

Introduction

Contacts

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Whitehills was the second harbour on this coast to fit substantial pontoons, following on about eight years after Lossiemouth. It had a good deep channel and was accessible 24/7 so made an ideal stopping off point on the way round from Inverness to Peterhead, with Lossiemouth as an option if required. Unfortunately over the last couple of years the entrance has begun to silt up a little and they now say that it is accessible to deep draft boats for only HW ± 5 hours. Unlike other harbours on this coast, dredging has, hitherto, been unnecessary but unless they do something about it in the next couple of years (which means finding funds) their access will become even more restricted. **Update 2018: They have been able to dredge here and they now advise that deep draft boats can get in 4 1/2 hours either side of HW** For the cruising 1.5 meter draft boat the harbour is still, except for especially low Spring tides, accessible 24/7 and it is still the preferred dropping off harbour for many of the boats plying this coastline although an increasing number are using Banff, which is now back in business after a prolonged period of rebuilding.

The original village was the group of terraced cottages built end on to the sea to the west of the harbour; the fishing boats landed their catch over the beach and they hauled the boats up between the cottages in the winter storms. In the early nineteenth century the Seaford Estate built the present harbour and by the mid nineteenth century there were between one hundred and two hundred boats operating from here and the lifeboat station was built in 1860. The Whitehills Harbour Trust was formed in the late nineteenth century to maintain the harbour which supported the fishing folk until the mid twentieth century but then, as the trade migrated to the larger ports and the stocks ran down (or were sold to the EU!), the fishing declined and the decision was made in the 1990s to convert the harbour to service the leisure industry.

This was achieved at the beginning of this millennium and we have the present day situation. They have packed in as many berths as possible and if you are a berth holder it can be a tricky place to get into but the provision of visitors' berths on a pontoon in the first basin has made their access fairly uncomplicated. (This pontoon does not yet show on Google Earth).

Right up until the early 1920s the accommodation still consisted of unserviced, "But an' Ben", terraced cottages but then improved housing was built by Banff council as part of their "slum clearance" (which shows just how primitive those original cottages were) and the present village slowly developed.

Today the village is largely a dormitory/tourist village; most of the inhabitants do their shopping and banking in Banff as there is little provision for this in Whitehills. The fish market and processing plants have closed down and the original fish market is now a harbour "asset" available for hire.

Many people make reference to the "Whitehills Sailing Club" which is, in fact, incorrect; when Whitehills opened its pontoons in 2000 the larger draft yachts in Banff (which was still a drying harbour) moved here; Banff had a Sailing Club in those days and to this day the yachts in Whitehills are members of the Banff Sailing Club which basically is a two harbour sailing club and very often races starting off Whitehills finish off Banff (which is fun for the Race Officer!!)

The harbour website can be found at <http://www.whitehillsmarina.co.uk/>

Approach

The channel in to Whitehills is fairly narrow (a feature it has in common with many of the harbours on this coast)

and the approach is best started from a position due North of the end of the harbour pierhead. Most of the local yachts make their approach well within the boundaries of the sector light on the pierhead to stay clear of the rocks along the shore to the east of the pierhead and the rocks bordering the channel parallel to the outer pier.

If you are approaching from the West do not be fooled by the two "bad ground" markers which, in some lights, can be very prominent; they are not lead-in marks and if you line up on them from the WNW you are likely to end up on the rocks they are warning you away from. Anyway, if you come inside the ten meter contour crossing Boyne Bay

(opposite the wind farm) you will find yourself in the gathering swells running on to that beach; it's best to stay a good three-quarters of a mile off before turning in towards the harbour from the NNW.

The approach from the East around Knock Head **is a minefield of kreel pot markers right out to the twenty meter contour so any approach by night must consider this**; by day you need to be aware of the off lying, unmarked rock to the NE of Knock Head which, as you can see from the chart, is there but quite where it is not defined, as are the depths off that headland! (the author has sailed past this headland quite close in many times and is still unsure of its location!!). Suffice it to say you need to tiptoe through the pot markers a sensible distance off that headland and then position yourself to the NNE of the pierhead before lining up your approach.

When you reach a position about 50 yards to the west of the pierhead, the entrance channel will open to port and you should pick up a line running between the bad ground markers and the pier wall heading for the old lifeboat slip dead ahead. The deep water is right in the middle of this channel favouring neither side, so don't go too close to the harbour wall. When you are abeam the harbour entrance proper you'll be able to see the visitors' pontoon opposite the entrance and start working out how to get alongside.

The two bad ground markers give a useful indication of the water available in the channel; the outer marker sits on a concrete block and when the water is level with the top of the block there's 2.4 meters of water available, when it's level with the bottom there's 2.0 meters, and if it's away from the bottom of the block go back to your tide tables!! The marker board referred to on the Whitehills website is for outbound sailors and not visible from the approach.

Berthing

As has been said you will berth alongside the long pontoon

in the first basin and they are charging (2022) £20 per night for up to 12m and £25 per night for boats over that. Shore power is included in the charge.

There is now a long pontoon on the wall opposite the visitors pontoon which is mainly given over to anglers.

Facilities

Water and shore power is available at every berth and there are showers (£1.00) and toilets ashore. Diesel is now available by hose from a refuelling berth but petrol would have to be collected in cans from the garage on the outskirts of Banff. Calor gas is available at that garage but not Camping Gaz; Camping Gaz refills can be found at Buccaneer Marine in Macduff

There is room here for non berth holders to be stored ashore for the winter and crannage can be arranged with Macduff Shipyard.

Buccaneer Chandlery situated in Macduff is your best bet for electronic or engine type problems.

From a member:

"Can I suggest the inclusion of Whitehills in the North and East Scotland section. It is a delightful small harbour, and the village is a very pretty old Scottish fishing village, little changed over the years. There are limited visitors berths, so a phone call ahead is necessary. The Harbour Master is extremely friendly, welcoming and helpful. He spent 40 years operating his own fishing vessel out of Whitehills, so there are not many questions he is unable to answer. If you phone 20 minutes before arrival he will take photos of your arrival and allow you to download onto your laptop or e-mail to you. **(Ed note. I talked to Bert in 2022 - he says he needs a bit more than 20 minutes notice these days to get round to the pierhead to take a photo!!** He will then help with your lines.

Diesel is available but they are not set up for cards, cash only. Berthing on pontoons, but if requiring fuel this is against the wall on the old fish market quay, so long lines required for this.

Facilities excellent and spotless, coin op shower £1 = 7.5 minutes. Short walk to a general store, and a good pub (Seafield Arms) with excellent food. The harbour is developing its own bar/restaurant which during my visit (May 8/9th 2013) was estimated at two weeks to completion.
A very pretty and efficiently organised harbour which merits inclusion."

What To Do

The Seafield Arms on Chapel Street has just been refurbished (2012) and has a good menu. There used to be a very good restaurant on Loch Street called "The Cutty" but we think that is now closed. The restaurant on the harbour mentioned by our member was indeed completed and has become very popular; well reknowned locally for its menu and service.

Other than that there is a small store for basic requirements (but limited stock), a paper shop and a Post Office. There is an hourly bus service to Banff (quarter to the hour) with the last bus back at quarter to midnight. This bus starts at Inverness and runs through to Aberdeen so connects to both their airports.

History