

## Preparing for Salt Water

Ireland has been blessed with our wonderful inland waterway network including the inland seas that comprise our giant Loughs. Many inland cruisers are sea capable boats and with preparation and planning are well capable of excursions to the salt waters of the Shannon Estuary, and stunning scenery of the south west coast. For many cruisers Killaloe Bridge may have seemed the end of the navigation, imposing a mental wall of fear, beyond which sea monsters and raging currents prevail, where pirates, tides and the Atlantic with its ice bergs and swell

awaits. Nothing could be further from the truth. Each year more and more inland

boats are discovering the beauty and adventure offered by both Shannon Estuary and the Cork/Kerry coasts. The IWAI's Lough Derg branch has long pioneered and promoted successful cruises in company to Limerick, Foynes, Kilrush, Fenit, Dingle and beyond. This has proven an excellent way for skippers and crews to gain experience and build confidence, whilst enjoying wonderful scenery and adventure. Back in 2005 eighteen inland vessels



cruised to Dingle and back including a variety of single and twin engine cruiser types. Since then many crews have built on their CIC experiences and revisited the Shannon Estuary, and wonderful places like Kilrush Creek, Foynes, Fenit and Dingle, often in groups of two or three boats. Back in 2006 we travelled 1000nm alone from Killaloe through Limerick around the SW coast to Dingle, Kinsale, Dunmore East, Waterford, Kilmore Quay and to Dun Laoghaire and back. (see [www.oceanfroggie.com](http://www.oceanfroggie.com) for trip blog)



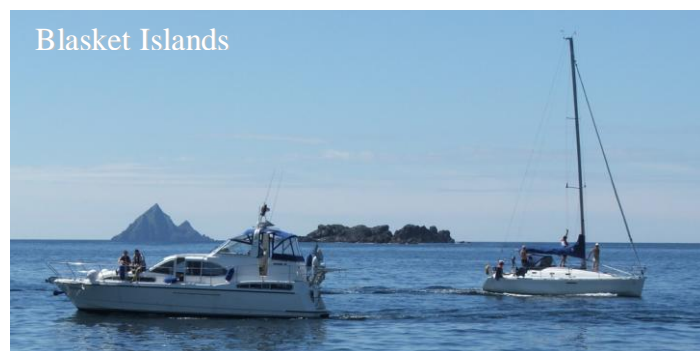
*Ocean Froggies 1000nm Cruise from Killaloe to Dun Laoghaire and back*

## So what's different at Sea?

We don't have tides on the lakes, the IALA navigation buoys and markers are a little different being green and red instead of black and white, with other unfamiliar aids such as light houses, cardinal markers and lights. So you'll need to have and be able to use coastal navigation charts and/or a GPS plotter. The rules of the road are more extensive but not too different from inland. We share the sea with ships and commercial fishing vessels, but traffic is light on the estuary and off the SW coast. The sea state can be quite different to inland lakes, especially the nature of waves combined with swell at times. The key difference between inland and coastal cruising is the need for good *passage planning* - for weather, sea state, fuel, navigation, tides and crew well being. But it's not rocket science. On a CIC one or two lead boats may do this for you and you can learn much from their expertise.

## Preparing for Sea

Before heading for tidal waters you should prepare and equip both your vessel and crew. What experience will you need? That depends on whether you will be travelling in the company of other experienced boats who will take responsibility for the planning and navigation, or if cruising on your own. It would be sensible to do your first few tidal trips in the company of at least one other boat with tidal navigation experience, or bring an experienced skipper with you, or join one of the association's frequent coastal cruises in company. Attending a classroom training course such as the ISA/RYA "Yachtmaster Coastal Skipper" will be of great benefit as well as informative and entertaining. These courses are run all around the country during winter months (see training on [www.sailing.ie](http://www.sailing.ie)).



Lough Derg branch members who have attended such evening courses gained the confidence and skills that enabled them take on enjoyable trips to Kilrush, Fenit and Dingle last season, travelling in small groups of two and three boats. This after the experience already gained on previous CICs. Small steps help gain confidence and build real experience and enhance safety.

You will need the Limerick Cruising guide, coastal navigation charts, tide tables, a current almanac such as the Afloat/Reeds 2008 which includes tide tables for major ports, tidal stream atlas, port information and chartlets for pilotage, and the usual navigation tools such as a Portland plotter, pencils and hand bearing compass. Tide tables for Limerick and Foynes can be downloaded from [www.sfpc.ie](http://www.sfpc.ie). It is important that your vessel and engine(s) are in good condition and recently serviced, with particular attention to fuel quality and fuel systems. Some older inland vessels may have significant dirt or sludge in the bottom of fuel tanks which could be disturbed if the vessel is subject to greater movement at sea. For this reason I recommend that keeping fuel tanks fairly full to minimise movement during passage. Also a good idea to keep one or two spare fuel filters on board and suitable tools to change them. Ensure you have adequate safety equipment on board such as PFDs, life raft and/or inflated dingy, fixed VHF, fire fighting gear, flares, first aid kit, and if going offshore items such as a Grab bag, hand held VHF + GPS, etc. A hand held VHF is fine for the estuary, but not recommended as your only source of communications in coastal areas due to its lower transmission power of only 5w. I



would recommend fixed VHF (25w) and a hand held as your backup for coastal and offshore cruising. Secure the vessel for sea passages, especially the anchor which on some inland craft merely rests on deck and could fall over the side. Fenders and mooring lines should be taken in and firmly secured. Having a line washed over the side by a wave into the path of the propeller is not something one

hopes for. If you have a dingy on davits, ensure it is pulled up tight against the davits, strapped very firmly and cannot move or sway. Stow everything below in lockers or put heavy items on the cabin floor.

## Navigation

As many know I'm a fan of electronic navigation, so if you plan to use a GPS plotter as your primary navigation tool then make sure you have the electronic charts installed on it for your cruising area well before the trip. Program the GPS with your routes and waypoints well in advance. A good way to do this is to plan passages on a laptop PC using software compatible with your make of GPS and then download the routes to the on board GPS using either a USB lead, or a memory card. A 15" PC screen is better for planning and drawing routes than a tiny 4" or 6" GPS screen. I recommend and always carry paper charts as a backup to GPS. I often do the "old fashioned" plots on paper charts just for fun and to compare how my conventional navigation skills and the GPS match up. It's always a good idea to have a plan B anyway. In good visibility "eyeball" navigation is not too difficult around the SW coast as the land and coastal features are so distinctive and visible often for distances over 30 miles.

## Check List

- ◆ Insurance Cover: Estuary/Coastal
- ◆ Vessel Recently Serviced
- ◆ Vessel suitable for passage
  - Cat B for Coastal
  - Cat C for Estuary/Kilrush
- ◆ Tide Tables and Almanac
- ◆ Limerick Cruising Guide
- ◆ Coastal Navigation Charts
  - Imray C55 (SW coast inc estuary), and/or
  - BA 1540, 1547, 1548, 1549 (estuary)
  - Optional 1819, 2739, 2789, 2790 (Dingle)
- ◆ Life Raft and/or Inflatable Dingy
- ◆ Coastal Distress Flare pack
- ◆ VHF Transceiver 25w
- ◆ PDFs / Life Jackets
- ◆ Adequate Clean Fuel – Keep tanks full
- ◆ Travel/Sea Sick Pills – Essential
- ◆ 1<sup>st</sup> Aid Kit
- ◆ Weather Information
  - Weather-Dial Sea Area Forecast
  - VHF weather broadcasts
  - Met Eireann Web Site
- ◆ Suitable Clothing
- ◆ Spares
  - Fuel/Oil Filters
  - Impellor, Oil and Belts
  - Bungs and Hose repair kits
- ◆ Secure Vessel for Sea
  - Stow all items VERY securely
  - Secure Anchor and Ropes
  - Dingy or Life Raft available quickly
- ◆ Adequate food, provisions and water
- ◆ Grab Bag - Coastal passages
  - Hand Held VHF, GPS + spare batteries
  - Personal EPRIB (ie PLB)
  - Flares, Torch, Sea Sick Pills
  - Car Keys, Credit Card, Water
- ◆ Contact Phone Numbers
  - Marinas + Harbour Masters
  - Diesel Suppliers
  - Weather Forecasts

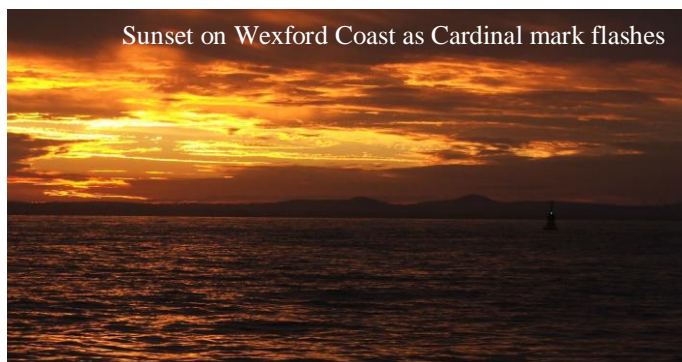
The Shannon estuary can look quite different depending on the state of tide, so care is needed to identify the many and varied types of navigation marks and buoys, some often confused with other buoys and electrical lighting gantries. This is where a GPS is an asset and allows you to confirm your position. In the wide open expanse south and west of Shannon airport it is easy to get confused. At low water the estuary may be ¼ mile wide and quite distinctive, but at high water it can be up to 2 miles wide, and easy to run over covered sand banks. Generally boats and ships travel down the estuary with an ebb tide, and return to Limerick on a rising flood tide. If cruising the estuary for the first time I recommend travelling down on a neap ebb tide, as the current will be slower. Neap tides flow between 1.5kt and 2.5kt, but at Tarbert race the current can be up to 7kt on a spring ebb tide.

## Crew Comfort and Sea State

Some crew members heading to sea for the first time may experience a degree of anxiety with even the slightest swell, which can look scary to the inexperienced. But once a crew realise that it is quite normal, get used to the movement, and that the boat was designed to deal with it, the ride seems less uncomfortable and confidence grows. We avoid cruising unless the sea state is pleasant anyway, but if it turns out a little worse than planned, then it's only uncomfortable rather than scary. If there is a swell than sea sick pills and staying up top near the helm makes all the difference. When there is little or no swell then going or staying down below is fine. This is a big difference with inland cruising. I recommend all crew members take some treatment for sea sickness well before leaving, the helmsperson is often immune to the motion.

Cruising speed is an issue, because in a F3-4 a boat doing 14-20kt can be quite comfortable, whereas at 7kt while safe it can be a bit "rolley polley" and unpleasant for some crew members. In a slow single engine boat I recommend such passages only in calm conditions (ie like the Derg branch trip to Dingle in 2005 when we had 8 single engine boats on the trip).

**Key to enjoying coastal cruising is weather**, taking on only what you and your crew are happy with, and only travelling when it's enjoyable. Be prepared to change plans and wait for breaks in the weather before taking on passages, but if the weather deteriorates, consider leaving the boat in port and pick it up a week or so later when the weather improves.



winds on the inland lakes, build their confidence in the boat and get used to such conditions in a familiar environment, then a F3-4 at sea will seem a luxury once folk get used to the slight swell. Sail yachts doing 5-6kt must usually plan passages to go with a tidal stream, but a 15-20kt motor boat can easily go against 1-2kt tide, and so can plan passages more for sea state comfort rather than saving passage time.

## Limerick Navigation Tips

- ◆ Do NOT use if more than ONE turbine running in Ardnacrusha which is summer norm
- ◆ Arrive down in Limerick 3 or 4 hrs either side of LW depending on aircraft so you will fit under the bridges.
- ◆ If in doubt and for total peace of mind reduce aircraft by dropping masts, radar arches and canopy.
- ◆ Use enough power to maintain steerage going under bridges, especially O'Dwyers bridge and Baals.
- ◆ Arriving after LW, say 3hrs before next HW will minimise the flow due to the incoming tide. On Springs there can be a reverse flow on the Abbey river as the tide comes back in.
- ◆ Do NOT navigate between Limerick Docks and the Sea lock at Sarsfield bridge for 2 hrs either side of LW, as it is too shallow and dries out at LW springs.
- ◆ If overnight in Limerick ONLY use the Hunt Jetties – Secure and Quite.
- ◆ Swipe cards for the Hunt Jetty security gates can be got from either the Ardnacrush or Sarsfield lock keeper.
- ◆ Strongly recommend making contact with Pat Lysaght of Waterways Ireland, who can meet you exiting Ardnacrusha and guide you down to Limerick with his boat. Pat is a gentleman and has been a great help to many inland boats passing through Limerick.

Motor boats usually plan to avoid the rough water generated by brisk winds blowing against a strong tidal stream. Wind with tide makes for a calmer sea. When passage planning shallow water, tidal races and rip tides should be avoided except in light winds. Folk instinctively tend to want to cling close to the coast, but often the sea state a few miles further offshore in deeper water can be calmer.

Dingle is beautiful and well within reach of even single engines boats in the right weather. It is nicer though to be able to cruise at 15kt because an 8hr trip suddenly becomes only a 4hr trip, or if the sea is a little more than anticipated, at least you're not going to have to put up with it for long. Unfortunately there is nearly always a bit of a swell on the SW and W coasts due to the sheer size of the Atlantic ocean, and it can take a few days to settle down after a blow even if there is no wind afterwards, whereas on the Irish sea and on the east coast, the sea settles down almost as soon as winds drop, or within an hour or two.

Realistically on a cruise to Dingle it is unlikely that you will avoid F3-4 at some stage either on the outward passage or on the return, unless you are exceptionally lucky with the weather. At speeds of 15kt Dingle is a lovely run well within reach of Kilrush Creek on the Shannon Estuary. In 2006 we made Dingle in one day from Killaloe at 15kt, but we were lucky with the tide and weather.

If basing yourself in Kilrush Creek, there is a lot to do on the Estuary itself, including visits to Foynes YC, Carrigaholt with a day trip to Loop head and back for some scenery and fishing. Anchor off Scatterry Island for a swim, fishing, or a paddle ashore for a walk around its historic ruins. You should encounter many Dolphins both on the estuary and the coast.



**Remember - SAFETY is about having the right attitude rather than just a load of equipment giving a false sense of security**

The trip from Killaloe to Limerick is wonderful and passing through Ardnacrusha is one of the best kept secrets in Ireland. If your boat and crew are happy crossing Lough Derg, Ree or Erne than they are more than capable of cruising down the Shannon Estuary to Kilrush Creek. The inner estuary is no more exposed to weather than Lough Derg, no swell, and all that is required is some simple planning around the Limerick tides and weather. Pick the right weather and the estuary and SW coast can be safe and enjoyable with awesome scenery. Lough Derg is connected to some of the most spectacular coastal cruising areas in Europe – and it's on your door step.

*Happy Cruising - Noel Griffin, Lough Derg Branch*

### Shannon Estuary Tips

- ◆ Go down with the ebb tide, up with the flood.
- ◆ IALA Bouyage - Green and Red, but some navigation markers are painted pylon gantry structures or masts on land, islands, or mounted on rafts. Not obvious to the uninitiated, many folk are surprised by the variety of marker structures.
- ◆ Neaps tides can be a more comfortable for 1st timers in case there is a stiff W or SW breeze
- ◆ Keep well clear of Beeves light house (sheehen) - foul ground 100m all around
- ◆ Strong current at Tarbert drifting you sideways - there can be 3kt+ on neaps and 7kt on spring ebbs
- ◆ Car ferries crossing at Tarbert race every 1/2 hour, and move at speed. They can ferry glide SIDEWAYS at 15kt due to the strong current.
- ◆ Enjoy the Dolphins, fun sitting at the bow watching them fly along the bow wave.
- ◆ Approaching Kilrush Creek stay over the dredged channel to the marina sea lock. Do NOT use the floating buoys as a guide, but instead use the *leading marks* to stay over the channel, by keeping them in line one behind the other. Tidal current tries to push boat sideways.
- ◆ On your return trip I advise leaving Kilrush at LW Kilrush or slightly afterwards so that a) if you do miss the channel you'll float off and b) you will be assisted back up the estuary on the flood tide arriving in Limerick near HW (ie assuming your at displacement speeds of say 7kt).
- ◆ Ship traffic below Foynes seems to move like snails but at 20kt+ can creep up on you quickly. Traffic volume is light. Listen on VHF.
- ◆ Foynes YC is well worth a visit. Mooring only on the outside Jetty as the inside dries at LW. Lighting at Auginish Alumina is an awesome sight.
- ◆ Generally there is no swell in the estuary upstream of Kilrush, so sea sickness should not be a problem even if there is a breeze.