

Introduction

Contacts

Harbour Master 01834 812094 VHF11

Saundersfoot, only 2 miles North of Tenby, has always been the Cinderella to its sister Tenby but, to many yachtsmen, it is the preferred destination. It has the same LW access restrictions and lack of "marina" type services but has always seemed a little more welcoming than its larger neighbour. There will be some who disagree with that, preferring Tenby's brighter lights, but for a long time it had the added advantage of being possibly the "cheapest" harbour on the Bristol Channel as regards harbour dues though it has had to up those quite a bit recently in line with the other harbours on this coast.

Things are on the move here; they have restructured the Harbour Trust, both in personnel and financing and have plans afoot to improve the lot of all harbour users including the visitors. The harbour now has an amenities building containing both showers and toilets (so one is not reliant on discovering the code to the Sailing Club!) and further improvements, especially with regard to LW access, are in the pipeline.

The harbour itself is well sheltered and still services a small fishing fleet which has exclusive use of the East Wall. The exception to this is in South Easterlies which have a long enough fetch over the Bristol Channel to make anchoring off the harbour extremely uncomfortable and the harbour entrance very dicey, if not dangerous. It was originally built to facilitate the export of coal and service the fishing industry but the decline of both those industries in the twentieth century has meant it has had to rejuvenate itself as a tourist destination and that process, as far as sailing is concerned, is still ongoing.

It may puzzle some people, used to dredged, 24/7 harbours and marinas, how such a tidal harbour managed to operate commercially but you have to remember that for centuries our coastal trade was used to this; one timed it to come in on the flood, bottom out and load/unload during the ebb to be ready to depart on the next flood – in some places (like here) they even did it on the beach driving their horses and carts out over the sand to convey goods to the shores. We, as leisure sailors, must sometimes adjust our activities likewise - it's part of the fun! (mind you they weren't restricted to the hours between 1600 Friday to 2200 hours Sunday for their passage)

The harbour has one extra interest to the cruising sailor and that is its flushing system. At the top of the harbour they have built a wall/weir across, which traps the water coming down the stream into the harbour. They use this trapped water rather like a toilet cistern and pull the plug once a day (at low tide) and let the contained water flush down the harbour which results in the deep channel which you can see in our photographs of the harbour at low tide and the dregs of that flush keep the channel down the beach from the harbour mouth clear thus saving constant dredging!

The harbour website can be found at www.saundersfootharbour.co.uk/

Approach

If you are coming down the Bristol Channel during the week

..... you have to adjust your passage plan to remain clear of Pendine Range which will mean plotting a course from Worms Head to Caldey Island before turning NNW to pass East of the Woolhouse Rocks (careful here because the ebb will be setting you towards these rocks) heading for our way point. Note that the waypoint we have given is, of necessity, well outside the 2m contour and you may wish to adjust that if you are shoal drafted. Most of the departure points from up Channel (or even across Channel) are a good six hour transit, even with the ebb under your skirts, so it is likely that you will arrive at the bottom of the tide and will have to go on a visitors buoy before entering the harbour on the flood.

Approach from West is governed by the activities of Castlemartin and Manorbier Ranges and during the week the necessary diversion around them will make your passage too long to consider Saundersfoot a destination. However, during the week end or at times of inactivity on the ranges the sail along the Pembroke Coast is really impressive (if you are sailing in company have the cameras ready as you will seldom get a better backdrop for each other) Watch out for the overfalls off Linney Head and St Govan's Head (especially on springs) If you have come from Milford, scooting through Caldey Sound will be your preferred route but leave the Giltar Spit buoy to port as the soundings on the Admiralty Chart off the South Beach are at least thirty years old. On a sunny Saturday afternoon in the summer you could be met with a wall of racing dinghies off the South Beach which can be a bit intimidating and needs careful attention because their levels of experience are varied and your right of way on the starboard tack may very well be totally ignored!! Whatever, a run along this coast with the wind on the stern quarter followed by a reach up from Caldy Island to Monkstone Point and on to Saundersfoot is an experience which will remain in your memory well into your dotage.

Finally, if you haven't been here for a long time you'll be pleased to hear that for about ten years now they have marked the final approach channel in to the harbour with small, moveable buoys in the summer so you need no longer tip toe in with an anxious eye on the echo sounder - for at least two hours either side of HW you will have enough water to navigate in with confidence that you are in the channel.

Berthing

At the moment there is room for six visiting boats within the harbour

....., drying out of course. Some of these berths are against the South Quay between the central steps by the crane and the running moorings at the east end of that wall – you need to be aware that, if you are offered a mooring in amongst the permanent moorings in the centre of the harbour, the bottom dries to mud, not sand as claimed by some publications. The Harbour Master asks that you contact him in advance so that he can work out where he can put you.

They have a pontoon landing stage at the bottom of the steps on the South wall and it was planned to extend this for the 2017 season but that hasn't happened yet so until then a berth tied to the wall, clear of the steps was always one of the best places to end up and still is. The present landing stage is not available for an overnight stop. In 1996 it cost about £2.50 to tie up here but today (2021) it is £12 for 22 foot then £1 per foot on top of that

There are visitors buoys out in the bay and several pontoons there also. Be advised that these are not deep water moorings and will only have a metre or so of water at LWS; they are mainly for shallow draft angling and speed boats. They will charge £12 per boat to use these buoys.

Facilities

Showers and toilets are available through the harbour office and also at the Sailing Club. Water is available on taps on the quays. There is no shore power to tap into but the HM may be able to help if you need batteries charging. Petrol and diesel has to be obtained at the petrol garage outside the town (and from memory that's quite a hike) Calor Gas and Camping Gaz refills can be obtained from Frosts Hardware on the High Street. There is a well used slip for trailer sailors - it's directly outside the Harbour Office and there is a charge.

What To Do

The town is well provided with pubs, restaurants and take aways.

History