

Foyle Boat Trail



LOUGHS AGENCY

EARNING A WELCOME

1. Please be friendly and polite to local residents and other water users.
2. Drive with care and consideration and park sensibly.
3. Change clothing discreetly (preferably out of public view).
4. Gain permission before going on to private property.
5. Minimise your impact on the natural environment and use recognised access points. There are many unofficial access points which could be used with the owner's consent.
6. Be sensitive to wildlife and other users regarding the level of noise you create.
7. Observe wildlife from a distance and be aware of sensitive locations such as bird nest sites, bird roosts, seals on land and wintering wildfowl and wader concentrations.
8. Follow the principles of 'Leave No Trace'.
For more information visit: www.leavenotraceireland.org
9. Keep the numbers in your party consistent with safety, the nature of the water conditions and the impact on your surroundings.
10. Biosecurity: sailors must help stop the spread of invasive species threatening our waterways and coasts! Wash and thoroughly dry boats, trailers and all other kit after a trip. Desiccation is effective against most invasive species, countering their serious environmental and economic impacts.

WILDLIFE

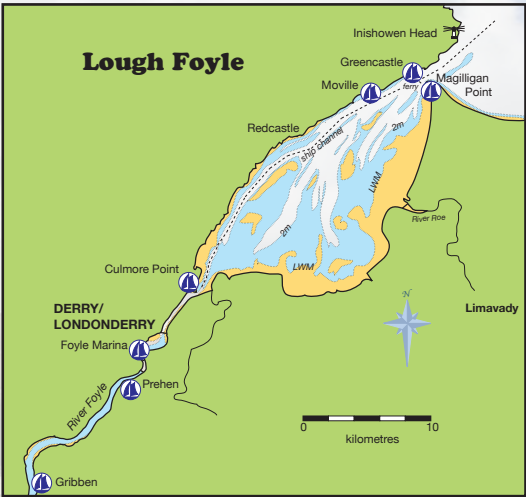
The lough is frequented by otter, seal and porpoise with occasional sightings of dolphin and basking shark around the mouth.

Waders and wildfowl (often breeding in the arctic) winter along the Foyle, variously roosting on the surrounding land at high tide and feeding on mudflats as the tide recedes. Others, such as whooper swan, graze the grasslands.

Those venturing out of the lough will experience the delights of sea bird colonies along the cliffs of Inishowen.

PLACE NAMES

- Beg - small
- Bun - foot of a stream or river (where it runs into the sea or meets a larger river)
- Carrick or carraig or craig – rock or crag
- Dun or doon – fort
- Ford – fiord, being a feature formed by glacial erosion
- Inish or inch - island/peninsula/headland/isle/meadow
- Ken or Kin – from Ceann, being point, headland, promontory, cape
- Long - ship (some believe that this indicates a Norse or Viking link)
- Mara - of the sea
- Mor - big or expansive
- Port - sheltered body of water, bank of river
- Rinn – corner or point
- Ron - seal
- Schieldren - shield shaped
- Stook - stack (isolated remnant of a headland which has been cut through by erosion processes)
- Tor – rocky height, pillar rock
- Tra or tre – beach



* Not to be used for navigational purposes.

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Heritage & Eco Tourism

The Foyle is a major tidal waterway that largely follows the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. With a rich maritime heritage, for centuries it has been a civil port and was once a strategic naval base. The first ship fitted with a screw propeller was built on the Foyle and – although shipbuilding is no more – a boat building tradition continues to this day, including hand built timber Foyle punts (the eponymous vernacular sailing dinghy once used to net salmon, with minimal keel and internal sandbag ballast that can be readily shifted as course requires).



The River Foyle starts many miles inland, separating the twin towns of Lifford and Strabane. It is tidal along its entire length and brackish from its mid-way point (becoming progressively ‘saltier’ in its lower reaches).

Near the top of the river is Islandmore, a 100 acre island. In Neolithic times, sea level was several metres higher than today. When early man ventured along the Foyle in his primitive boats (hewn from oak logs or fashioned from hide stretched across a wooden frame), the valley would have been an archipelago of small islands where, today, there are scattered low hills.

The river makes its way north and then swings northeast to the historic city of Derry~Londonderry. Below the city, the river passes through a narrow melt

water channel cut in late glacial times when an ice sheet blocked its former passage westwards. Emptying into the wide Culmore Bay, the river sustains the busy commercial port at Lisahally. This is where the German U-boat fleet surrendered at the end of World War 2.

At the mouth of the bay is Culmore Point, with its medieval tower and promontory fort earthworks threw up by an invading Elizabethan army. The point marks the mouth of the river - beyond this lies the broad Lough Foyle.

A notable feature along the east side of Lough Foyle are the sea walls. These were built by “The Honourable The Irish Society” in the 19th century, claiming hundreds of acres of fertile land from the sea. Even today, sea shell fragments are found through this well tilled soil.

At the extremity of the eastern shore of the lough, Magilligan Point curves westwards to almost enclose this sea lough. A Martello tower was built here in Napoleonic times to house an artillery detachment. This impressive fortification with its partner on the opposite shore at Greencastle was part of a network that defended against a feared French invasion.

Greencastle harbour is home to one of Ireland’s largest deep sea fishing fleets. Until recently, the Foyle supported a fleet of smaller boats engaged in commercial salmon fishing. In the lough and at sea ‘drift’ nets were fished, being ‘shot’ or paid out in a straight line and allowed to drift in the current. In the river, draft nets were fished, shot in an arc with both ends being brought together to encompass (hopefully!) a shoal of salmon.

Following the fall of France to the Nazis in World War 2 and with the Irish Free State (as Ireland was then known) being neutral, the Foyle was the most westerly port available to the Allies. Britain was reliant on supplies from across the Atlantic and merchant ships came under attack from U boats. In an attempt to keep supply lines open, the British devised the convoy system. Merchant vessels were marshalled into groups with a protective screen of naval warships. The Foyle was a major base for ships on convoy protection duty. The biggest engagement during the Battle of the Atlantic was the attack on convoy ONS5 escorted by the Derry based B7 Escort Group. A ‘wolfpack’ of 42 German U-boats attacked. On the night of 5 May 1943 there were 24

attacks, resulting in the loss of 12 merchant ships. The escort group claimed 6 U-boats sank and 5 seriously damaged.

The importance of the Foyle in the Battle of the Atlantic was rightly acknowledged upon German surrender when their U-boat crews were ordered to report to Foyle. On 8 May 1945 the British Admiralty issued the following instruction: "U-boats at sea to surface, fly a black flag or pennant, report to the nearest Allied radio-telegraphy station, and proceed on surface to such ports as directed". Lisahally, at the mouth of the River Foyle was selected as the port where the official surrender of the U-boat fleet would take place. On 14 May 1945, 8 U-boats were escorted up the Foyle, a token force, followed by 34 more before the month was out and eventually joined by another 30!

After the war, commercial airlines developed a network of routes. One such operation quite literally flew from the Foyle, being passenger carrying 'flying boats'. The sizable concrete apron where they taxied ashore, exists still, a short distance from Muff, on the western shore of the lough.





AREA 1: The Gribben Quay

Mid-way between Strabane and Derry~Londonderry, the Gribben site offers convenient access by way of a concrete slipway and stone quay to explore both upstream and downstream. There are basic toilets and a canoe bothy. Access is controlled by a barrier on the entrance lane – contact the site managers (Loughs Agency).

The Gribben Quay is described as a ‘fishing station’ on nineteenth century maps that detail fish house, ice house, fish chimney and quay. It still boasts a well preserved ice house and a quay (recently renovated). Fishing was a mainstay of the economy of the Foyle valley for centuries. A 1682 record reveals that “ the quantity (of salmon) formerly taken were from 120 tons to 250 tons” and details salmon exports from the Foyle to Venice (Italy) and Bilbao (Northern Spain).

Offshore there are extensive sand banks but once these are navigated there is pretty much a clear run downstream towards Derry. Upstream is more problematic – best explore on a rising tide and feel the way along with the water coming to lift the boat off a bank!

There is an amazing heritage along this river! To the east are the mountainous Sperrins and in the other direction rise the wild Donegal hills. Running to the Atlantic, this tidal river ebbs and flows through the lands of three ancient Irish lordships (O'Neill, O'Donnell and O'Cahan). The Foyle passes monastic sites from where monks, on the edge of Europe, brought Christianity eastwards to a neighbouring pagan land and from there to mainland Europe. On an island hill bounded by the Foyle, a city was established by newcomers from London, granted royal favour by King James I (an English king but born a Scotsman). The history of the Foyle valley weaves a complex heritage tapestry, its landscape bearing the marks of settlement, war, migration, trade, fishing and commerce.

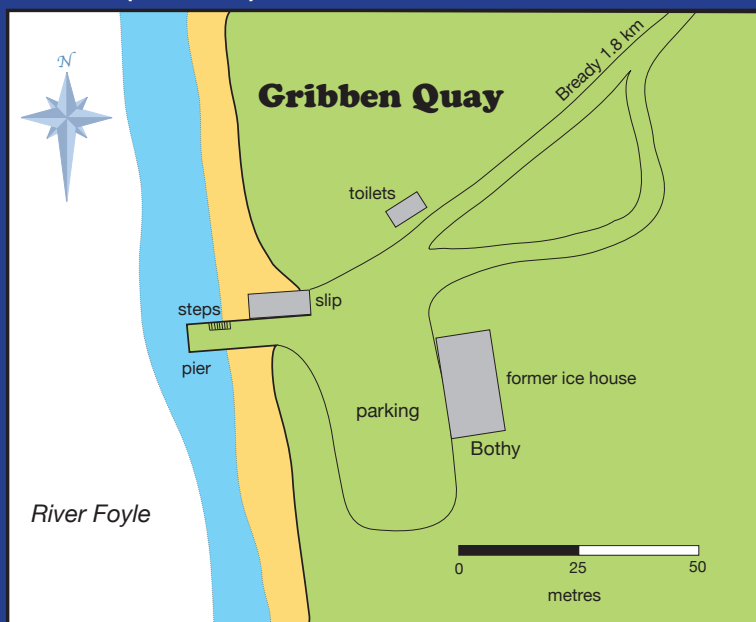
Explore the river and discover its heritage. Strabane canal linked the town of the same name to the Foyle. Constructed in 1792, it fell into disuse in the 1950's. The entrance to the canal is only a few miles upstream of the Gribben.

Opposite and upstream is Mongavlin Castle, a ruined castle that once housed a homesick bride from the Hebrides. Married to one of the O'Donnell clan, she did not wish to live in the family seat in Donegal town protesting that it was too far from her homeland. In a marvellous compromise, O'Donnell housed her in Mongavlin from where she could sail directly to the Hebrides or readily receive visitors from her beloved islands!

On the Tyrone side of the river, opposite Mongavlin, is a large piece of land that was 'reclaimed' from Sollus Bay. An 1800 map marks 'old channel' on the reclaimed land (once a channel of the river). It is unusual for a part of any river to be named a 'bay' (bay is a coastal feature but the river is marked on the oldest maps as 'Lough Foyle' – viewed then as an arm of the sea).

At least eight ferries operated across the Foyle. These ferries were busy with a 1786 correspondent complaining that passengers, making their way to and from the ferry at the Gribben, had trampled half an acre of ploughed land such that it had to be ploughed again!

***See also map of River Foyle overleaf.**



*** Not to be used for navigational purposes.**



AREA 2: Prehen

Just beside the busy A5 road, on the outskirts of Derry, is a slipway managed by the local council. There is a barrier on the slip but contact the council to arrange access – Derry City and Strabane District Council.

Prehen, on the east bank of the River Foyle, upstream of the ancient city of Derry, has long been associated with water based recreation.

The boat house here is the base for City of Derry boat club (the club races sculls) and the local canoe club (Foyle Paddlers). Close by is Foyle Search and Rescue (they have the private pontoon there). The council has longer term plans for the site that includes construction of a pontoon.

Downstream is the Craigavon Bridge with its low air draught (1.2 metres) and beyond is the city of Derry. Some sailors put in at Prehen and make their way downstream under the bridge with the masts down, stopping at the Foyle Port Marina to rig their boats.

Wind eddies and gusts can be tricky on the river from here down through the city but nothing insurmountable – people take part in sailing taster sessions here and go on to learn to sail on this stretch with no difficulties!

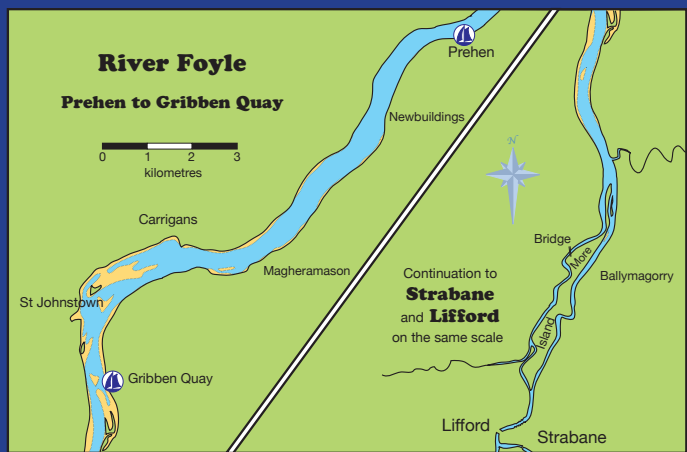
The river upstream of Prehen is readily navigated for several miles (see Gribben Quay). Not discounting the attractions downstream, the sailor venturing upstream will discover 15 miles of tidal river offering scenic views of the distant Sperrin Mountains and the famed ‘Hills of Donegal’ (Blue Stacks and Derryveaghs) as well as river side salt marsh, woodland and pasture.

Something that often surprises visitors is Islandmore, a hundred acre island betwixt two channels of the Foyle (known as the Backwater and – what else - the

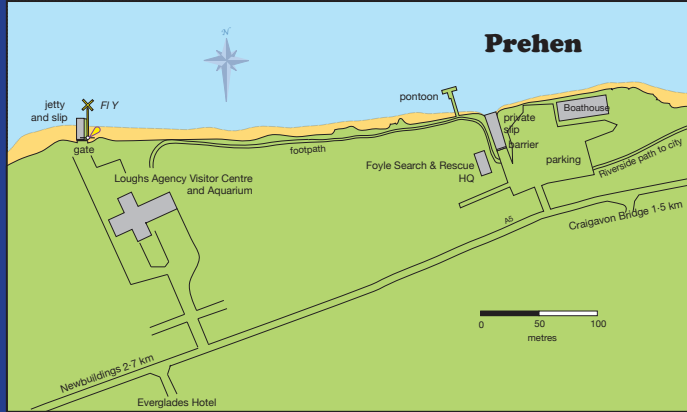
Frontwater). Elizabethan maps show the upper reaches of the Foyle as an archipelago but sedimentation and falling sea level has consolidated some of the historic islets into one main island.

Near the bottom of the island is the entrance to Strabane canal, an eighteenth century navigation built to carry ships into Strabane. On the Donegal shore, there is a castle, a stronghold of the O'Donnell's on the edge of their Tir Chonaill chiefdom. The Foyle has always been a conduit for people, as well as cargo. Mongavlin Castle was the home of an O'Donnell bride, a daughter of Clan Donald the Lord of the Isles. This choice of residence permitted ready passage down the Foyle and thence north west to her longed for western isles home.

Above the "island", a single stretch of water leads into the twin towns of Lifford and Strabane on either bank of the Foyle. Here, at the confluence of the Finn (draining much of County Donegal) and the Mourne (draining the western half of Tyrone), the Foyle is born.



* Maps not to be used for navigational purposes.





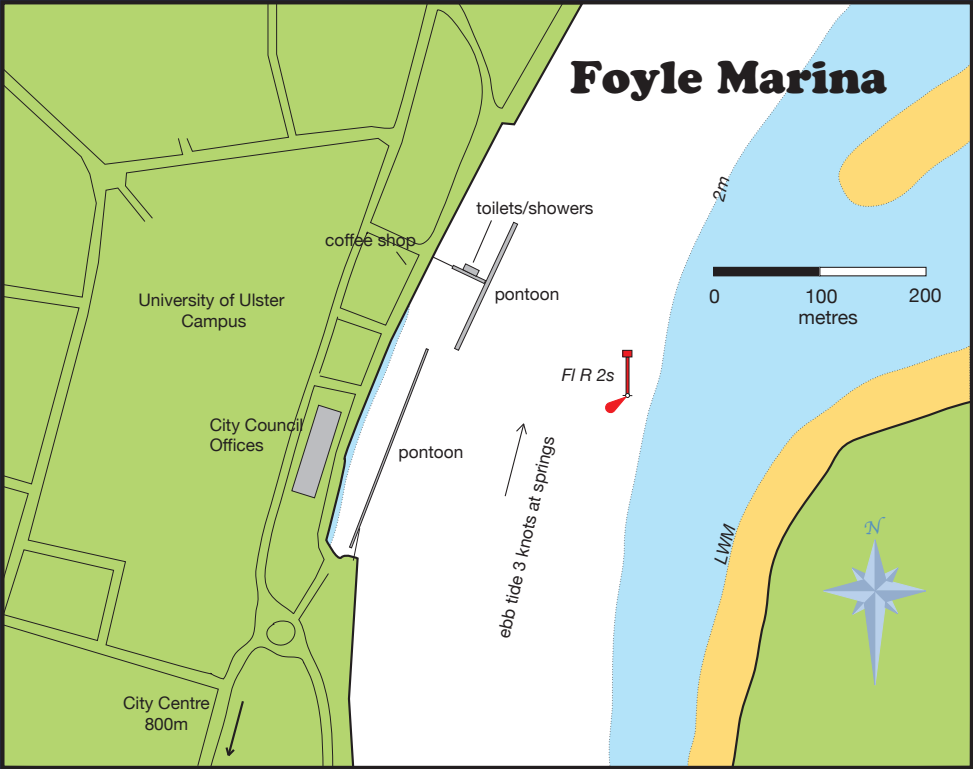
AREA 3: Foyle Port Marina

The Foyle Port Marina includes two gated access pontoons. When things get busy (as they do during festivals), the port installs additional pontoons along the city quays. There is electricity (including three phase) and running water. The main pontoon has toilets and showers. Bookings should be made with Foyle Port.

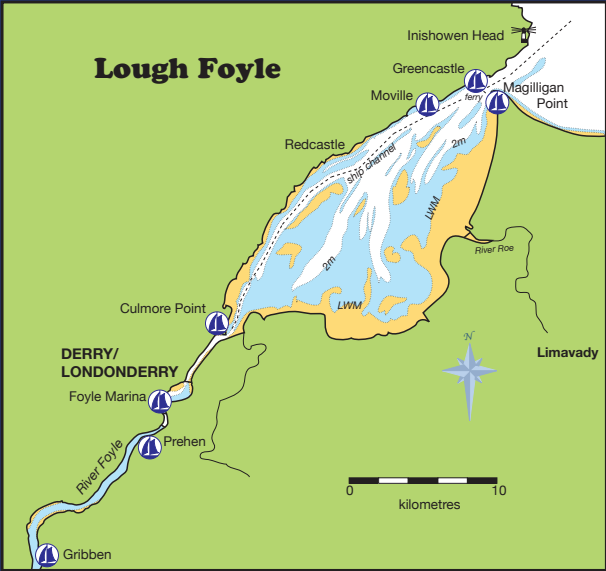
The quays are becoming reinvigorated with new cafes and restaurants. Following the quays, a walker or cyclist can make their way along a looped trail, following both banks and crossing the Foyle Bridge and Craigavon Bridge.

The city of Derry is a walled city that has withstood three sieges in its history. It was founded on an ancient monastic site that stood on a hill that was once an island in the Foyle. The view from the river is striking with a 400 year old cathedral crowning the hill across which the city sprawls and the gothic Guildhall (the gift of the Honourable the Irish Society) framing the skyline.

The Foyle remains a busy port with most activity at Lisahally at the mouth of the river. The extent of the city centre port can be seen from old charts that detail mooring posts, wharfs, piers, landing stage, jetties, cranes and travelling crane along both banks of the river all through the city! There was even a graving dock (or dry dock)! Nowadays, leisure craft, tall ships, visiting naval vessels and cruise ships have the city waters to themselves.



* Maps not to be used for navigational purposes.





AREA 4: Culmore Point

There are three slipways in close proximity at Culmore Point. Choose which one according to the tide!

Launching from Culmore requires particular study of the eddies that sweep past the point. Remember that an incredible amount of water is forcing its way through Culmore Bay, surging past the point to spill through the narrow river mouth – and returning again after the ebb.

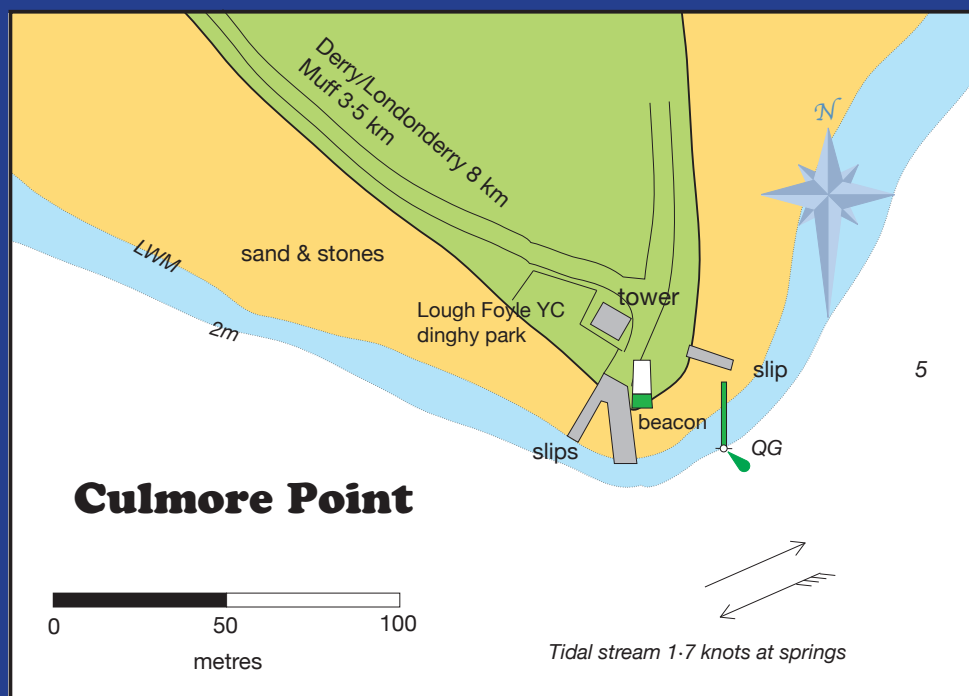
The name Culmore comes from the Irish for ‘large corner or peninsula’ and it forms just such a feature, washed by the River Foyle on one side and Lough Foyle on the other. Always a strategic site at a narrow point on the river, dominating it and controlling passage upstream, a medieval tower was built by the Doherty clan that held sway on Inishowen. An Elizabethan naval force (under a general called Dowcra) landed here in 1600, skirmished with the natives and threw up an earthen bank as fortification (this can still be seen by walking along the shore a short distance to just short of the football pitch).

Lough Foyle Yacht Club has its home here, sailing a range of craft. The club sail Foyle Punts, graceful boats with a 16’ keel and 5’ beam designed for fishing the shallow waters of Lough Foyle. They have a shallow draft without centre board or drop keel. Instead, sandbags act as ballast and these are moved around the deck to trim the boat as the 3 person crew alter course.

Opposite is the busy commercial port at Lisahally. Foyle Port have been supportive of local sailing clubs but, for safety reasons, please keep clear of the docks and any manoeuvring ships.

The river upstream is relatively narrow – it occupies a meltwater channel cut by waters pouring from melting ice sheets at the end of the last ice age. Steep slopes are well wooded on the western bank and there are some quite palatial dwellings overlooking this tranquil waterway.

Seawards the water opens up into Lough Foyle. The shipping channel runs along the Donegal side (the western shoreline) and the rest of the lough is quite shallow with a sizable area drying out. The eastern shore is bounded by sea wall along a considerable length with some stretches of salt marsh. Regardless, it dries along most of its length but some adventure awaits those with time, skill and patience, seeking to explore a little frequented area of water. The Roe and Faughan rivers are traversed by the Belfast to Derry railway imposing a low air draught at their mouths! Otherwise, the Roe is navigable (with skill) past a medium sized island and as far as Swanns Bridge a few miles upstream.



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AREA 5: Redcastle

There is a roughly built slip near Redcastle at the end of a long narrow road but turning is constricted. There is some rough ground sheltered by several large trees that tempt a camper and nearby is a hotel offering sustenance.

Redcastle is one of three names on the navigable side of Lough Foyle that point to the strategic importance of this waterway - the others being Whitecastle and Greencastle. Think what traffic was on this water centuries ago... clerics moved by boat between ecclesiastical sites (amongst them the famed Columba had his monastery on what was an island in the river at modern day Derry), the great Irish chieftains (O'Neill, O'Donnell, O'Cahan) had their fiefdoms upstream, Vikings rampaged, the Normans raided and then settled and Scottish raiding and trading galleys always passed this way from their home not too distant across the North Channel.



AREA 6: Moville

There are two slipways at the harbour in Moville.

The streets of Moville are typical of a Victorian seaside resort. The usual services (shops, cafes, pubs, accommodation) can be found in this small town.

A shoreline path leads to Greencastle. The path passes an activity centre where there is a bothy available to those following the sea kayak or dinghy trails (camping, showers, toilets, fresh water, electric point and secure boat storage). Prior booking is recommended -

Email: info@inishadventures.com

Telephone: + 353 (0) 87 2202 577

The sailor will find several sandy coves where they can pull ashore such as the convenient picnic site at GR C629389.



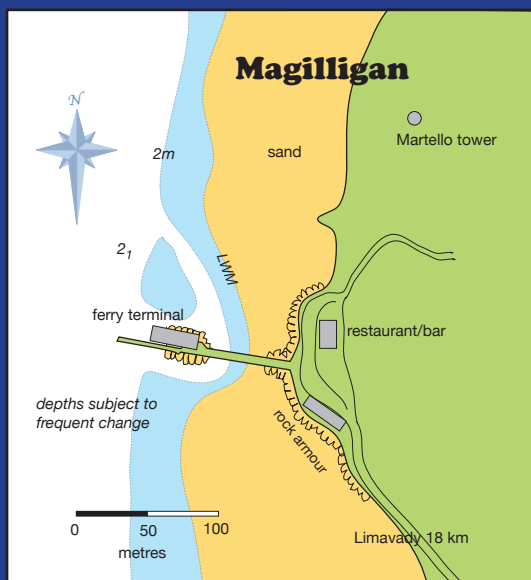
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AREA 7: Magilligan

Magilligan is a ferry port flanked by gently shelving, sandy beaches. There is no vehicular access to the shore (the slipway is a ramp for accessing the vehicle ferry).

A short distance from Inishowen (across the lough and within Northern Ireland) is Magilligan Point with a cosy bar and restaurant. The beach wraps around the point and runs for a further nine mile (that far does the strand run that it changes name three times - Magilligan to Benone to Downhill). Boats can slide on to the sand for a run ashore (obviously keep an eye on tides!). A Martello Tower stands sentinel at the mouth of the lough, a twin on the opposite shore at Greencastle. An extensive dune system entices exploration but be mindful that a military training area (including shooting ranges) occupies a large expanse.



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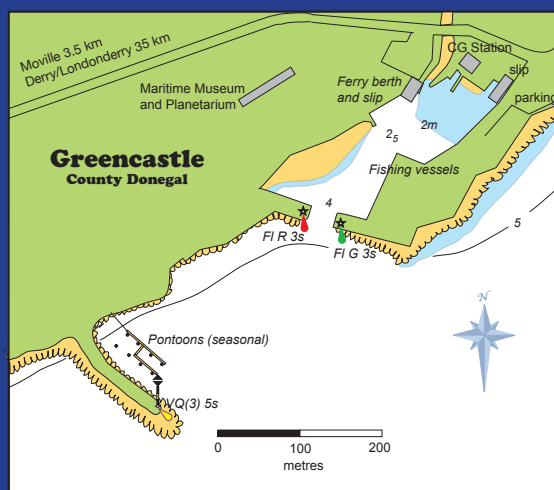
AREA 8: Greencastle

There is a slipway in the eastern corner of Greencastle harbour, as well as the large slipway at the ferry terminal. Outside the main harbour, a breakwater shelters pontoons (managed by Donegal County Council).

Across the Narrows from Magilligan, an ancient castle overlooks the busy fishing harbour of Greencastle.

The village has a superb fish restaurant and the visitor should take a look around the Inishowen Maritime Museum - housed in the old coastguard buildings overlooking the harbour.

The shore seaward and inland is a delight to explore with low cliffs broken by sandy bays such as the Pilots Cove.



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DISCLAIMER

Every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of this publication. The Loughs Agency and its partner organisations cannot, however, accept responsibility for errors or omissions but, where such are brought to our attention, future publications will be amended accordingly. The guide must be used in conjunction with an accurate navigation chart and an OS 1:50,000 map. Neither the publishers, funders, contributors, landowners, site managers, riparian owners nor agents of the aforementioned can be held responsible for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person or persons as a result of information, guidance or advice given in or omitted from this guide

The representation in this document (map, text or otherwise) of a road, track, path, quay, pier, slipway, marina, mooring or similar is no evidence of right of way.

Users of this guide are reminded that sailing and boating are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement. The national governing bodies (ISA / RYA) publish and promote safety and good practice through a range of training and educational programmes for all users of the water.

BIOSECURITY

Clean, drain and dry your boat, trailer and gear to prevent the spread of invasive species of fish, shellfish and plants!

Biosecurity is a serious issue for boaters today! We need to play our part in reducing the spread of non-native invasive species which threaten our waterways and coasts and have both serious environmental and economic impacts.

There are various practical, low cost measures which boaters can take to reduce risk. For those drawing boats on trailers, it is important to wash and dry boats, trailers and kit before moving from one water body to another. Ensuring all water is drained from the boat (including lockers, bilges etc) is essential as desiccation is effective against most species.

Any plants and animals adhering to the hull or on kit such as anchors and warps should be scraped off and put in a bin destined for landfill.



SAFETY ADVICE

When sailing on the lough, consider the following safety advice:

- There are extensive mud flats - please be aware that some access points are best used at high water only.
 - The river system is a spate river with a huge and wide catchment - watch out for flood debris such as trees.
 - The Foyle Port marked shipping channel (maintained depth 8 metres) is a short distance offshore on the Donegal side. Depth reduces rapidly either side of this often busy channel. Small vessels should be aware of the limitations and needs of larger craft that are restricted to this channel.
 - The lough and lower reaches of the river are water based recreation areas - be aware of other users, especially sailing boats competing in races.
 - Wear an approved buoyancy aid at all times; wear adequate clothing. Prolonged immersion in cold water leads to hypothermia - hypothermia can kill.
 - You do not need to be a strong swimmer but you will need water confidence to deal with a capsized boat and to get ashore safely.
 - Carry and know how to use tide tables, map, chart and compass.
 - Obtain an up-to-date weather forecast.
 - It is recommended that sailors leave details of their route with the coastguard and another responsible adult.
 - Carry adequate basic safety equipment - spare clothes, extra food, warm drink, bivvi bag, compass and means of communication (waterproofed VHF radio or mobile phone, flares etc), first aid kit. Remember - a dinghy may be difficult to see from a larger craft so carry a whistle and torch / strobe light.
- Carry a paddle in case the wind disappears.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Loughs Agency acknowledges the contribution of many individuals and organisations in assisting with the development of the boat guide – individual members of the public; members of clubs / associations; staff from harbour, council, trust, agency; and colleagues across the Loughs Agency.



TIDAL INFORMATION

- Tide tables are available for Lisahally (near mouth of River Foyle) from Foyle Port.

Approximate Time Differences HW/LW and Tidal Characteristics

- Moville - 00:45
- Londonderry/Derry city +00:35
- Lifford +03:00
- Tidal range: up to 3.08m at Lisahally
- Average flood time (Lisahally): 6 hours 7 minutes
- Average ebb time (Lisahally): 6 hours 17 minutes
- Streams in the entrance to Lough Foyle run at 3.5 knots at springs
- Streams between Moville and Culmore reach 2.5 knots
- The river runs on average at 4.5 knots
- Take care where wind is against tide producing short, steep waves



USEFUL MAPS AND GUIDES

Irish Cruising Club “East and North Coasts of Ireland Sailing Directions”

ISBN 978 0 9558 199 1 9 (excellent information on tides, tidal streams and navigation points)

OSNI Discoverer Series: sheet 4, 7

Ordnance Survey Ireland: sheet 3

Admiralty Chart no 2510, 2811



NAVIGATION ADVICE

Lough Foyle is a large, tidal expanse with a narrow entrance, enclosing a shallow bay. Complex streams, eddies, races and overfalls require careful passage planning (study tides, charts, pilot books and weather forecasts)! Bear in mind that – although apparently sheltered – the lough can whip up rough (particularly in easterly and southerly winds fetching across and along the lough)! The lough can become choppy, particularly if wind is against tide.

The shipping channel hugs the western side of the lough (where the deeper water is). Sailors must avoid impeding maritime traffic - stay outside of the well marked shipping channel and steer a wide berth from the commercial port around the mouth of the river (quays and jetties at Culmore Bay) and at the top of the lough near Maydown. Bear in mind, too, the hazards of water intake and discharge near the power station across from Culmore Point!

Shellfish aquaculture is an important sector of the economy of the lough. Boats dredge for shellfish, executing tight turns when fishing - busy crew can easily overlook a small boat! Watch out for metal oyster cages along the shore (submerged at high water but should be marked).

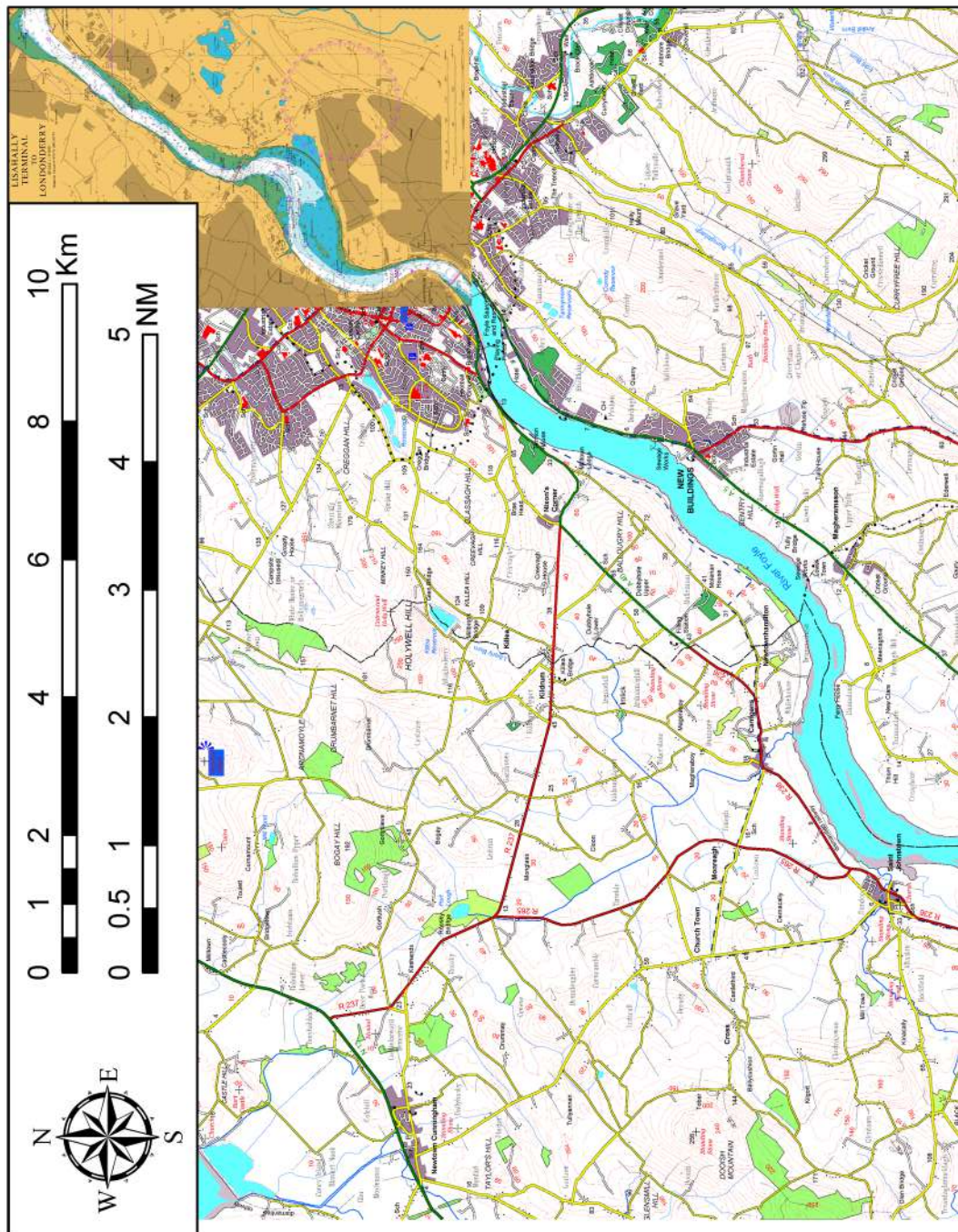


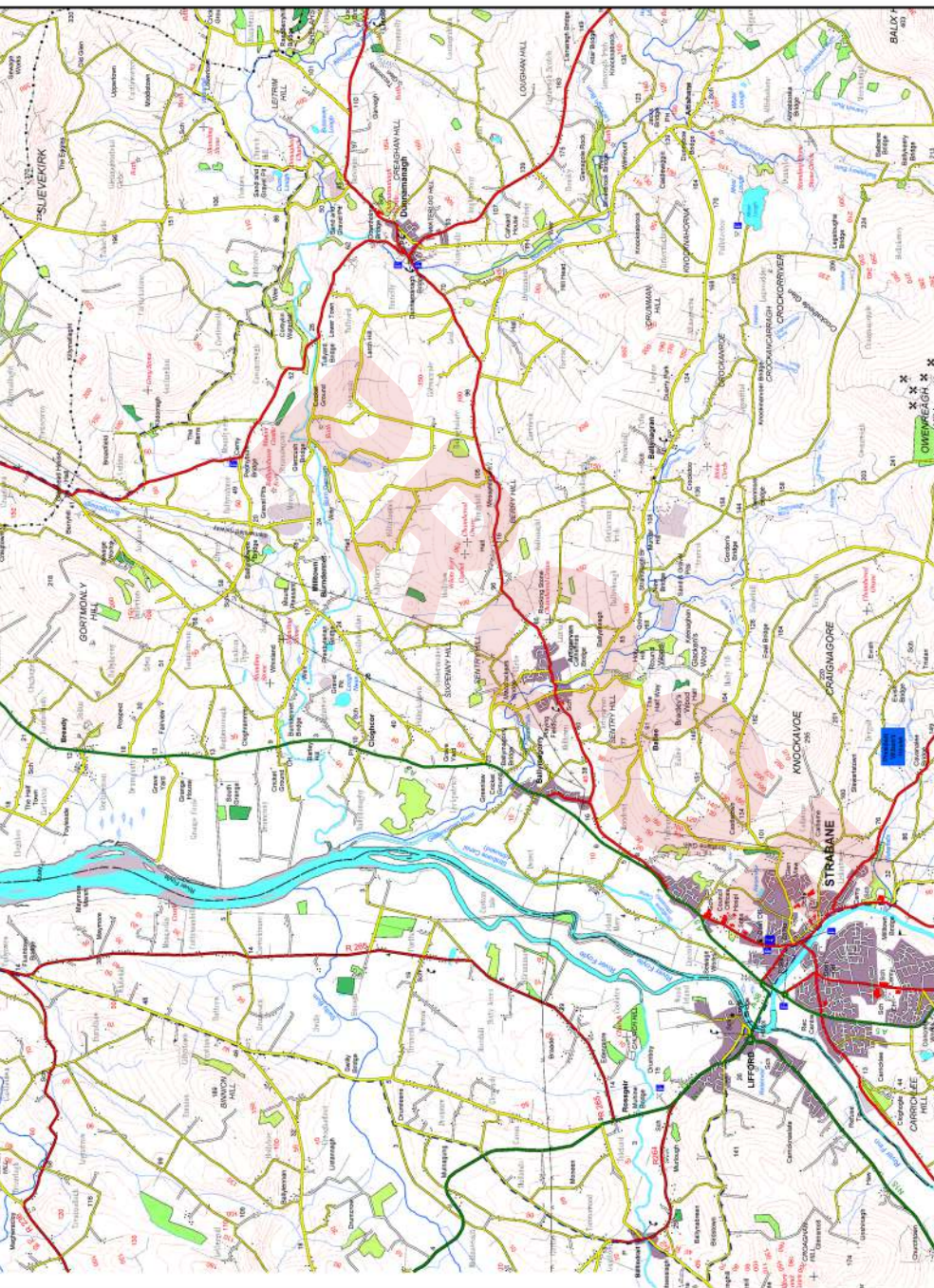
FURTHER INFORMATION AND ACCOMMODATION

Tourist Information Centres

A range of self catering, Bed and Breakfast and hotels are available along the trail - check online or contact tourist information points.



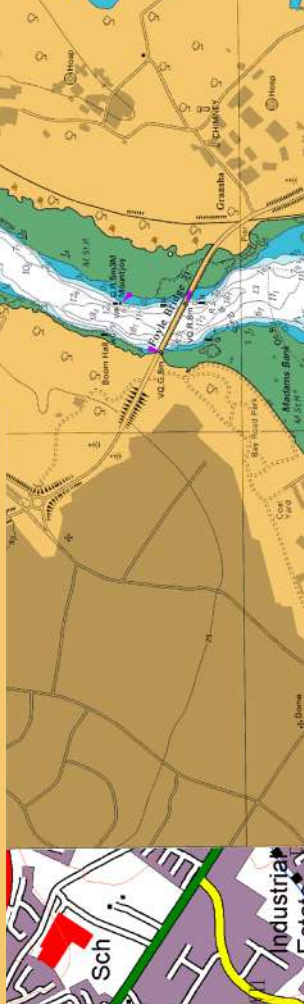
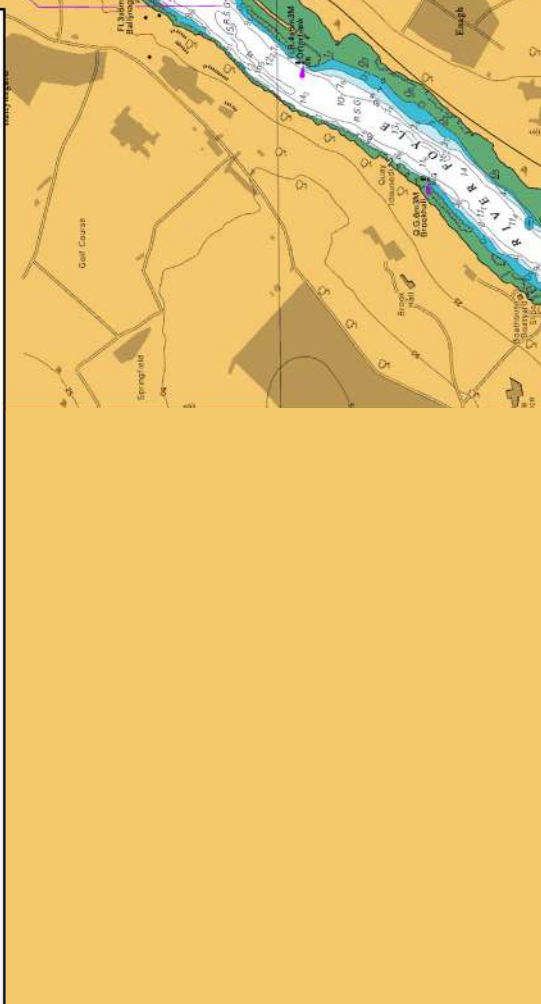
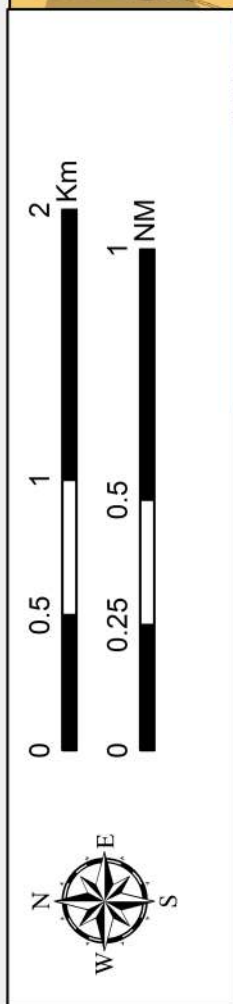




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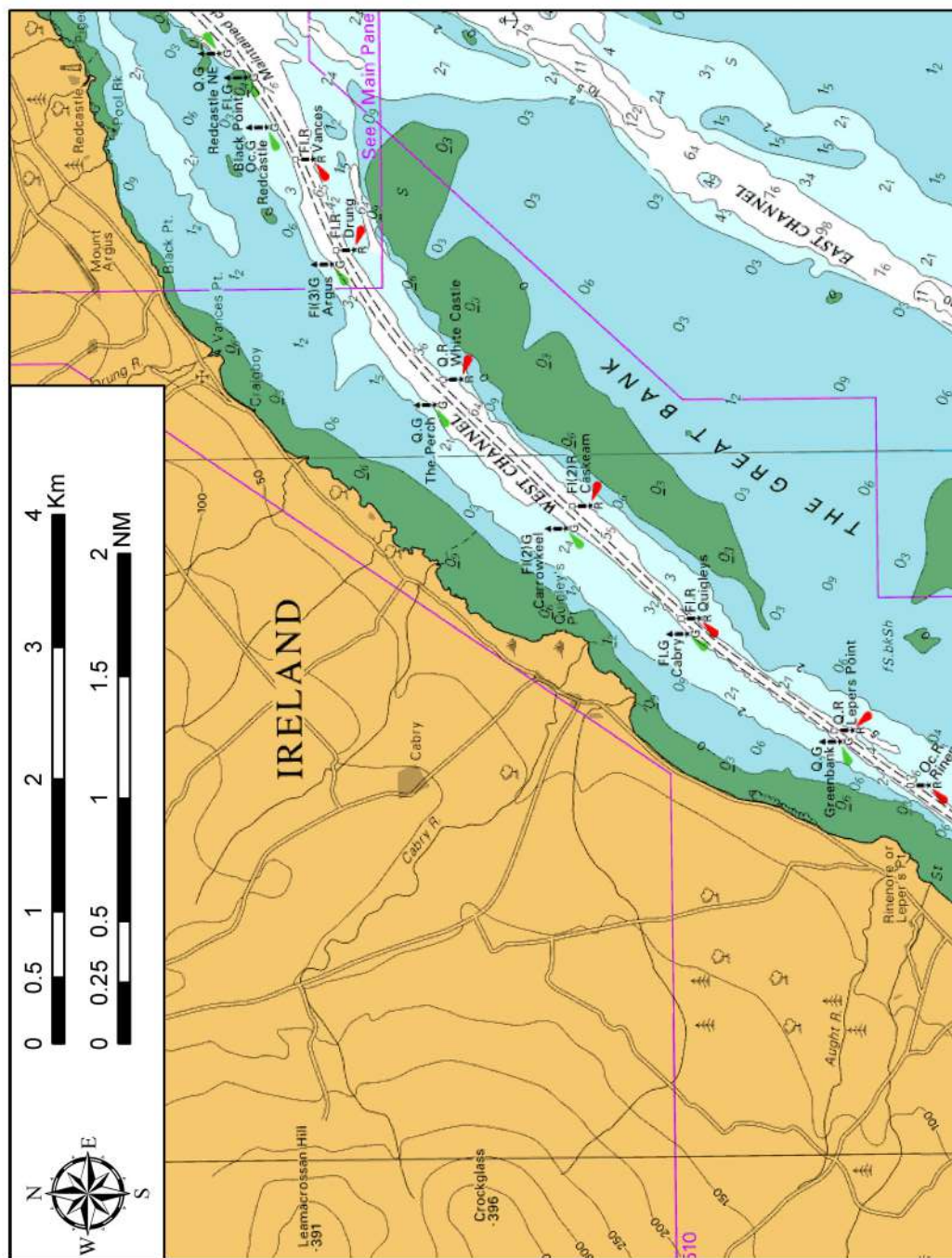
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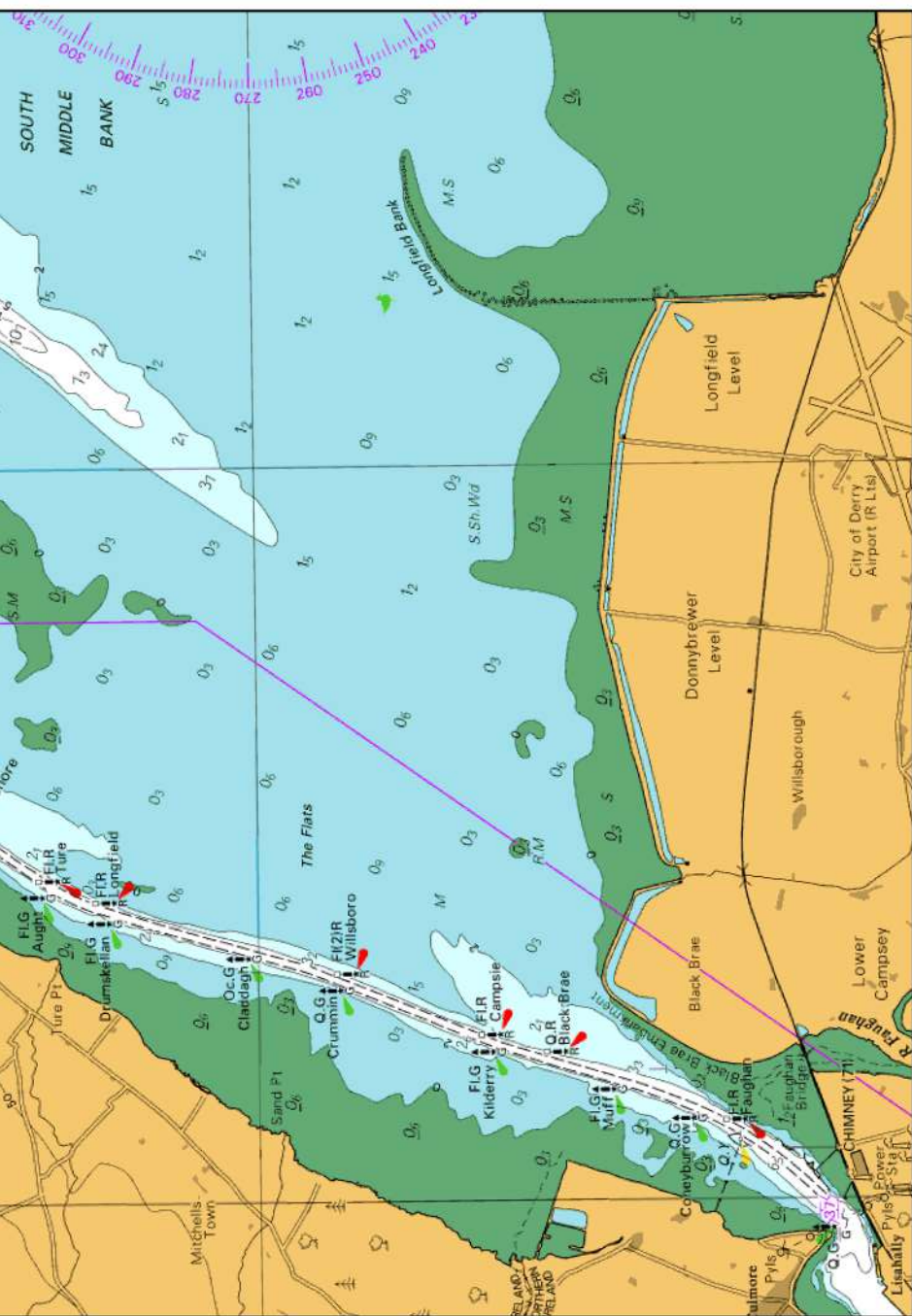
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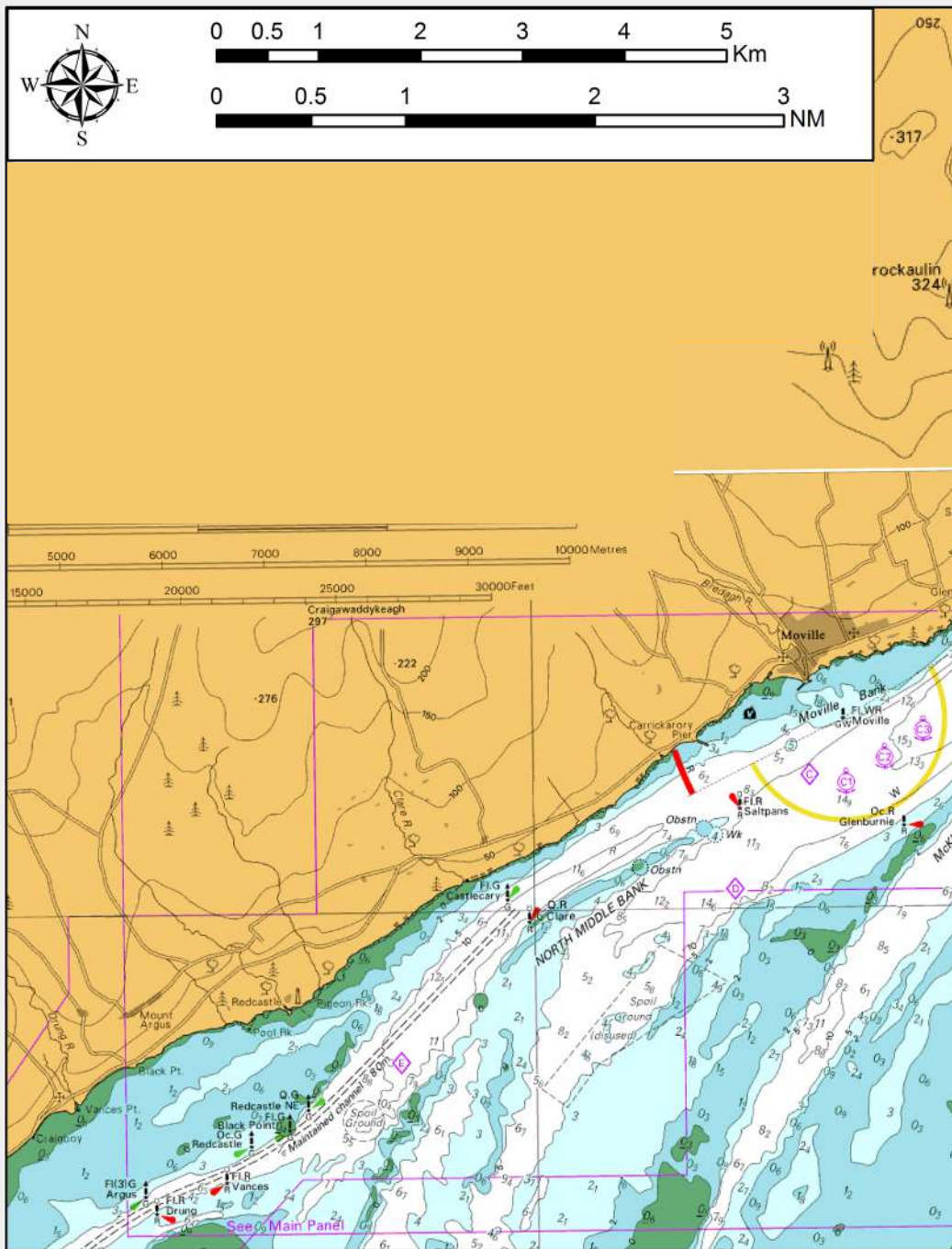
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