

Introduction

Contacts:

Harbour Master VHF Channel 80, tel 028 2076 8525 mob 07803 505084

Ballycastle is a harbour which tends to be overlooked by the Almanacs and Pilot Books which is not unsurprising given the tides and currents in Rathlin Sound. On the other hand it is ideally placed for the cruising sailor who likes to proceed in comfortable day hops of between 25 to 30 miles; this puts it within range of Glenarm on the East coast of Antrim, Port Ellen on Islay and Lough Foyle to the West.

The challenge is to arrive at Rathlin Sound at the optimum state of the tide!!

The Harbour itself contains a well endowed marina, provides excellent shelter and is accessible at all states of the tide. The town of Ballycastle has a wealth of eateries, pubs and hotels and, as the marina has coded gates, the boat can be left there quite securely and it can be used as a base to explore the county of Antrim. Knocklayde mountain to the South of Ballycastle is a gentle uphill walk and provides a view of the whole of Antrim and across to Scotland on a clear day. At the foot of the mountain is Glentaise (which is one of the Nine Glens of Antrim) and its forest One can also bike round the coast to the East where there is a superb view of Rathlin Sound from Fairhead.

There is a ferry across to Rathlin Island which takes about half an hour, runs roughly every two hours in the summer and in 2019 cost £12.00 pp return (cheaper for a family); Tickets can be bought on line at <https://rathlinballycastleferry.com/tickets-old/> or by phoning them on (0)28 2076 9299 this does have the advantage that you can leave the course-to-steer up to the guy on the bridge!! There are walk on tickets available but at the weekends you'd be advised to book ahead.

Approach

Hazards:

There is a large rock (more an islet) off Kinbane Head two miles up the coast.....

.....to the NW of Ballycastle which is at the confluence of meeting tidal eddies. The whole of Rathlin Sound from Carrickarade Island in the West to Fairhead in the East is affected by extremes of currents, overfalls and eddies. The tidal streams can reach 6kts at springs and 4kts at neaps. Headlands especially can have heavy overfalls and round the corner off Torr Head the springs can run up to 9 knots

On the face of it the approach to Ballycastle is simple; one comes round Fair Head from the East or outside Carrickmannanon Rock from the West and makes for the Initial Fix just to the East of the harbour entrance and makes one's way in from there.

In reality the situation is very different, especially if a Spring Tide is running; get it wrong and you could spend six hours going backwards... even on engine!

Remember also, that around all the main headlands when the streams are at their worst there are considerable overfalls and eddies. Having said all that; at High and Low Water Dover the inshore currents are mild and it is only two or three miles to Ballycastle from either Fair Head or Carrickmannanon Rock; so if you pick your time right there should be no problems. The cruising sailor should not be put off by the dire warnings in the Almanacs and Pilot books; yes, if you venture into the Sound with a F5 against the worst of the tide you can expect an extremely rough passage but, other than that, a well found boat on a well planned passage has nothing to fear. Detailed information on the tides in Rathlin Sound can found in our article at:

[Rathlin Sound](#)

Berthing

The Pontoons can take boats up to 13 metres but is fairly tight...

.... and larger yachts may find it easier to go alongside the pontoon to the West of the link-span... the HM will advise on this on VHF channel 80.

If preferred there is a suitable anchorage outside the harbour though this can be subject to swell if the wind goes into the North and you should take care to remain to the East of the submarine cable serving Rathlin Island.

Berthing charges; They are now charging by the metre, £2.80 per metre per night and, and if you stay more than four days you can get the weekly rate of £14.50 per metre. This is all in, shore power and VAT

Facilities

Ballycastle has everything: water and shore power on the pontoons, a fuelling berth (diesel only, petrol in cans from garage about half a mile), showers, toilet and laundrette block. Gas/Gaz and provisions can be obtained in the town. There is a bus link to Belfast and ferry to Rathlin Island. The RoRo ferry to Campbeltown has not run for several years though there is a passenger RIB (with enclosed cabin) operating on that route. This ferry has not restarted post Covid but is hoped for sometime in August 2022

<http://www.kintyreexpress.com>

What To Do

There are public houses and restaurants/take-aways to suit every taste and pocket. If you are here on the last Monday and Tuesday of August, beware, you are liable to enjoy yourself as it is the annual "Auld Lamas Fair" with music on every street corner and pub; you'll be glad to get back to the boat to put your feet up.

A selection of pubs can be found at

<http://www.beerinevening.com/pubs/results.shtml?l=ballycastle>

History