

RWYC 2024 summer cruise plans leaving Caernarfon Saturday 25th May

Plan A is to head for Port Ellen, Islay and then further as time and weather allows in daylight hours passages with overnight stops on the way North either at anchor or in marinas.

Plan B in the event of general poor forecasts and unsuitable winds for Scotland (NW to N) would be to head South initially into the Bristol Channel with the possibility of carrying on to Padstow and then the Scillies for those able to be away for longer (again all in daylight hours passages with overnight stops)

Plan A - Assuming the weather is looking suitable for going North the Caernarfon based boats would leave Saturday morning 25th May in time to pass through the Swellies before HW slack (HW Caernarfon 1152, Liverpool 1303 so Swellies HW slack 1103) and aim to spend Saturday night at anchor at either Moelfre or, preferably, Cemaes Bay.

Sunday 26th May will require an early start (especially if starting from Moelfre as LW Holyhead is at 0643 so it would be advantageous to be past Point Lynas before the flood starts) with a passage over to either Port St Mary or Port Erin depending on the wind direction (the stream turns S through Calf Sound at about 1725 so if heading for P Erin it would be necessary to be through before then). Rather than make the next stop Peel my idea would be to head for Ardglass on Monday 27th as this would allow an easy “diversion” into Stranford Lough for a couple of days if it looked like the forecast was unsuitable for carrying on further up the coast of Northern Ireland for a while. Hopefully that won’t be the case and we’ll be able to head up to the marina at Bangor Co Down via Copeland Sound on Tuesday 28th. The marina at Carrickfergus is an alternative if some have been to Bangor previously and fancy a change.

Wednesday 29th could be a well earned rest day in Bangor/Carrickfergus before a fairly early start on Thursday 30th to carry the ebb up to Glenarm marina to arrive around LW Liverpool (1131).

The next stops for Friday 31st May and Saturday 1st June would be Ballycastle and/or Church Bay, Rathlin Island, or perhaps a night in each. Due to the very strong tides around Fair Head and in Rathlin Sound, even approaching neaps on this day, correct timing for arrival at the start of the Sound is vital, especially if there is any swell running from the West. LW slack in the Sound is at about 1200/1240 so we’d need to leave Glenarm by 0800/0830 on Friday to cover the approx. 20nm to Fair Head with the ebb under us and we could then proceed to either Ballycastle marina or the pontoons in Church Bay harbour on Rathlin Island. Rathlin is a unique spot – only very basic provisions available but there’s a pub serving food and some very nice walks with a lot of wild life to see.

Those on a 2 week cruise may wish to start their way back retracing their steps down the Irish coast and perhaps then over to Peel or maybe via Portpatrick and the Isle of Man.

For those carrying on the next passage would be the hop over to Port Ellen on Islay on Sunday 2nd June – again correct timing for departure, be it from Ballycastle or Church Bay, is vital for the approx. 25nm passage to Port Ellen. I’d plan to round Bull Point at the Western end of Rathlin at about HW Liverpool (0802) as going that way avoids the MacDonnell race off the East of Rathlin Island and also the course up to Port Ellen just about clears to the West the TSS NE of Rathlin. Once round Bull Point the distance to Port Ellen is about 23nm.

Monday 3rd June could be a rest day in Port Ellen allowing restocking supplies, water and fuel and some walks on the island – maybe a distillery tour if not fully booked?

Given suitable weather my next idea would be to make a passage through the Sound of Islay and round into Loch Tarbert on the West coast of Jura and anchor in the remote central part of the loch through the narrows of the Cumnaen Mor for the night on Tuesday 4th June. Tides are approaching springs so will be running fast in the Sound of Islay, turning North through the Sound from about 0930 until about 1500 – it's about 14nm from Port Ellen to McArthur Head at the South end of the Sound so a departure at around 0900 should give a favourable tide most of the way to McArthur Head and then through the Sound of Islay with the 4-5kn tide under us in the middle part of the Sound weakening as we round into the entrance to Loch Tarbert, so I would expect the 33nm passage to take 5 or 6 hours. The narrows at Cumnaen Mor require accurate pilotage, covered well in the Clyde Cruising Club guide and by Antares charts, so should not prove too challenging. A passage through into the inner loch through the Cumnaen Beag might be possible for anyone brave enough, even if just to poke your nose in and back out for a few minutes either side of the HW slack period.

Some might wish to spend a 2nd night in Loch Tarbert before carrying on somewhere else round the island of Mull or the Firth of Lorn. Weather permitting my "ideal" cruise plan would be to press on to the island of Tiree on Wednesday 5th June (about 48nm passing round the South end of Colonsay) and then cross over to Castlebay, Barra in the Outer Hebrides the following day. This is about 40nm from Gott Bay on Tiree and both passages are entirely weather dependant. If the passages are possible I'd likely spend a couple of nights at Castlebay before crossing back East to Canna harbour followed by a couple of nights around the SW end of Skye and the Sound of Sleat. A night in Mallaig marina to restock before starting back South via Tobermory, Oban and down the Sound of Jura to either Craighouse or Gigha would be the plan before heading back to Anglesey via either Sanda Island & Portpatrick or down the Northern Irish coast and, in both cases, then on to the Isle of Man.

Spells of bad weather may make these plans too ambitious but there are plenty of alternative sheltered spots between Port Ellen and Tobermory in case of need.

Plan B (and the Northerly winds forcing it) would be pretty much a "re-run" of the 2021 cruise to the Scillies for Bethan & Dave's wedding and would involve an overnight stop at Aberdaron on Saturday 25th May and then an early start on Sunday for a long day passage down and around St David's Head to Solva or nearby through Ramsey Sound (as Fishguard not great in anything but very light Northerlies). I did this 69nm passage in 2021 and had the last of the S going stream through Ramsey Sound having left Aberdaron at 0615 and arriving Solva at 2000. Tide timings are about an hour earlier this time so it would be a very early 0515 start.

From Solva/nearby we'd head for Milford Haven either to anchor at Dale or go into Milford marina before heading over to Padstow with an overnight stop at Lundy Island, which is well worth a visit. Lundy could be the turning for home point for those boats on a 2 week cruise.

After a couple of nights in Padstow the plan would be to head for the Scillies with perhaps a night at anchor off St Ives to break the trip (assuming that the Northerly winds that forced the change to Plan B had changed to something different by then).

Hopefully the weather will be kind and allow Plan A – we'll have to wait and see and decide a couple of days before departure date.