

# Mayo

## Killary Harbour to Killala County Mayo

### Inishbarna

L759-659 Sheet 37

Barna means 'gap'. This craggy island is well named, as it lies in the very mouth of Killary Harbour. It has a hillock running WNW/ESE. It is unnamed on the 1:50,000 OS map. The main channel passes through on its northern side, the narrower channel on its southern side being called Smuggler's Gap. There is a tower on the summit, tiled white to seaward. With a similar tower on Doonee Island at L748-662, it forms a transit for safe passage for larger craft through the reefs S of Inishdegil. Doonee is also unmarked on the 1:50,000 OS map, and has a difficult, deep-water landing only.

#### Landing

Land easily on Inishbarna onto a small stony beach at L762-658 on the eastern side, just under and NE of a ruined bothy. There are great views from the summit.

#### Tides

The tide runs in for 6 hrs from HW Galway -0500. It reaches 0.5kn until Bundorragha, and then increases to 1.5kn approaching the Erriff River, NE of Leenane.

### Inishdegil Beg (Carrignaglamph)

L740-674 Sheet 37

Small grassy island just NE of Inishdegil More. Landing place on sheltered storm beach on SE facing side. Sheep, ruin, views. Purple Sandpiper.

### Inishdegil More

L735-672 Sheet 37

A tiny gem of a formerly inhabited island. Grassy and rocky with outliers. Incredibly, people lived here until the 1940s. It lies a couple of kilometres directly outside the mouth of Killary Harbour. The island is privately owned and particular care should be taken to leave absolutely

no litter, to ensure continued use for all. There is a good supply of driftwood on the western side, where terns also nest. Well worth a stopover, and a good waystop on an inner coastal tour to avoid the exposed beaches under Mweelrea Mountain.

#### Landing

The landing place is onto a gravelly beach in a cove on the north-eastern side, under ruined houses. Camping is at the houses, with water in a well behind the middle ruin, which may or may not be drinkable. Approach this landing via the main channel through the group. There is also a storm beach just SW of the northern tip. Landing is sometimes possible onto boulders in a creek on the western side. There is a similar landing on the southern side.

### Govern Island

L718-690 Sheet 37

Govern Island, just 1km SE of Frehill Island, is inhospitable. Far preferable for waystop or emergency is Inishdegil to the SE. There are plenty of seals but little chance of landing. SW of Govern Island are the Carrickgaddy Rocks (Carraig Gadai-Thieves Rocks). These were named when *Gráinne Mhaol* allegedly chained some thieves to the rocks and spread mackerel on their stomachs for the gannets to dive onto. The ebb tide is often felt here where it turns SW towards Crump after spilling out of Killary.

### Frehill Island

L708-698 Sheet 37

Lying 6km NW of the mouth of Killary Harbour, Frehill is a steep, narrow, grassy island running NW/SE. It is about 500m long, with an extensive area of drying rocks to the S.

#### Landing

Landing on the island itself is all but impossible, although sheep do graze. However, a forced landing is often possible in moderate condi-



tions on the flat tidal rocks to the S where a low, central lagoon is sheltered by higher, drying rocks to either side. Entrance to the lagoon from either side is via a narrow channel. This landing would be acceptable as a waystop in calm conditions, or

an emergency stop in less favourable conditions, but only on the lower half of the tide.

Far preferable for waystop or emergency is Inishdegil. The ground to the N and NW outside Frehill towards Caher Island is shallow and



*The harbour, Inishturk, Co. Mayo - Josie Gibbons*

breaks in wind. This inshore passage between Killary and Roonah is strictly for good weather only. In any kind of westerly swell, there are many breakers around the island. If paddling past, it's best to keep close to the N-facing shore. Particular attention should be paid to Carrick McHugh, a rock 3 cables N of the island. The island is privately owned and particular care should be taken to leave absolutely no litter, to ensure continued use for all.

## **Inishdalla**

**L633-721 Sheet 37**

Inishdalla is a small grassy island, lying just 2km SE of Inishturk. The 1968 Pilot says it has a moderately soft landing on a sandy beach. The beach is in a cove at the northern side of the E end. There are also deep-water landings reported in narrow, rocky inlets on the northern side. Uninhabited, its main interest is its large colony of grey seals. No water found, but there is flat grass for camping.

## **Inishturk**

**L619-749 Sheet 37**

There were once up to 180 people resident on the island, and now there are less than 100. The island children all go away to secondary school as teenagers. This is one of the most rugged and remote of all the inhabited islands off the W coast. Until recently, there was no regular ferry, but long overdue perhaps, Inishturk got a new ferry on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1997. This is probably the most significant 'Irish Offshore Island Development' for many years, and it's hoped that the needs of islands and islanders are at last being taken seriously.

Operating out of Cleggan and Roonah Quay, this ferry also has a real significance for kayakers, as the homeward trip becomes possible even if the weather kicks up overnight. Those who sail small boats off the W coast of Ireland must occasionally expect to fail to be behind their desks of a Monday morning. Inishturk is now a marginally more dependable objective. We wish the islanders well and hope that all this won't change

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things for them, other than as they would wish.

There are fantastic high cliffs at the back of the island. The western side of the island can cut up very rough and care should be taken to avoid breakers up to 100m W of the cliffs. In mirror-calm conditions or offshore easterly winds, the back of the island has huge cliffs to explore. Care should also be taken at the N of the island where fierce downdraughts can be experienced beneath the two high points.

There are B&Bs, pubs, and basic shops. There is a splendid circular roadway to walk. This goes inland, up the valley from the harbour, and back anti-clockwise by the southern side. Generally, the walking on the island is very good. The N and W are dramatically cliffy. Near the north-east-



*Caher Island, Co. Mayo - Séan Pierce*

ern tip is a blowhole, the seaward end of which emerges through a penetrable boulder-choke, giving a scuba dive of great quality.

### **Corncrake**

Formerly a Corncrake stronghold, there were 26 pairs counted in 1988. Paddlers heard at least one in 1992, but they were all gone by 1994.

### **Landing**

The landing place is in the main village and harbour on the eastern side, which is sheltered. Also, landing is possible at beaches just S of the main harbour, if necessary. Off the mouth of the harbour is a bar, which can give a sporting arrival or departure. But the water inside or outside the bar is well sheltered. In the Great War, the Royal Navy favoured this as an anchorage.

### **L607-737**

A narrow cut in rocks yields a superbly sheltered natural harbour, halfway along the southern coast. Camping is easy, but it is a good walk to the pub.

### **Ballybeg**

L650-755 Sheet 37

A small islet lying SW of Caher. The island is overpopulated with sheep throughout the summer. Deep-water landing is possible through an inlet on the north-eastern side.

### **Caher Island**

L665-759 Sheet 37

Caher is 8km out from the shore and 11km SW of Roonah Quay. On the SE of the island is a brackish lake and on the NW high point is a well - St. Patrick's Well. The island is uninhabited and 'belongs' to Inishturk, the people of which have the commonage grazing here. There is a fine 5<sup>th</sup> Century monastic ruin and crosses, which are used for the annual pilgrimage to and 'pattern' on the island. A pattern is an ancient rural Irish Catholic prayer tradition. The island is the alleged resting place of Saint Patrick. The 'floating' stone is still there and will always return to the island, even if stolen. And beware the thief, whose boat will sink. There is also an ancient prayer/wishing bowl. A must for the passage maker.

## Landing and Camping

Land on the SE, or at Port Temple in a shallow bay below the ruins of the church, just NW of the eastern tip. There is another, in some ways better, landing on the SW side. It is difficult to find until very close, and consists of a narrow inlet, which turns to the right after a few metres. The land just opposite is probably the best for camping.

### Bird life

Bonxie breeding.

## Roonah Quay

L744-808 Sheet 30

Situated where Clew Bay turns S, this recently modernised pier is in an exposed cove. There are almost continuous breaking swells over a long rock ledge running out W from the pier. This is the embarkation place for the ferry to Clare Island, with waiting room, public phone, toilets and Post Office nearby. Launching is difficult, from the steps or a boulder beach adjacent. In north-erlies, a better spot is the N end of a sandy beach just S of Emlagh Point at L747-797, about 1km to the S, reachable by road. More dependable, but less convenient, on the Clew Bay side is the sand-silted Carrowmore Pier at L794-817. It is just NW of Louisburgh and within walking distance. Another launching point is Oldhead Pier, about 4km further E at L834-824 where there is a hotel but is otherwise remote from facilities.

## Clare Island

L715-852 Sheet 30

A beautiful, large, high, dramatic, inhabited island, dominating the mouth of Clew Bay. There is a regular ferry service from Roonah Quay at L744-808. The population of the island is about 150 in winter, and is double that in summer. There are several B&Bs. Basic provisions are available and there are limited facilities - a pub, hotel, hostel, public phone and even a nurse. The island is well worth a special visit. It is the highest of the truly offshore islands of Ireland. Knockmore at 462m gives spectacular views of the Mayo coast and falls almost sheer to the sea. Corncrake have not been heard since 1988 except for a single calling bird in 2002.

## Landing and Camping

Land by the pier at L715-852 by the main harbour near the SE tip. The pier is just by an old, square castle, being one-time HQ of pirate-queen Granuaile who ruled the western sea-board. Camping is possible by the pier or in a field behind the beach.

L693-843 This is a significant landing on a gravel beach beside a broken pier. It is about halfway along the S coast at Portnakilly. It is not apparent until close and is situated below a conspicuous church and ruined 12<sup>th</sup> Century Abbey. This has been recently restored. It is early Cistercian, pre-Norman, pre-English and pre-Granuaile. There is a well-stocked Co-op shop, but it is a long way to the pub at the harbour.



*Church offerings, Caber Island, Co. Mayo - Séan Pierce*



*Off Clare Island, Co. Mayo - Josie Gibbons*

L703-877 Near the northern tip of the island, landing is also possible on the north-eastern side, about 1km SE of the tip, in a well-sheltered cove. The cove is about halfway between a prominent boulder beach and the disused but conspicuous lighthouse on the northern point of the island. Landing is onto a steep slip, or onto a sheltered breakwater. This landing is of interest on circumnavigation, or for its green road giving convenient access to the interior.

### **Circumnavigation**

A circumnavigation is a memorable experience, but a serious undertaking. There are long sections without reliable landings, particularly from Portnakilly on the southern side, all the way through the SW and N to the landing spot on the NE. There is an inlet on the southern side of the island, 1km E of the south-western tip. Locally called Lackwee, it is exposed to the SW but otherwise sheltered

### **Tides**

Tides flooding into Clew Bay flow E on the northern side of the island and NE on the

southern side. The flood begins a little after local HW and LW, which is Galway +0015. In other words, it runs from HW Galway -0530 to +0040. Note that the flood is stronger than the ebb on the southern side, and the ebb is stronger than the flood on the northern side. In each case, the stronger flow achieves 1.5kn, the weaker only 0.5kn. The ground on the southern side is shallow.

As a result, both passages, and particularly the northern side, kick up when the ebb is against the prevailing westerlies. If on passage N, catching the flood combines well with the tides into and through Achill Sound. But care is needed on passage S for the reasons given above.

## **The Islands of Clew Bay**

L935-863 Sheet 31

A detailed examination of the islands of Clew Bay is way beyond the scope of this guide. Were such included, the size of the guide would instantly double.



*Sunset, Clare Island, Co. Mayo - Josie Gibbons*

The islands of Clew Bay are easy to get to, and provide an attractive 'last refuge' option for visiting paddlers suffering bad weather.

Essentially, these islands are the most western tip of Ireland's 'drumlin belt', the other end being at Strangford Lough, S of Belfast. The belt wanders through Down, Armagh, and Cavan, and then meanders ever westwards, disappearing into the sea at this point. The islands, just as in Strangford, tend to be grazed, grassy hummocks. Drumlins are the remnants of lateral moraines left behind by the last ice age, covered with grass and gravel.

These islands are in the prettiest of locations. They are sandwiched between the mighty cone-shaped Croagh Patrick to the S and the Nephins to the N. Croagh Patrick is known all over as 'the Reek', a reek being a haycock, or also a stack of turf. The Nephins are probably the remotest and wildest mainland hills in Ireland.

It is widely believed in Ireland that there are 365 islands in inner Clew Bay, 'one for every day of the year'. Pilgrims climbing holy Croagh Patrick get

their chance to count them, but must be distracted, as in reality there are slightly less than 100. The barefoot walk to the summit, in late July, is an annual test for the hardier of local Christians.

Only some of the islands are inhabited, and no water has been found on any uninhabited ones. There is probably a connection. Island More and Knocky Cahillaun are the largest. Inishgort has a lighthouse. John Lennon bought Dorinish in 1969 and a commune thrived there for a while. Many of the islands are interconnected by reefs at lower tides, and many others are almost so, making seagoing journeys amongst them less trouble on the top half of the tide. The big worry is being caught on mud on a falling tide, unable to walk or float out of trouble.

Access is from anywhere near Westport or Newport, but perhaps nowhere more central or convenient than the pier at Carraholly at L935-863. From Westport, head northwards on the N59, then turn left at a sign for rugby, golf and sailing clubs. Follow the small road to the sailing club and park at the pier. There is a stand-pipe for fresh water and easy slipway access.

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A different island may be chosen each night. Beware that navigation needs careful map reading and getting lost is more than possible, necessitating landing and a stroll to the nearest summit to reorientate. There are a few derelict crofts. Black Guillemot, waders, Grey Wagtails, and all the usual bird and plant life abound. A single Corncrake was heard in 2001.

### Tides

There is no committed or exposed paddling, although beware of the tidal race on the ebb at the Inishgort lighthouse at L901-875. Beachcombing on low tides is a must. Local HW/LW is about Galway +0030.

## Achill Island Area

Achill is the biggest and most populous Irish island with 2,500 full-time residents. It is connected to the mainland by a bridge at Achill Sound. 'L' shaped, high mountains mark the scenery all along the south-western side. Only in the far north-eastern corner is there flat land.

At Keel, there is a substantial machair, and behind it is the most populated part of the island where there are pubs, restaurants, and all amenities. Two-thirds of the way down the western side is Dooega, a sheltered harbour, and at the southern tip lies Achill's little sister Achillbeg, a wonderful island.

The eastern shore on the edge of Achill Sound is low and boggy. Near the southern end of the sound is a Granuaile castle worth visiting. The RNLI station is close by. Midway up the sound is the bridge at the village of Achill Sound, where there are all facilities.

On the N coast is the hamlet of Doogort, under Slievemore Mountain, with its beautiful beach and pier, backed by machair. During the famine era of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Edward Nangle ran the most energetic Protestant ministry ever experienced in Ireland. Generally, the various Christian churches in Ireland do not proactively proselytise (convert) each other's members. Nangle went in hard and succeeded to a degree, but at a price. He opened schools and even a hotel. He stands critically judged by history in that he only offered food to the hungry who would become Protestant. Those accepting this bribe were called

'souters', a pejorative term all over Ireland to this day. He also operated on Inishbiggle.

## Achillbeg Island

L720-924 Sheet 30

Formerly inhabited. Good camping. Attractive. A fertile valley links two ice-rounded hills. There is a row of cottages on the northern slope of the valley and a disused schoolhouse on the southern side. In 1959, there were 8 pupils, all brothers and sisters. The population was never more than 117. There were 100 in 1900, and this was down to 67 in 1936 when the remaining people resisted evacuation and resettlement on Achill. The last 38 people all left during the 1960s.

Dun Kilmore on a forked headland on the western side, is a triple fort with the outer, easterly, section at F709-926. The two inner citadels are on the two branches at F707-927 and F706-926. Dun Kilmore is said to be the most elaborate promontory fort of the W Coast. It was started in the early Iron Age, and was inhabited by many cultures over a long period up to early Christian times. It is somewhat dilapidated through incessant Atlantic assault. Find it by walking W along the northern side of the waist, past a storm beach and under a cliff, until the forked headland is identified.

There are some remarkably attractive (70m) rock climbing cliffs at F714-922.

### Landing

The best landing is at a lovely sheltered sandy beach midway on the E side. Landing is also possible on the north-eastern side, but less easily.

The crossing of Achill Sound to the E of the island and Blind Sound to the N are often treacherous as both are exposed.

There are also some storm beaches on the outside (W) of the island for those who favour the oceanic feel to their camping.

## Bills Rocks

L551-938 Sheet 30

The Bills Rocks lie 11km due S of Keem Strand (F562-043) on Achill Island. Keem is pronounced 'Kim' locally. This is the nearest launching point for a trip to the Bills. Larger groups might prefer Gubalennaun Beg quay at F623-036 where there





*Achillbeg Island, Co. Mayo - Séan Pierce*

is easy parking and no surf. This option adds 1km to each leg of the trip.

The Bills comprise three large, steep-sided, grass-covered rocks. The largest rock has a grass covering of approximately half a soccer pitch. The ground is relatively level and could be camped upon, but it is completely exposed and it would probably be foolhardy unless you were sure of settled weather.

### **Landing**

It is possible to land on the largest rock, which is the most northerly. On the southern side is a long, sloping cliff to the top. The gradient here is approximately 50° and while it might be easy for a rock climber, it could be quite challenging in canoeing gear or wet weather. The landing should only be attempted in calm weather and is best at LW, when there is an obvious ledge approximately 2m above water level, which can be accessed by a large, 'easy to climb' crack. It would be prudent to have a light kayak for this endeavour.

There is probably only enough room for three kayaks on the ledge, which limits the size of the

landing party. Kayaks can be left on the ledge and tied to the rock face using rock-climbing chocks.

From the ledge, a large fissure runs diagonally from bottom left to top right and the top of the rock face. There are obvious handholds along the crack and it would probably be graded a 'diff' in old rock climbing parlance.

If you have the skills, the climb is worth it. At the top, you really feel exposed, miles from anywhere on a rock in the sea. It is an airy feeling. There are great views back up to Achill while to the SE, the exposed western coasts of Clare Island, Inishturk and Inishbofin are visible. The trip is a brilliant day paddle. It is worth circumnavigating the rocks. There is a beautiful arch to the W.

### **Achill Island (Outer) - the Round of Achill Head**

The round of Achill Head may be done from either side, depending on conditions. The wind direction is everything, but beware of katabatics (downdraughts) on the lee side of the final ridge out to the head, a notorious local feature. The round trip from Doogort to Keem is about 26km.



*Achill Island, Co. Mayo - Josie Gibbons*

If going to Keel, it is even longer at over 33km.

The round of Achill Island as a whole is about 80km, especially if the beautiful Achillbeg is taken in, and it is worth taking at least three days. This expedition round Achill Head will always be the crux of that trip, and has to be one of the foremost Irish sea paddling trips, to be grabbed when conditions allow, and with caution.

Those on expedition along the coast will find it considerably easier to stick to the inner route through Achill Sound, but the round of Achill Head will be an integral part of the outer route. A trip around Achill and the Mullet Peninsula to the N is a week's unrivalled expedition. This trip involves a challenging open crossing to Du-villaun Mór from Achill Head itself or Saddle Head to its NE.

The Round of Achill Head is described here from the northern side, starting at Doogort.

**Doogort**

**F672-089 Sheet 22/Sheet 30**

This is an important launching or finishing point for the route outside the Mullet peninsula

or Achill Head. There is a good beach – it is best to land on at the western end under the hotel. There are also a campsite with facilities and water. It is a bit of a carry from the campsite to the beach. The quay just NW has a landing and water, but no camping. Beware of overfalls to the E of the beach on the ebb. They are just W of Ridge Point at F704-109.

**Annagh Strand**

**F602-077 Sheet 22/Sheet 30**

The outer, western part of Achill is dominated by the two summits of Slievemore (671m) at F650-087 and Croaghaun (664m) at F554-058. Between these two, on the northern side, cut off from civilisation altogether, lies the utterly beautiful N-facing Annagh Strand. It is 9.5km or more into the anticlockwise round of Achill Head. The beach is backed by Lough na Keerogue (Lake of the Beatles). From Doogort, the coast follows the cliffs around, with at least one memorable arch, until a truly remarkable pap (teat) shaped hill (269m) at F607-076 lies just SE of the beach. This is a worthwhile trip in

itself, either by hill walk or paddle, and a must on the circumnavigation, as 16km lies ahead. The megalithic tomb at F602-076 is easily found as it has a 'modern' *bothán* (hut) built in its middle, anything but a normal sight, probably of Inishkea islander construction.

## Achill Head

F517-052 Sheet 22/Sheet 30

From Annagh Strand it is necessary first to travel NW to Saddle Head at F564-094 where a considerable lump may be expected. A reef just offshore adds both technical interest and fear. Then it is SW to the head itself. A few storm beaches litter these impressive cliffs under Croaghau. Although at least one seems well enough sheltered, conditions would need to be calm indeed to land. The head itself has broken islets off it and the innermost passage is passable under the right conditions. Moyteoge Head at F565-035 lies 5km ESE, behind which is Keem Strand.

## Keem Strand

F562-043 Sheet 22/Sheet 30

A beautiful, horseshoe beach at the end of the road on the southern side of the island, Keem Strand is known to photographers the world over. Sheltered in most conditions, it surfs in southerlies. There are parking spots and viewpoints here, and many walks for Croaghau and Achill Head. No facilities. This bay was the killing ground for the Achill Basking Shark fishery.

## Gubalennaun Beg Quay

F623-036 Sheet 30

In trouble, this is the only dependable landing spot for dozens of kilometres in either direction. Keem Strand to the W may dump and Keel to the E is a famous surfing beach. This is a quay with no facilities except water and camping, and the certainty of a landing in any conditions. In nearby Keel can be had most anything - nice restaurants, pubs, provisions. The famous Achill Basking Shark fishery was based here until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Keel Strand

F636-046 Sheet 22/Sheet 30

This is a famous surfing beach to be used by sea kayakers only in calm conditions. There is a camp-

ing and caravan site just in from the beach, with a convenient road and water near the village at the NW end of the beach. There is a golf links in the middle. The most remote part is in the SE where the Minnaun (or Menawn) Cliffs begin. Camping is excellent just behind the beach just about anywhere, though watch for golfers in the middle.

## Achill Island (Inner) - Achill Sound Sheet 30

The kayaker on passage can easily manage Achill's inside route. The tide governs entirely only in its narrower places, and the wind mostly prevails.

Achill Sound Bridge at F738-998 and Bull's Mouth at F737-068 are major challenges to larger craft, but kayaks can always manage. Under most conditions, one may paddle under the bridge, even against the flow. This may involve a short sprint, or at worst, a portage. Avoid the bottom of the tide because drying mudflats inhibit the process. All facilities are available here, as Achill Sound is the main town of the island.

At Bull's Mouth, at the northern entrance to the sound at F737-068, the eddies allow one to avoid problems. Wind against tide generates its fearsome reputation.

## Tides

The tide flows simultaneously in from both ends to meet on the extensive mudflats just S of Achill Sound Bridge.

Accordingly, the flood flows S under the bridge until local HW, which is a couple of hours after HW Galway.

At the southern entrance to the sound, the tide floods N through the southern entrance of the sound at Achillbeg, from HW Galway -0450 until +0135, and ebbs in reverse. In the narrows at the entrance, especially at the twisty bit just NE of Achillbeg, tides reach 3kn in neaps and 4 - 5kn in springs. On the flood, a major eddy circulates just inside Darby's Point at F723-935 on the Achill Island side, reaching Granuaile's castle at F721-941. Either use or avoid as appropriate.

At the northern entrance to the sound, the tide floods S through Bull's Mouth at F737-068 at 5kn, from HW Galway -0450 to HW Galway + 0120, which is local HW at Bull's Mouth. On the flood, a major eddy circulates just inside the

entrance on the Achill side. Either use or avoid this as appropriate. With wind over tide, quite a race is set up to the SSE. On the ebb, the sound empties to the N, which is often benign.

In summary, going either way through the sound, slow boats should start a couple of hours before HW Galway, and enjoy the flood to the mudflats just S of the bridge. Then perhaps break the journey, provision up and have a meal, in time to enjoy the ebb out the other side.

## Inishbiggle

F746-067 Sheet 30

The population is 30-40, mainly elderly people. Inishbiggle is a low, boggy island with a dozen or so inhabited houses. The post office is at F746-067. Local information is that the seas on the inner passage between the mainland and Inishbiggle are often treacherous. Although Ballycroy, the local town on the mainland is very near, islanders access the outside world via Achill. There are modern launching facilities either side of the Bull's Mouth.

### Embarkation and Landing

Inishbiggle is at the northern end of Achill Sound and is separated from Achill Island by the Bull's Mouth at F737-068. Land on a beach of small stones just E of the Bull's Mouth, between the Bull's Mouth and a pier at F739-069.

Launch from the slipway opposite, on Achill, at F735-071, where there is parking. Another handy embarkation point is on the Achill side of the North Sound at Bunacurry Harbour at F718-044. This is a stone and mud flat area, with a manageable carry even at LW, and plenty of parking.

The islanders have sought a cable car for generations. Boat access is less than dependable, because of the strong tides all round. Without a cable car, they feel their community is threatened. In particular, children cannot be sure they will make school every day. It seems that Eamon O'Cuiv, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, the Gaelteacht, and the Islands in 2004, is serious about providing one at last. He has shown more genuine interest in the islands, even the English speaking ones, than any other minister, ever.

## Illancroagh and Heath Island

F786-030 Sheet 30

These two small islands jointly and effectively guard the entrance to the SE corner of Achill Sound North, a water system called Bellacragher Bay. The bay penetrates between the Corraun Peninsula and the mainland almost to Mallaranny, a narrow twisting inlet of great interest and a splendid option for a foul weather day.

The embarkation point at F784-025 is just below the post office at Tonreege, halfway between Mallaranny and Achill Sound Bridge. Limited parking but with a handy stony landing.

Illancroagh at F786-030 is the more interesting of the two islands. It can be landed on anywhere. There is splendid, huge, exposed bog oak on the western side, and a significant Common Gull colony in season. There are tide races all around. The tide runs E and W on either side. Wind over tide in these gaps normally happens on the ebb. These conditions provide a fun race just off the put-in point, and elsewhere at times. The tide also fills and empties round the duller Heath Island.

The passage inwards from this point features strong tides at all the projecting points, and a varying landscape best savoured on the journey SE and inwards. Rhododendrons are followed by conifers, by grasslands suitable for remote yet convenient camping, then by ubiquitous peat-hags, sometimes close to the road and sometimes away from it. At the head of the bay are salmon farm tanks, always worth a visit to see these brutes leaping and displaying.

The trick is to catch the tide inwards, lunch, and then catch it again outwards. Otherwise eddy-hop. Local HW is about Galway + 0230 in the furthest recesses of the bay, which is perhaps an hour later than local HW at the Bull's Mouth.

Tidal races are to be found at most of the twists and turns. The most playful ones are on either side of Illancroagh, and these are best enjoyed on the top half of the ebb. Being shallow, they do not particularly need a spring tide.



*Ancient inscribed slab, Duvillaun Mór, Co. Mayo – Séan Pierce*

## Inishkeas/Duvillauns Group

F614-183 Sheet 22

This remarkable group of islands is well worth visiting.

### Embarkation

Embarkation is from Fallmore, a sheltered, sandy, S-facing beach about 3.5km W of Blacksod Point, and 1km S of a prominent tower on a low hill, known as Glosch. The surf is much smaller at western end. Camping is on machair and there is water at the houses. The southern part of the Mullet peninsula is a stronghold for Corncrake and used to be for Corn Bunting.

### Tides

The main W coast flood runs N from Achill Head, past Black Rock, then NNE past the outside of the group, from HW Galway -0320 to +0305.

The flood and ebb pour into and out of what is almost a sheltered 'lake' confined between the group of islands and the Mullet. The flows through the gaps seem to start a couple of hours earlier, at HW Galway -0515 and +0100. It

floods generally NE/N through the channels between the Duvillauns, the Inishkeas and the Mullet. Certainly, in Blacksod Bay S of the Duvillauns, the ENE flood runs at these times. The streams are weak inside the lake but achieve 2.5kn in springs off salient points, and flow strongly through the gaps in the inner islands.

Inside the islands, the ebb pours out of the 'lake' the same way, and the timings are the reverse of the flood. Outside the islands, the ebb is more complicated. The main W coast ebb stream outside the group forms eddies and thereby runs weakly NNE immediately outside of the Inishkeas and Inishglora, and keeps going until it rejoins the main ebb flow approximately 3km WNW of An-nagh Head, where there is much turbulence.

### Black Rock

F483-156 Sheet 22

The rock is known to locals as *Tór Mór*, and to Irish Lights as Black Rock. Like Eagle Island, Black Rock is a prominent lighthouse rock on which landing is impossible in most conditions. This, along with the fact that it is over 11km off-

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shore and steep-sided, makes it essential that any visit is undertaken in (very) settled weather.

### Landing

A landing is possible near the steep, carved steps on the south-eastern side of the rock, with very low swell conditions and an unladen (or someone else's, plastic) boat. There are 3/4 options from mid to high tide but only one at lower tides, about 20m from the sea-arch.

There is a jetty at the eastern end, but there is often too much movement there. All landings are very steep, in deep water, with any waves giving a lot of vertical movement. This gives a real risk of a bad bang if the boat hits any rocky outcrops while dropping with the waves. So, even in the calmest conditions, landing cannot be assumed and it is recommended to keep lunch handy to eat on the water before the long, open crossing home.

After a successful landing, the boats must be hauled up the steep rock and tied to the iron stakes near the steps, which were probably chiselled into the rocks in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The walk to the top is steep. Launching is, as always, much easier. Always ask Irish Lights for permission for landing at a lighthouse.

There is rough camping, but this is not advised, as lighthouse keepers have been known to wait months to be taken off after their stint of duty here. Bill Long states that it is reputed to be the 'most difficult of the lighthouse rocks on which to land; totally inaccessible at times, either by boat or by helicopter'.

No water.

On a day trip, embark from Fallmore at F614-183 or Portglash beach at F612-202, for a 12km journey on a bearing of about 250°. If based on the Inishkeas, the distance is 8.5km at 235° from the western end of the sound between the N and S Islands at F556-218.

### Tides

Departing from the Inishkeas, the only relevant tide is the main W coast tidal stream, which floods N from HW Galway -0320 to +0305, and the ebb in reverse. For a departure from the Inishkeas, a good strategy might be to leave an hour or more after local LW, taking advantage of

the last of the S-going stream, allowing a return after the start of the N going stream. The rate of the streams has not been measured, but judging by the way buoys are dragged down, at least close in to the rock, they do seem to run strongly, possibly 2kn. Paddlers report having to ferry glide when getting close to the rock, to avoid being swept past.

On Black Rock itself, the light character is FL WR 12s 86m 22/16M, i.e. flashing, white & red sectors, every 12 seconds, height 86 metres, visibility 22 nautical miles in the white sector and 16 nautical miles in the red sector. It was, until recently, an acetylene gas light, one of the very few in Ireland or Britain. It was converted to acetylene from incandescent paraffin vapour in 1974 when it was automated. The acetylene system was decommissioned to a museum in Wexford in 1999 and replaced by solar power.

In 1940, the S.S. Macville was attacked by a German bomber close to the Rock, shattering the lighthouse panes and damaging the roof.

There are impressive, recently renovated dwellings of cut stone which was quarried from the rock. Amazingly, lighthouse keepers and their families lived here for 29 years until 1893. Then, dwellings for the families were built at Blacksod and the keepers would stay in shifts on the Rock in the years until the light was automated.

## Duvillaun Mór

F579-157 Sheet 22

### Landing

There is an unreliable landing place on a somewhat sheltered sandy beach (bouldery at LW) on the southern shore at a point marked Gubnageeragh. The scramble up is awkward, but tired paddlers from Achill Head may take advantage. There is camping above the beach. Water is available in small lakes at the top of the island. Otherwise the much more reliable landing point in calm conditions is in a shallow bay on the north-eastern side, almost facing Duvillaun Beg. Land onto flat rocks, in a sheltered cut, best just NW of a ruined dwelling.

The island was abandoned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 1821 census, there were 19 people living on the island, and a community existed



*Rusheen Island seen from Inishkea South, Co. Mayo - Séan Pierce*

here up to at least 1917. The ecclesiastical remains on the brow of the hill at the western end are of a small anchorite settlement being an eremitic establishment from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

The square ruin is a killeen, a children's' graveyard. A carved flat stone on the summit depicts a Greek crucifixion on one side and a pre-Celtic cross (with a circle surrounding the cross) on the other. Well worth the visit. The western end is wild and dramatic, with small sea stacks and islets lying off the shore. The E end boasts a beautiful arch.

### **SPA**

Storm & Leach's Petrel, Barnacle Goose, Peregrine, Chough, Arctic & Little Tern.

Lapwing and Greater Black-backed Gull breed and there is a colony of black rabbits.

### **Duvillaun Beg**

**F588-164 Sheet 22**

The landing point is on a storm beach just N of south-western tip. Otherwise, land on rocks just N of a long spit at the eastern tip.

### **Gaghta Island**

**F600-174 Sheet 22**

Land onto stony beaches, midway along the north-eastern side in a cut.

### **Leamareha**

**F608-175 Sheet 22**

Land at shingle or rocks on the northern side. Greater Black-backed Gull breed.

### **Inishkeas**

These islands are not named for Inis Gé (the 'islands of geese' in Gaelic), despite their ornithological significance. Instead, they are named for 'Insulam Gedig' in Latin, or Naomh Géidh or Saint Gé in Irish. The first written reference to the islands was in a letter from Pope Innocent III appointing a local Bishop in 1198.

There was a thriving and stable Irish speaking population here from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nevertheless, no native writer ever emerged to record their lives from their own perspective, as happened elsewhere. Their story is



*Inishkea South, Co. Mayo - David Walsh*

pieced together from outside records. The population was stable at about 300 between the two islands for much of the time, though the South Island nearly always held more people than the North Island.

They ran out of turf by the 1830s, importing it thereafter. They survived the 1840's famine better than the nearby mainland, partly through fishing and piracy. Circumstances suited piracy because calm weather conditions in April and May becalmed many a sailing boat hereabouts. This all got out of hand so the coastguard placed a presence on the island to stop the practice.

Ravaged always by storms, the islanders were almost beaten by a big one in 1857, and were finally defeated in 1927. As protection against the wind, they developed a special style of lazy bed for the potatoes, 2m across and 30cm higher on the windward side, to protect the fragile young plants. The climate being milder than the mainland, potatoes could be sown in February or even January, giving the islanders a huge competitive advantage at the market in Belmullet.

They kept cows for milk, pigs for meat, and sheep for sale and for wool. They even kept horses to work the land, but more so on the N island where the widespread machair is more equine friendly. They also grew barley and their *poitín* was well known over a wide area, being favoured by the Boycotts, a well-known but not particularly popular local landed family. Their *poitín* was despised by the artist Paul Henry who visited in 1909. The boat crew got sozzled and gave him a trying journey back to Westport.

A pier was built on the North Island in 1863 but it was blown away within the year. A sturdier model was built on the South Island beginning in 1888, which is there to this day and looking well, sheltering the strand in front of the village. Schools were established on both islands about 1899. Three policemen were stationed on the North Island about the same time to try to stop the worst of the illegal distillery industry. Relations between the islands were never good, except when absolutely necessary. Burials took place only on the North Island. The North Island also took in



the Coastguard in 1849 and a police barracks fifty years later.

Perhaps all this influenced things so that the North Island took the pro-Treaty side in the Irish Civil War of 1922/23, and the South Island the Republican side. On one occasion, they all drew up on their own side of the narrow channel between the islands and pegged stones at each other.

In 1927, the two islands were united in grief when, on the 26th October, their young men were cruelly taken, ten of them lost in one storm. A big low came in and they were fooled by the lull at its centre. The fishermen were yards off the North Island when the westerly winds struck suddenly and strongly. Many couldn't retreat, and the last to drown were almost on the mainland well to the E. Each of the five currachs contained two brothers, mostly in their late teens. The community spirit was broken and another drowning a couple of years later emptied the islands by 1939.

### **SPA**

Peregrine, Barnacle Goose, Golden Plover, Common, Arctic & Little Tern. Corncrake numbers have dwindled to nothing, and the last bird heard singing was in 2000.

## **Inishkea (Inis Gé) South**

**F558-210 Sheet 22**

The S island is perhaps the more attractive. It is renowned for its winter population of Barnacle Goose and Snipe. There is also a large population of seals. The landing place is at the ruined village onto a sandy beach beside a stone pier. The beach is sheltered between the pier and Rusheen Island, which is accessible at LW.

Approached from the SE, the island is seen as low lying, with a white tower on the summit of a low hill, which, when aligned with another on the shoreline, gives a bearing of 120°. The two towers transit to the gap between Duvillaun Beg and Gaghta Island, useful to yachts. The ruined building on the skyline is the village school at the northern end of the village.

### **Water**

Good reliable water can usually be had in a small well, 100m S of the pier, just above the first beach, Porteenbeg, where sand meets grass.

### **Camping**

Good camping may be had at the village behind the houses.

Beaches in rounded bays to the S of the village give good landings and camping, but not water. On circumnavigation, escape is possible on the Atlantic side at the head of at least three deep channels almost dissecting the island towards the southern end.

### **Climbing**

There is what appears to be unlimited and excellent rock climbing on steep gneiss at the south-eastern end. Stan Pearson and Ian Stevens have been working here since 2002. There is a clean crag at the southern tip, and other crags on the outside as one moves N. Grades vary between severe and E1, 10m to 25m. Routes can look improbable, but the rock is fantastic with hidden finger jugs. On balance, the crags here are not as comprehensive as Gola, but it is quiet, for now anyway.

It is an outstandingly beautiful and pleasant island, not to be missed if in the area.

## **Rusheen Island**

**F561-212 Sheet 22**

Rusheen is a small tidal islet off the strand in front of the South Island village. One may walk out at HW. It appears as an undistinguished islet, and one may land anywhere. Rusheen might not even have achieved individual mention here, save for its extraordinary history. It was a major centre of the whaling industry in Ireland in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Then as now, the Norwegian whaling industry wanted to do things its own way. Seasonally controlled at home, they established out-stations in other countries to bridge the gaps. They set up one such station in 1908 at Rusheen. They rented the island from the Congested Districts Board who had bought out the whole of Inishkea. It appears they also paid rent to the islanders, who liked to think they owned the place, and wouldn't be persuaded otherwise. This may have been a Norwegian solution to a Norwegian problem, but was more likely an Inishkea solution to an Inishkea problem.

Within months there was a thriving industry, with modern buildings, piers and slips, though made of wood, Norwegian style. Three whaling boats killed an average of 60 whales per annum, of all main types but mostly Fin. The Norwegians kept themselves to themselves, living on their boats, but some learnt Irish to deal with the workers. Steam power helped with the hauling and boiling of the whales to reduce them to oil and fertiliser, but water was in short supply. Hence the dam to be seen behind the houses on the South Island.

The S islanders coveted all the employment for themselves, and wouldn't let N islanders work for the Norwegians. This actually suited everyone in a roundabout way. The southerners could afford to employ mainlanders to till their fields and harvest their crops for them. North Island fishermen thrived because less fishermen meant better fishing. Also, lobsters seemed to thrive on the discarded whale offal. So did the pigs of the South Island which all went feral. Cray and lobster were plentiful and valuable, and were transported live. The cray went to Paris and the lobsters to faraway London.

The whaling only lasted until 1911 when a combination of events ended it. There was a major strike. Further, the stench was unbearable. Even the mainlanders many kilometres away to the E complained. Finally, a fall off in demand for whale products ended the enterprise. The rusting and rotted remains of this endeavour are still to be seen as litter all over Rusheen.

No drinking water was found.

## **Inishkea North**

**F565-223 Sheet 22**

The North Island is separated from the South Island by a narrow sound. The most visible feature is a huge, prominent burial mound just E of the village at the south-eastern tip, known as the Baily Mór. Its humpbacked shape is dominant from most angles, and it boasts carved stone slabs said to relate to St. Colmcille. The dead of both islands were buried on the North Island.

### **Landings**

Land at sheltered sandy beaches in the rounded bay in the SE, underneath the abandoned

village. There are landing points also in many other spots. These include the northern side of the south-eastern tip, and a beach on the north-eastern side, just short of the northern tip, where there is a seal colony. Escape is also possible on the Atlantic side, at the head of a deep cut behind the village, and probably other spots.

### **Water**

Water has been found in a well that may need a little tidying, at the N end of the houses, in from the N end of the larger beach.

### **Camping**

Camping in the bay in good weather is best at the Baily Mór mound, which is open but scenic, and otherwise attractive. In bad weather, some shelter may be had at the village.

Little Tern were seen acting territorially in 2004 (fighting), which may indicate that they are starting to breed.

## **Carricknaweelion**

**F565-240 Sheet 22**

A large, flat, grassy, sheep-grazed companion to Inishkea North, just off its northern side. In fact, the camping is the more attractive on the main island opposite, on machair, for those seeking the truly remote experience. The two islands are connected at the bottom of the lowest tides. Land easiest at any of several small sandy beaches on the south-eastern side.

## **Carrickawilt**

**F568-249 Sheet 22**

The southernmost of three remote rocky islets separated from Carricknaweelion and Inishkea North by a modest sound. The three are collectively perhaps more interesting to paddle round than to land on. Carrickawilt is a small, low-lying, flat, grass-topped rocky islet, with a large concentration of Atlantic Grey Seals. Land at a sheltered boulder beach in a cut on the south-eastern side.

## **Carrigee**

**F567-254 Sheet 22**

The middle of the three separated islets. Barren, with some patches of grass and thrift. Many seals. Easy landing on the ESE side with shelter



*Village seen from the pier, Inishkea South, Co. Mayo - Dave Walsh*

from swell by offshore rocks. It is easiest to land at LW. One deep inlet is best. Many gulls' nests.

## **Carrickmoylenacurhoga**

F572-257 Sheet 22

Carrickmoylenacurhoga is a large, low-lying and very rocky island, the northernmost of the three separated islets. Rather inhospitable, especially at the northern end. A series of deep cuts along its eastern side provide landing onto rock shelves or into rock pools at LW. The best-protected landing is in a narrow gap in the south-eastern corner. More than 80 Grey Seal were present in May 2002.

## **Erris Head Area**

F701-418 Sheet 22

The 'head' of Erris Head is on a small, grassy island separated from the Mullet peninsula by a narrow, dramatic channel at F699-416, which is a useful escape from the Atlantic side. On the Broad Haven side, about 2km to the SE, is a good little harbour called the Danish Cellar at

F706-397, useful on passage, with water in the house and camping.

## **Tides**

The main W coast stream touches land hereabouts, so the flood runs NE/E from HW Galway -0320 to +0305. Races occur on the Broad Haven side where returning eddies meet the mainstream. On the flood, a clockwise eddy comes back N along the Broad Haven coast from about 2.5km SSE of the head.

On the ebb, anticlockwise eddies happen in two places. One eddy comes back N along the eastern side of Broad Haven bay, and rejoins the mainstream W of Kid Island. The ebb also sets up anticlockwise eddies on the Atlantic side, SW of the head. During the ebb, a race occurs off Erris Head, and ripples or overfalls occur NNE and ENE of Eagle Island, where the eddies running N along the coast between Eagle Island and Erris Head rejoin the main flow. Local paddlers report that the tide always seems to be going N inside Eagle Island, on both flood and ebb.

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In combination, all this seems usually to favour a clockwise passage on a circumnavigation of the Mullet, given a south-westerly wind direction.

### Embarkation

Embark from either of two locations, safe anchorages both, important to yachts on passage:

1. A working pier at F644-344 with good parking, on the northern side of Annagh Head, in a good big bay known as French Port, *Port na Francagh*.

2. A wonderfully sheltered, isolated storm beach just further N, called Scotch Port at 647-361. The Commissioners of Irish Lights have a building at Scotch Port, for servicing the lighthouse on Eagle Rock and Black Rock. Here is a Corncrake reserve (one bird in 2003), and where Quail are not unknown.

These are also excellent embarkation places for a round of Erris Head, linking with Belmullet for a manageable walk-back of about 8km. The paddle is about 32km. For a shorter trip, shuttle to the Danish Cellar at F706-397 for about 16km paddling. Either trip enjoys the Atlantic side of the Head, which is as scenic and committing as any.

### Passage

On passage, there is camping manageable opposite the French Port pier, but no water. For water, ask in the house nearest the pier. This is the house once owned by Danny Gilboy, the late warden of the nearby Birdwatch Ireland reserve. Do not go onto the reserve without permission, or unless accompanied by a member of the Gilboy family. Do not camp at the head of the bay unless intending departure near HW, because of the extensive flats which severely dry out. Camping at Scotch Port is convenient and uncomplicated.

The islands off the NW of the Mullet peninsula share common access and tidal information. They vary from low and grassy to huge and rocky, with a significant lighthouse.

### SPA

Storm Petrel, Arctic & Little Tern, Barnacle Goose, Corncrake, Quail.

## Inishkeeragh

F607-303 Sheet 22

A low, uninteresting island just S of Inishglora, where a landing is possible on a beach of small boulders on either side of the eastern tip. Note that small half-tide reefs between Inishkeeragh and Inishglora are unduly prominent on the OS 1:50,000 map. They show as small islands, which confuses the navigator.

The island is almost cut in two by a ravine. Land at the head on either side.

## Inishglora

F616-308 Sheet 22

Inishglora is a long and narrow low-lying island. It is interesting for its monastic ruins at the eastern end, and for its beehive stone formations. The church roof collapsed in 2003 after standing for centuries.

### The Children of Lir

The cairns on the island are said to be the resting places of the children of Lir. The children, Finola and her brothers Aedh, Conn and Fiachra were changed into swans by a jealous stepmother, Eva. She was jealous of the love of the children for their mother Eve, her eldest sister, who had died. The swans would keep the wit, the nature, and the speech of humans, as well as the power of music. This would last until a prince from the N married a princess from the S, and they heard the voice of the Christian bell bringing the light of the new faith over the land.

In all, they spent 300 happy years on Lough Derryvaragh in County Westmeath, 300 desperate and stormy years around Rathlin Island off the NE of Ireland, and finally 300 years at peace around Inishglora. Then, Saint Kemoc changed them back into humans. Alas, they were elderly crones. Here on Inishglora, as Christians, they ended their days at last. This is the saddest tale of ancient pre-Christian Ireland, well worth reading up on.

Storm Petrel extensively colonise the eastern end of the island.

In the 1821 census, 7 people were living on the island.

## Landing and water

There is a landing place opposite Inishkeeragh on a sandy beach on the southern side, just inside the eastern tip. Landing might also be possible on a storm beach in a shallow bay, midway along the northern side. There is a disused well at the eastern end, but the water is not good. Wells need use.

## Eagle Island

F641-392 Sheet 22

A prominent, rocky lighthouse island, on which landing without swimming is almost impossible in nearly all conditions. The sound immediately inside the island to its SE is always lumpy and best avoided in difficult conditions. Local paddlers report that the tide in the sound always runs NE, and that it is usually best to pass by further inside altogether, along the coast.

As with all lighthouses, always ask Irish Lights for permission to land. There were two lighthouses, which form a transit, clearing obstacles nearby. The eastern light was discontinued in 1895, and the western light was automated in 1988. Its character is 3 white flashes every 10 seconds.

The lights have a troublesome history. Storms wrecked the towers during construction and again afterwards. The keepers' accommodation was washed away. A wave 68m high washed over the island in 1861. The tower filled with water and the keepers had to drill holes to open the door.

The grassy top of the island feels sheltered, and appears to have once sustained the lighthouse personnel well enough. There is a substantial walled garden just above the northern landing steps. The lighthouse is powered by solar panels. Great Black-backed Gull abound in the long grass.

## Landing

There are two landing spots. Each is at or alongside a small landing stage, each either side of the SE sound. Each is just outside the sound, one at the eastern tip, and the other at the southern tip, behind a stack. Steps are cut in the rock either side of these landing stages, where it is probably best to drag up heavy boats.

## Camping

There is no water, but there is plenty of camping on the grassy plateau. However, an overnight stay runs a huge risk of stranding, should swell

height increase, even a little. See Bill Long's 'Bright Light, White Water' for descriptions of the huge seas which give this island it's bad reputation. A short visit is recommended.

## Belmullet

F703-325 Sheet 22

Sheltered and easy access from Mayo's western and northern coasts may be had through Belmullet. A lock-free canal is navigable to kayaks on the 2 hours either side of local HW. This gives easy passage from Blacksod Bay into Broad Haven. Belmullet is a most useful town on passage. A market town, all facilities are available.

## Tides

The tide flows simultaneously into Blacksod Bay and Broad Haven, meeting on the drying mudflats on the Broad Haven (eastern) side of the town. The flow in the canal is usually from Blacksod towards Broad Haven, and reaches 4kn in springs. The mudflats on the Broad Haven side are severe, so don't miss the tide. Approach and leave Belmullet near HW.

Local HW is Galway HW +0040.

An excellent evening meal is available in the hotel, and a handy B&B is with Eileen Gaughan, Mill House, American Street, Belmullet, tel. 097-81181. Her garden backs onto the canal just on the Broad Haven side. Kayaks can be left here conveniently and securely, which is otherwise a problem.

Camping locally is unattractive.

## Kid Island - *Oileán Mionnán*

F787-438 Sheet 22

Kid Island is a massive lump, 86m high, more than matching the local mainland cliff-top, 250m to its SE. Kid Island guards the north-eastern approaches to Broad Haven - *Cuan an Inbhir Mhóir*. To pass NE inside the island is to be transported instantly into the surreal world of the N Mayo coastline. High and sheer cliffs dotted with huge caves vie with jagged stacks everywhere. Transcending everything are the Stags of Broad Haven. This is scenery worthy of any James Bond boat chase.

## Embarkation, Camping and Water

Launch from the beach inside Binroe Point pier - *Barr na Rinne* at about F802-406. There



*Stags of Broadhaven, Co. Mayo - Alyn Walsh*

is no water or camping on the island but there is excellent camping on machair at the launch point, on either side of the road approaching the pier. Excellent water is available from a pipe exiting the cliff at the northern end of the beach, N of the pier. This area is known locally as Carrowteigue - *Ceathrú Thaidhg*.

### **Landings**

There are two. Land more easily in a cove in the NE, below some metal stanchions placed there long ago to aid getting sheep onto and off the island. However, the scramble from here is long and needs care, up rock slabs and then grass. Marvel at the thought of yapping dogs industriously herding sheep on such terrain. Many of both species must have had an unexpected swim or worse. The landing at the western tip is more exposed, but there is an easier scramble to the summit.

The grass top is extensive and sheep-grazed. It was the sight of sheep in 2003 that tempted an ISKA party to try to find a landing. A long, interesting ridge runs out N, worth the scramble for the view. A cave appears to run right through

this ridge, 20m above the water line. Light can be seen. Rumour has it that scuba divers climb up there and scramble all the way through.

Breeding sheep, Puffin, Guillemot, and Great Black-backed Gull.

### **Stags of Broad Haven - *Na Stacaí* F838-479 Sheet 22**

No amount of forewarning prepares the visitor for the reality. Only a few places truly merit this assertion. One thinks of Skellig, Moher, Aran, but these Stags are worthy of inclusion on any such list. Unlike the others, these Stags are little known, greatly enhancing their fame among the few fortunate enough to have visited.

There are five stags in all - huge, dramatic, pointy topped rocks usually circled in foam. They lie 4km from the beach and 2.5km from nearest land. They are best seen from the SW. All but one have arches, and one is entirely bisected by a long narrow dramatic cave. The passage through and around the Stags is one of the significant Irish sea kayaking experiences.

## Embarkation

The embarkation place is at Portacloy - *Port a'Chlóidh* at F840-440, a sheltered, sandy beach, attractive and N-facing. There is good camping just behind the beach on commonage, but ask for permission. Water is available in local houses. Launching and landing is easier at the pier NW of the beach under most conditions, but the camping there is less satisfactory. There are no provisions available locally - this is a very remote spot. A watchtower on the headland marks the western side of the entrance to the bay.

The whole coastline hereabouts, particularly from Portacloy W, has arches, caves, channels and passages second to none anywhere. These are easily enjoyed in plastic boats. Bring good headtorches for the caves, which are very deep.

Local HW is Galway +0040.

## SPA

Puffin, Storm & Leach's Petrel.

## Landing

Landing on any of the Stags without swimming is not normally possible.

The central Stag (*Teach Dónal Ó'Cléirigh*) is highest at 97m. Land at the south-western tip at F840-478.

To its S is *An Teach Mór*, second highest at 94m, on which the landing is easiest on the northern tip at F839-479, but the climb to the top is harder. Or, land at the more exposed southern tip at F839-476, which has the easier looking climb.

E of centre is *An Teach Beag* at about 85m, which boasts the tunnel, running E/W. Land at the south-eastern tip at F840-478, or at an equally sheltered spot just outside and NE of the tunnel at F840-479. A little rock to the E of *An Teach Beag* is *An Bád Bréige*, which is often mistaken for a boat when seen from a distance.

No kayaker is known to have landed on either of the Stags NW of centre, *Carraig na Faola* and just further out, *an t-Oighean* (78m).

## Pig Island - *Oileán na Muice*

F880-440 Sheet 23

Named for its amazing porcine appearance when seen from E or W, the island is splendidly

bisected by a sea arch at the centre. The landward side of the roof of the arch is the jowl of the pig. The view of the arch in itself warrants a visit. The island, when viewed from the sea, appears to be attached to the land behind.

## Embarkation and Landing

The embarkation place is Porturlin - *Port Durlainne* at F885-425, which is a small fishing village. At the harbour in Porturlin, the camping is unattractive, but there is water out of a pipe on the roadside. Launching and landing is easy. No provisions. Beware that the lights on the quayside are not a transit for entry. The mouth of the harbour is narrow, and the ground outside is steep, blocking sight of most land features. If however, the features can be seen, entry is looking good. While there is obvious evidence of sheep grazing, no landing was found on the island. A deep-water landing might be forced on the landward, southern side. Scramble up at the SW.

Local HW is Galway +0040.

## Illanmaster - *Oileán Maigheastar*

F935-432 Sheet 23

High, square, block-shaped island located very close to the mainland but separated from it by a dramatic rock canyon. The channel is easily navigable by kayak and perhaps by other small, seaworthy boats, in good weather conditions. When entered from the western side, the passage through the high, steep, rock walls is impressive. The passage opens on the eastern side into an attractive bay, at the head of which (F936-426) lies a fine storm beach. The area provides an ideal lunch spot for kayakers en route from Portacloy to Belderg - *Béal Dearg*.

## Landing

The island is steep and precipitous. Landing is difficult but possible on the sheltered eastern side onto shelving rock platforms. The climb to the summit is a good scramble, best negotiated from the NE corner.

## SPA

Puffin and Storm Petrel.