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Rathlin O'Birne to Bloody Foreland



South Sound of Aran from the SW; Inishkeeragh, foreground, with Chapel Bay on Arranmore Island, L; The Clutch and Aileen Reef centre R; Eighter and the channel to Burtonport, upper R; Owey at top

“Cruising Ireland”

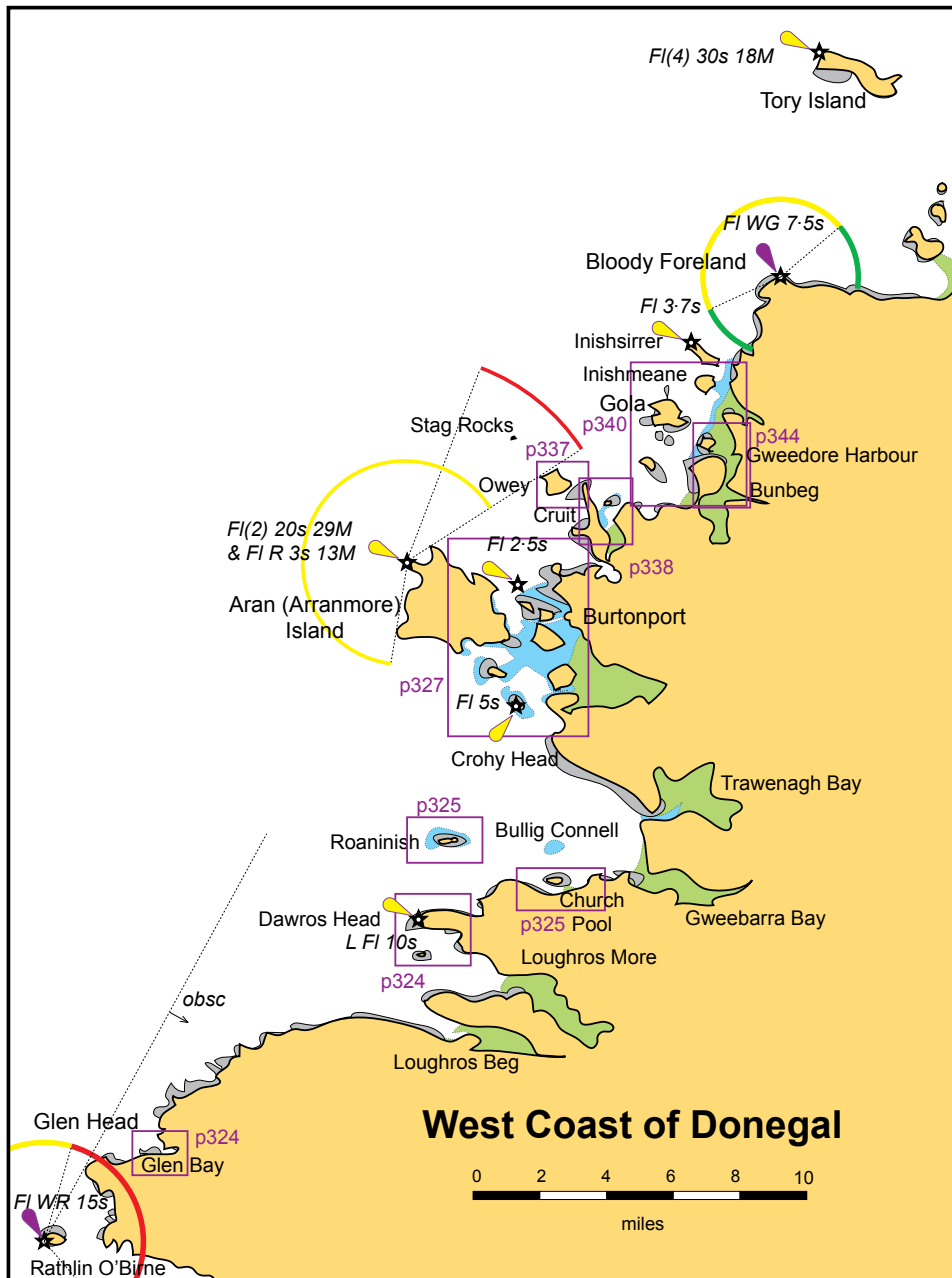
*This coast is described on pages 146 to 155 of **Cruising Ireland***

The west coast of Donegal is breathtakingly scenic. With its necklace of offshore islands, it has, as one marine writer recently put it, “an edge-of-the-world feel”. Its cliffs and bays have been moulded by exposure to the full force of Atlantic weather – “strongest in the north west” is one of the most frequent phrases heard on the Irish sea area forecasts.

Towering cliffs extend northeast from Glen Head, and are broken by a pair of sandy inlets, Loughros More and Beg, which have dangerous sandbars. To the north is a broken, rock-strewn coast with many excellent natural harbours. This is the Rosses, a granite coast reminiscent of north Brittany or parts of Scandinavia, with golden beaches and pink rocks with deep water alongside. Arranmore has Ireland’s second-largest island community, and shelters an archipelago of smaller islands to the east. A herring fishery

was founded here in 1784, and docks, houses and boatyards were built on Edernish, Inishcoo and the large island to the south, Inis Mhic an Doirn, which was renamed Rutland in honour of the Duke of Rutland, who was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland at the time. The enterprise was short-lived, but fascinating relics are still to be found, including many of the old buildings, some recently renovated. On the mainland, Burtonport nestles among the boulders; its deep-water pier shelters a fine little harbour.

To the north is a string of islands of which only one, Cruit, is bridged to the shore and has year-round residents, but Owey, Gola and Inishmeane are all occupied in summer. The people of Gola left their homes and school for the mainland in 1967, but they never lost touch with the island, and some have led a programme which has restored many of the old houses, brought a power cable from the



Tides – West Coast of Donegal

On the coast between Glen Head and Bloody Foreland HW occurs between +0040 and +0100 Galway. Spring tides rise about 3.8m and neaps about 2.9m above LAT. The tide outside the islands turns S at +0300 Galway and N at -0300 Galway with a rate of 0.8 to 1 kn. Inshore it turns 1 to 2 hours earlier, and so is in effect running S during the ebb by the shore and N during the flood. Near the salient points the rate reaches 1.5 to 2 kn at springs.

Constant (Burtonport) +0050 Galway; MHWS 3.9m, MHWN 2.9m, MLWN 1.5m, MLWS 0.5m.

Paper Charts

AC2725 Blacksod Bay to Tory Island covers west Donegal, but the medium-scale charts 1879 and 1883 are essential. The large-scale AC2792 is also essential if spending time exploring the Sound of Aran and Burtonport. The Imray chart C53 Donegal Bay to Rathlin Island may be worth carrying but is no substitute for the Admiralty charts.

mainland, and built a tearoom and campsite. The granite coast continues to Ireland's north west corner, which is not as savage as it sounds but took its name from the glorious pink hue which the sunset lends to the rocks. This is a Gaeltacht area; the spoken Irish of west Donegal, and particularly of the islands, is closely akin to the Scots Gaelic of Islay, and the two are quite mutually intelligible.

RATHLIN O'BIRNE SOUND to CROHY HEAD

AC1879
NE from Glen Head there are spectacular cliffs and stacks. The coast is most impressive, but foul up to 5 cables offshore. The only

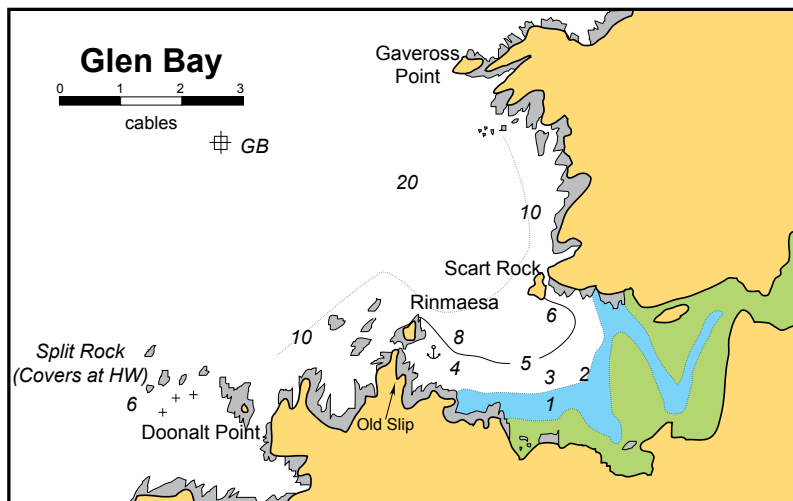
Dangers - Rathlin O'Birne Sound to Crohy Head

The coast from Glen Head to Loughros Beg Bay has many rocks within 5 cables of the cliffs. The principal offshore dangers between Loughros Beg and Crohy Head are **Meadal Rock**, dries 3.9m, in Loughros Beg Bay **Bullig Connell**, 0.3m, 8 cables N of Inishkeel **Free Ground Breaker**, 1.5m, **Wee Bullig**, 1.5m, and **Middle Bullig**, 2.4m, within 1.4M NE of Roaninish

Lights and Marks

Dawros Head, square white tower L Fl 10s 39m 4M
Dawros Bay, Idg lts 2xOc 6s (synchronised) 🚨
Dawros Bay beacon, PHM Fl R 5s 3m 3M

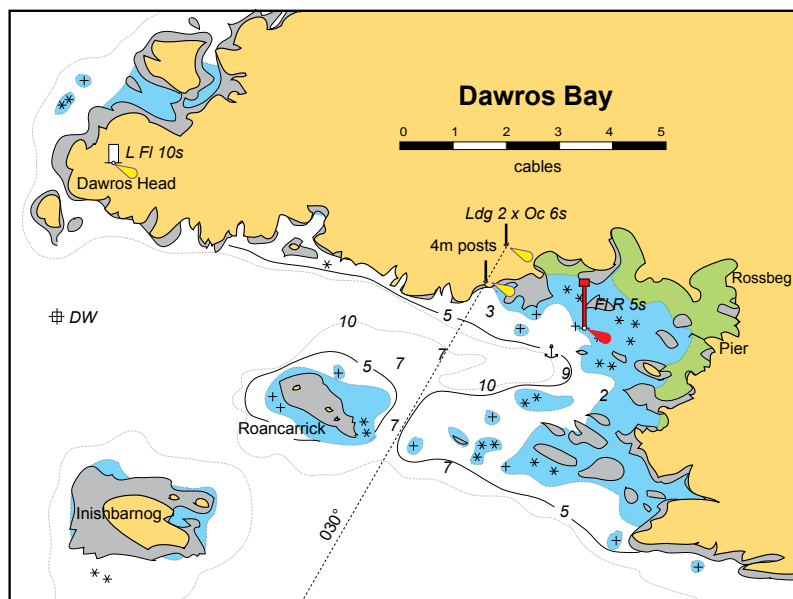
Glen Bay, Dawros Bay and Boyleagh Bay



The anchorage E of Rinmaesa Point in Glen Bay



The inconspicuous leading beacons in Dawros Bay



feasible overnight anchorage on this stretch of coast is Church Pool, while in heavy weather the nearest safe anchorage is Aran Road, entered from the N after going west-about Arranmore Island, 28M from Rathlin O'Birne. Loughros More and Beag, and Gweebarra and Trawenagh Bays, to the E, have dangerous bars and are not navigable.

Glen Bay

GB 54°43'·0N 8°45'·8W

AC1879 and Plan

Glen Bay provides temporary anchorage in winds from NE through SE to S. Anchor close to Rinmaesa Point in 7m, sand. The bay is unsafe in winds between SW and N or a swell from the W. Shops, pubs and restaurants at Glencolumbkille, 2 km.

Dawros Bay (Rosbeg)

DW 54°49'·2N 8°33'·9W

AC1879 and Plan

Dawros Bay provides temporary anchorage in calm sea conditions with N or E winds. The bay is best entered from the W; the approach from the S is on the line of the leading beacons, 030°. These are difficult to pick out by day. The pier dries at LW and is inaccessible without local knowledge. Anchor in 4m, close SW of the port-hand perch. Hotel and PO; small shop at Rosbeg village, 800m SE.

Boyleagh Bay

54°51'·5N 8°30'·2W

AC1879, 2792

There is a string of shoals and rocks stretching into the bay from **Bullig More**, 11m, 4M NW of Dunmore Head. These should all be avoided though some of them are dangerous only in a big sea or swell. **Roaninish**, 4-6m high, is clean on its S side but has reefs extending up to 7 cables N and W. Landing on Roaninish is possible at the gut N of the

Caution

As of 2011, GPS chartplotters cannot be implicitly relied upon in the close approaches to Dawros Bay due to the limited horizontal accuracy of the charts. It is particularly essential to maintain good traditional pilotage with continuous use of the echo sounder.



Dawros Bay from the SE; Rosbeg Point centre L, Dawros Head and Roancarrick top L

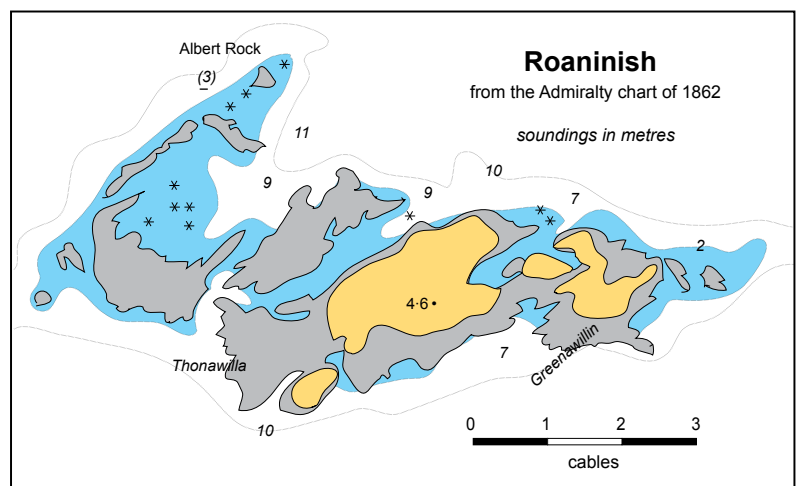
W end of the island; the bottom all along the N side is foul, and there is no anchorage. The innermost danger in Boylagh Bay is **Bullig Connell**, 0.3m, 8 cables N of Inishkeel. The flood tide sets strongly into Boylagh Bay.

Approach

From the S, give Dawros Head a berth of 3 cables and stay within 5 cables of Dunmore Head and Inishkeel, to avoid the rocks close NW of Dawros Head and Dawros Island, and the shoals in Boylagh Bay to the north. The approach from the N has no good leading lines. From Crohy Head, steer 160° towards the rocky shore at Carrickfadda, E of Church Pool, with Illancrone beacon astern, so as to pass well E of Bullig Connell; the chart shows clearance marks to pass E or W of this rock.

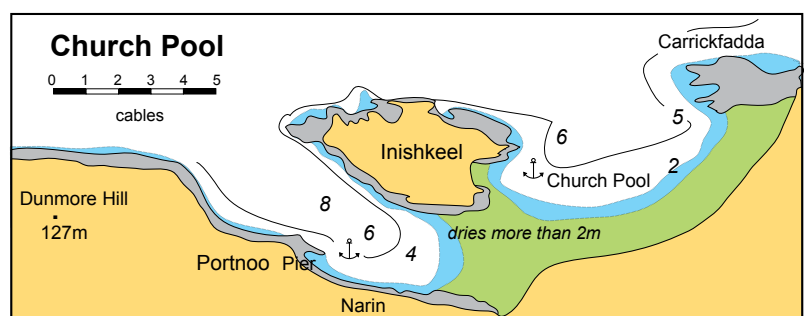
Anchorage

- Church Pool, E of Inishkeel, offers excellent shelter in winds from SE through SW to WNW, and good holding in about 3m, sand. There are visitors' moorings. This is the first good anchorage N of Glen Head.
- Portnoo, SW of Inishkeel, is more exposed to swell than Church Pool. However it provides better shelter in NE wind and in really calm conditions it is a pleasant place to stay overnight. Anchor 0.75 cable E of the end of the pier in more than 2m, or further out in less than 5m.



Hotel, shops, PO at Narin, beside the bay.

The Gweebarra River, in the SE corner of Boylagh Bay, is not navigable, has a dangerous and very shallow bar and should be avoided. The entrance to Trawenagh Bay, to the NE, is not safely navigable. The bay largely dries.



CROHY HEAD to BLOODY FORELAND

AC1883, 2792, *Imray* C53

The coast from Illancrone, 2M S of Arranmore, to Bloody Foreland is sheltered by a string of islands. The largest and most populous of these is Arranmore (Aran on the charts, and often also spelt Aranmore). The islands sheltering Burtonport have summer residents, and others, including Owey, Gola and Inishmeane, are seasonally occupied. The coast has a number of excellent anchorages and harbours amid beautiful scenery, with some splendid sandy beaches, and is a most attractive cruising ground. The islands give a useful amount of shelter for coastwise passages, and the pilotage, while interesting and challenging, is not unduly difficult. Despite the age of some of the survey data the depths shown on the charts are still remarkably accurate.

Lights and Marks *Arranmore and Aran Sound*

Aranmore (Rinrawros Point), 23m white tower Fl(2) 20s 71m 29M, AIS. Auxiliary light Fl R 3s 61m 13M, vis 203°–234°. The red light shows NW of Owey and over the Stag Rocks.

S Approaches to Aran Road (all 📖 pp329-332):

Wyon Point, white tower Fl(2) WRG 10s 8m W6M R3M; vis G shore–021°, W021°–042°, R042°–121°, W121°–150°, R150°–shore. Shows white over the approach from SW, green inshore to the S and SE, red over Illancrone and Middle Sound, white to the NW and over Inishkeeragh, and red over Turk Rocks, Aileen Reef and the South Sound of Aran to the N

Illancrone, white tower Fl 5s 7m 6M.

Turk Rocks, green tower Fl G 5s 6m 2M.

The Clutch buoy, PHM QR, 5 cables NW of Turk Rocks

Aileen Reef, red tower QR 6m 1M.

Carrickbealatroha Upper, white tower Fl 5s 3m 2M.

Lackmorris, stayed perch Isolated Danger mark, unlit.

Carrickbealatroha Lower, stayed perch W Card, unlit.

Black Rocks, red tower Fl R 3s 3m 1M.

N Approaches to Aran Road (both 📖 p332):

Ballagh Rocks, 10m conical beacon, white with black band, Fl 2·5s 13m 5M

Aran leading lights Oc 8s 3M 186° from bns, black with white band, S of Charley's Point. Front 8m, rear 17m

Channels S of Arranmore (all 📖 p329-330):

Chapel Sound (Cloghcor) leading lights Iso 8s 2M 048·5° from black and white banded bns NE of Chapel Bay

Rossillion Bay (Aphort) leading lights Oc 4s 308·4° from black and white banded bns N of Rannagh Pt.

Leac na bhFear, white tower Q(2) 5s 4m 2M, 2 cables W of Aileen Reef beacon.

Aphort, unlit beacon 1·5 cables NW of Leac na bhFear beacon.

Offlying dangers – passage W of the islands

Leenon More, 2M W of Inishkeeragh, has 8m at LAT but breaks with a heavy swell. The **Stag Rocks**, 1·25M NW of Owey, consist of three rocks 9m high and one, SW of these, which dries 1·2m. **Bullogconnell Shoals**, locally called **the Blowers**, are 1M NW of Gola and are the most dangerous. A small portion of the N shoal dries 1·4m and the middle and S shoals have depths of 2m and 3m. They break heavily and should be given a wide berth. Keeping Bloody Foreland closed behind Inishsirr, 045°, leads between them and Gola, and also NW of **Rinogy Rock** N of Gola. To pass outside the shoals keep Cluidaniller, the summit of Arranmore Island, open W of Owey. At night the secondary light on Aranmore lighthouse (Fl R 3s, vis 203°–234°) shows over all these dangers, and they may be avoided by staying W of the arc of visibility of this light.

In gales from SW through W to NW the whole coast is subject to very heavy swell and the sea state can be high, confused and dangerous, especially close W of the islands and salient points. If making the passage around the coast in such conditions it is prudent to stand several miles out to sea.

Dangers - Approaches to Aran Sound

The rocks E and S of Arranmore are too numerous to list but are referred to in the text. The principal dangers in the approaches are

Southern approach, S of Wyon Point:

Bullig-na-naght, 3m, 1·5M W of Crohy Head

Leenon-rua, dries 0·9m, 5 cables NW of Crohy Head

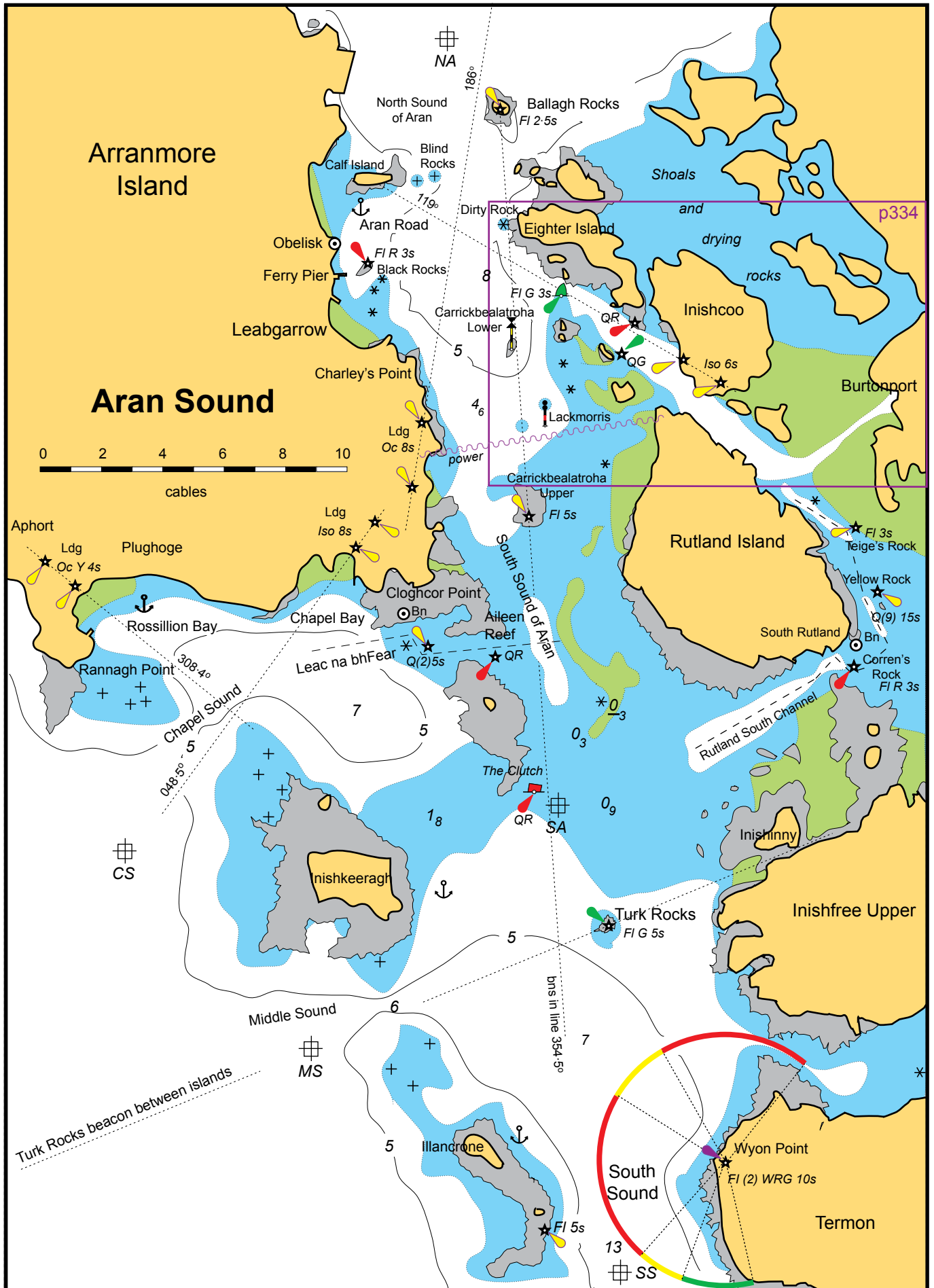
Carrickgilreavy, dries 2·7m, 5 cables S of Illancrone

Northern approach, N of Calf and Eighter islands:

Rinnagy, dries 2·4m, 1M N of Eighter

Bullignamirra, dries 3·7m, 7 cables N of Eighter

Blind Rocks, 0·9m, 2 cables ENE of Calf Island



Approaches to Aran Sound from the S; South Sound, foreground; Illancrone and its offlying reefs centre L, Middle Sound, Inishkeeragh, Chapel Sound and Arranmore top L, Crohy Head bottom R, Wyon Point centre R, Inishfree Upper and Rutland top R, Owey in the distance.



ARRANMORE ISLAND and SOUND

The west side of Arranmore has some very fine cliff scenery. In the Sound and between the islands within it there is a wide choice of anchorages. The North Sound of Aran has good depth and provides the safest access to Aran Road and Burtonport. The South Sound of Aran has a least depth of only 0.3m and

many rocks; it should be attempted only in daylight with an adequate rise of tide, but in moderate weather it is straightforward. There are many beacons and leading marks inside Arranmore, most of them with lights, but visiting yachts unfamiliar with the area should not attempt to use the minor channels after dark.

Approaches to the South Sound of Aran

54°55'·4N 8°29'W

AC1883, 2792, Imray C53 and Plan

Between Crohy Head (on the mainland) and Rannagh Point (the S point of Arranmore Island) are three channels: Chapel Sound, Middle Sound and South Sound.

South Sound

⊕SS 54°56·1'N 8°28'W

From the SW, identify Crohy Head and the beacon on Wyon Point. Approach with Roaninish astern and Wyon Point beacon

Place Names

Nomenclature can be a little confusing on this coast. Distinguish between **South Sound**, which is the channel between Illancrone and Wyon Point, and the **South Sound of Aran**, the shallower and rock-strewn channel between Cloghcor Point and Rutland Island. The general term **Aran Sound** is here used to describe the entire passage between Arranmore Island and the mainland. Distinguish also between **Bullig Connell** in Boylagh Bay and **Bullogconnell Shoals** NW of Gola, and between **Rinogy Rock**, N of Gola, and **Rinnagy Rock**, N of Aran Sound (note also that on AC2792, Rinnagy Rock is spelt Rinnogy). The major island is here referred to as **Arranmore**, which is the locally favoured name and spelling, used by the lifeboat station. However the Commissioners of Irish Lights use the spelling **Aranmore** for the lighthouse.

bearing 032°; this leads clear E of **Bulligna-naght** and **Carrickgilreavy** and W of **Leenon-rua**. Carrickgilreavy is often marked by breakers, and **Meadalmore**, the S extremity of Illancrone, covers only at very high spring tides. When Illancrone beacon is abeam, turn N, leaving the beacon 3 cables to port. Identify Turk Rocks beacon, one mile N, and steer to pass 2 cables W of it. The transit of Carrickbealatroha Upper and Ballagh Rocks beacons, 354°, leads clear W of Turk Rocks.

Note that these directions lead over Middle Shoals, with a least depth of 5.5m, and which break in heavy weather or a high swell. However in such conditions a yacht should not in any case attempt the approach to Aran Sound from the S, but should proceed outside Arranmore Island.

Middle Sound

⊕MS 54°56.9'N 8°30'W

Middle Sound is scarcely more than a cable wide between underwater rocks extending from the islands on each side. It is navigable only in settled conditions, and from seaward only with judicious use of GPS. For a vessel bound S out of Aran Sound it may provide an attractive option: the leading line is Turk Rocks beacon astern in line between Inishfree Upper and Inishinny (and in line with the peak of Errigal). The beacon 069° in line with the S end of Inishinny gives a least depth of 5m but leads close S of a 0.6m rock; the beacon 066° in line with the W point of Inishinny gives a least depth of 3m but a slightly greater margin for error on each side. It is essential to establish the identity and continued visibility of the leading marks before commencing the passage: from a distance the low islands merge into each other.

Chapel Sound

⊕CS 54°57.7'N 8°31.2'W

Chapel Sound is 1.5 cables wide between dangerous rocks and has a shoal with 2.4m at its SW end. The leading beacons NE of Chapel Bay lead through it, but for the stranger, it is to be approached from seaward only in clear visibility and with judicious use of GPS. When the Aphort beacons line up 308° it is safe to turn into Rossillion Bay.

Outward bound, the leading marks must be clearly identified to begin with, and must remain visible.



Wyon Point beacon from the W; Mount Errigal, R



Illancrone from the E



Turk Rocks beacon from the SW; the wind turbine at Burtonport, L



Carrickbealatroha Upper beacon (R) in line with Ballagh Rocks beacon (centre R) leads W of Turk Rocks and through the South Sound of Aran. Carrickbealatroha Lower beacon, L



(left) Turk Rocks beacon between Inishfree Upper and Inishinny and in line with Errigal leads through Middle Sound.



(below) Chapel Sound leading beacons 048° (centre)



Aphort leading beacons in line lead 308° clear NE of Black Rocks, SW of Rannagh Point



Charley's Point beacons, from the E: the N one (above) and the S one (below)



Aileen beacon, from the E



Passage west to east, Chapel Bay to the South Sound of Aran; Leac na bhFear beacon, R, Aileen beacon, centre L. Transiting W to E, the fishing boat has left Leac na bhFear to **port**, is borrowing to the N to find the deepest water, and will leave Aileen beacon close to **starboard**.



Aphort beacon (R), from the S

Anchorage south of Arranmore

- 1.5 cables NE of Illancrone in 3m, sand.
- Between 1.5 and 2.5 cables E of Inishkeeragh in 2.5 to 3.5m, sand.
- Rossillion Bay (Aphort, 54°58'·3N 8°30'·8W) is sheltered from winds between W and NE and may be reached by crossing the shoal between Inishkeeragh and the Clutch in a least depth of 1.8m keeping Turk Rocks beacon bearing 128°. Anchor in 2m, sand, clear of the moorings in the bay. The pier immediately N of Rannagh Point has 1m alongside and room for a 10m yacht to tie up for a short visit. Pub at Plughoge, 400m.
- Chapel Bay (54°58'·3N 8°29'·7W) is well sheltered from winds between NW and NE. Anchor one third of a cable S of the 2m-high rock in 4.3m, or SW of this position in 2.7m. Small pier.

All these anchorages are somewhat exposed to swell.

South Sound of Aran

⊕ SA 54°57'·7N 8°28'·4W
AC2792

The South Sound of Aran, N of Turk Rocks, is navigable by a yacht only above half tide and in reasonably settled weather. Leaving Turk Rocks beacon not less than 1 cable to starboard, bring Carrickbealatroha Upper beacon in line with Ballagh Rocks beacon 354° to leave Clutch buoy to port, and Aileen beacon 1.5 cables to port. Keep on this line until Cloghcor Point, the SE corner of Arranmore Island, comes abeam, then steer 325° for the more N'ly of the two leading beacons on the Arranmore shore S of Charley's Point. When the S leading beacon comes abeam, turn to starboard and head N, giving Charley's Point a berth of two cables to avoid the rocks off it. Note that Carrickbealatroha Upper rocks extend 1.5 cables N and NW of their beacon.

Caution

Note that (unusually) the navigable channel lies between Aileen Reef (to the N) and the Aileen Reef port-hand beacon. There is foul ground S and E of the beacon.



Arranmore lifeboat heading W from Aileen Reef towards Chapel Sound. The lifeboat has left Aileen Reef beacon (bottom R) close to port and is heading for Leac na bhFear beacon (centre). Aphort beacon is just visible above and to the right of Leac na bhFear. Rossillion Bay (Aphort) top L

South Sound of Aran to Chapel Bay

54°58'·2N 8°28'·6W see photos above and opposite

The sound SW of Aileen Reef and W of Aileen Reef beacon is a useful short cut. Heading W, approach Aileen Reef beacon steering 260° and leave it close to port. Borrow a little to the N between there and Leac na bhFear beacon, then leave Leac na bhFear beacon close to starboard, and head towards Aphort beacon. When 50m from Aphort beacon, turn on to a course of 250°, with the Burtonport wind turbine directly astern, until Chapel Bay opens up. The photograph above shows the lifeboat using this channel.

Caution

As of 2011 GPS chart plotters cannot be implicitly relied upon in narrow channels around Aran Sound and Burtonport due to the limited horizontal accuracy of the charts. Where precision of half a cable or better is required it is particularly essential to maintain good visual pilotage with continuous use of the echo sounder.

NORTH SOUND of ARAN

⊕NA 55°00'·2N 8°29'·1W

AC1883, 2792 and Plan

This is the normal approach to Aran Road and Burtonport. It is safe in almost any weather, the exception being NW gales; a prolonged NW winter gale can cause the entrance to break right across.

Directions - North Sound to Aran Road anchorage

The entrance is marked by the 9m high **Ballagh Rocks** beacon, a dominating feature of the Sound, which should be approached from due N so as to leave **Rinnagy** and **Bullignamirra** well to port. There are two alternative leading lines. **Lackmorris** perch a little to the left of **Carrickbealatroha Lower** beacon 161° leads W of **Leenane na Mallagh**, a 5·5m patch which breaks in heavy weather. The leading beacons on the Arranmore shore S of Charley's Point in line 186° lead over Leenane na Mallagh. Both lines lead close E of **Blind Rocks** (0·9m), E of Calf Island.

Approaching from the N: once past Ballagh