

Atlantic Coast (Wester Ross) Project

Topic Paper:

Shore access and marine traffic

1. Introduction

With ferry traffic to the Western Isles, inshore and offshore fishing fleets landing their catches, tour boats and recreational boat use, the project area sees quite a considerable volume of marine traffic. The majority of the traffic moves in and out of Ullapool, the largest and most developed harbour in the project area and one of the better sites for sheltered mooring. In addition, there is a smaller harbour at Old Dornie, and a number of public jetties, piers and slipways around the project area.

This paper makes an appraisal of the facilities for accessing the coast and marine area and the key issues arising. It is one of a series of topic papers which have been prepared to help inform the future use and development of the coast and inshore waters of Loch Broom, Little Loch Broom, the Summer Isles and Gruinard Bay. It represents the results of basic survey and evaluation work and should not be regarded as a policy document. It is however intended to help in the formulation of policy and to promote discussion. The Atlantic Coast project aims to develop and test an integrated coastal zone plan for this area which can help in the evaluation of development proposals, guide investment, and minimise conflicts of interest. It aims to promote a balanced approach: one that can safeguard the area's core natural assets and sustain or enhance its productivity over the longer term.

2. Historical background

Ullapool harbour was built in 1788 when the village was established by the British Fisheries Society. The pier was doubled in size after the Second World War, when new technologies and larger boats brought in huge herring catches. These were unloaded at the pier onto waiting lorries and transported away for processing. The harbour was extended again in the 1970s and an ice plant was built to service the klondyker factory ships which bought, processed and exported herring and mackerel.

The historical importance of the sea both as a source of food and as a means of transport can be seen in the many small piers, jetties and slipways around the area. The older examples are stone-built and were constructed to serve a number of different purposes. These were to provide access for the small 'puffers' that delivered goods along the west coast (a good example is the pier at Leckmelm on Loch Broom), to service herring fishing stations (for example the old jetty on Tanera Mor), or for salmon netting stations (such as the jetty at Laide). Many of

these older access points are now in a very poor state of repair, while others have been capped with concrete or upgraded in some way.

In more recent years, commercial fishing vessels have tended to use a smaller number of access points, mainly Ullapool and Old Dornie, and the use of the other sites has decreased as goods are now less frequently transported by sea, and the netting stations have closed down. However, there has been a growth in marine-based tourism over the past few decades, with local and visiting yachts, kayaks, sea anglers, divers and cruise boats all requiring shore access. There has also been the development of fish farming in the area requiring shore access points to service the farms.

3. Current situation

3.1. Marine traffic

Marine traffic within the project area consists mainly of local fishing boats and boats from further afield landing their catches to Ullapool, the Stornoway ferry, visiting and locally-owned yachts, dinghies and kayaks, cruise boats, dive boats, fish farm boats, and transport to and from the communities on Tanera Mor and Scoraig. The MOD also uses parts of the area for military exercises occasionally. Traffic within Loch Broom and the area between Annat Bay and Loch Kanaird is under the jurisdiction of the Ullapool Harbour Master.

Much of the area requires good navigational skills, in particular the area around the Summer Isles which has numerous rocky reefs and strong tidal currents between the islands.

3.2. Ullapool Harbour

Ullapool harbour is the main harbour in the project area, serving the west coast of the mainland between Gairloch and Lochinver, and acting as a landing port for fishing vessels operating in the Minch and out towards the edge of the continental shelf. It is also the port for the main Caledonian MacBrayne ferry service to Stornoway. Cruise boats operate out of Ullapool in the summer, and the village's sheltered location and access to services make it a popular stop-over for touring yachts and cruise ships during the tourist season.

The harbour is owned and operated by the Ullapool Harbour Trust, and this organisation has jurisdiction over marine traffic throughout Loch Broom, Annat Bay and Loch Kanaird. The harbour has an ice factory which is an important facility for larger fishing boats.

There are no pontoons in Ullapool Harbour for visiting yachts, and there is often no space for yachts to tie up alongside the pier. No public moorings are available. Water and diesel are available.

3.3 Piers, jetties and slipways

There are a number of access points to the sea around the project area, used for inshore fisheries or recreational access. These are in varying states of repair, with some recently upgraded while others are in need of maintenance and some require considerable renovation.

These access points are important both for local people and for visitors to the area, which is increasingly popular for sailing, kayaking and other water sports.

3.3.1. Old Dornie

The harbour at Old Dornie has both a slipway and a jetty. Both slipway and jetty are owned by the Highland Council, and are open to the public. They are used by local fishermen, local boat-owners, dive boats, and tourists. The slipway is not useable during lower tides, and cannot be extended because it would block access to the inner harbour. However, it was repaired several years ago and is in good condition. A fuel tank was recently installed, enabling boats to refuel locally.

3.3.2. Badentarbat

Badentarbat Pier belongs to Highland Council, and is used by residents of the Summer Isles, fish farm boats, the local cruise boat, dive boats and sometimes pleasure boats. It is also used by fishermen for taking gear ashore for repair and maintenance and is a popular venue for local and visiting sea anglers, both casual and dedicated.

The pier was built over 100 years ago, and was repaired and extended in the 1930s. Today it is severely cracked and eroded in places, and although still useable, is in need of extensive repair or replacement.

The pier is very exposed to southerly, south-westerly and south-easterly gales, but is nevertheless frequently used as it is accessible at all states of the tide which is not the case at Old Dornie.

3.3.3. Ardmair

There are three private access points at Ardmair. The first is an old stone pier which is useable when the tide is high, but it has no stairs or ladders making it difficult to use, and it is in need of some repair.

The second is a landing place on the beach, where it is possible to launch boats. This area has been used in the past by local boat owners and fishermen, as it is a good sheltered site. However, the situation regarding public access to this site is unclear.

The third is a slipway built recently for use by the Isle Martin boat, which is also used by local fishermen through agreement with the Isle Martin Trust. It is sometimes also used by tourists. The situation with regard to public access at this site is somewhat unclear at present as the slipway is privately owned. The Isle Martin Trust is working on a system for charging visitors for use of the slip.

There is a fourth private access point near Ardmair, which is used by the local fish farm to access and service its fish cages.

3.3.4. Am Pollan

Am Pollan slipway is on the seafront in Ullapool village. It is owned by the Highland Council, and is accessible to the general public. It is used frequently by the local yacht club, local and visiting small boats, and dive boats. The Altnaharrie ferry (running between Ullapool and the Altnaharrie Hotel on the far side of Loch Broom) used this slipway until 2003, but these trips have since been discontinued. Launching is possible here although access is difficult and care is required as the slip is very narrow. The slip dries out at low water spring tides.

The slip was built over a century ago. It was encased in concrete in 1960 to form the slipway that can be seen today. It is in poor condition and is gradually eroding and cracking. Repairs are required urgently, and there have been a number of proposals over the years to repair, extend and widen the slip.

There is a current proposal for repair and upgrading, being promoted by, among others, the local sailing club.

3.3.5. Badluarach

Badluarach jetty is owned by the Highland Council. It is used primarily by the residents of Scoraig, and also by visiting boats and divers from time to time.

It is badly cracked and was superficially repaired recently, but requires more long-term repair in the coming years.

3.3.6. Scoraig

Scoraig jetty is owned by Highland Council. It is used by the residents of Scoraig and visiting boats, and is the main entry and exit point to the community. The jetty is in good condition, but it cannot be used at very low tides. There is some concern that the jetties here and in Badluarach are not accessible for disabled members of the community.

3.3.7. Laide

Laide jetty was built in the late 19th century, and is currently owned and managed by the Highland Council. It provides the only public access to the sea in Gruinard Bay. At present, local boats moor at the jetty in the summer for sea angling and leisure use, and as many as twenty other local boats use the facility from time to time. An estimated 80-100 boats belonging to visitors are launched at the jetty each year.

The jetty is currently in a poor state of repair and cannot be used at low tide. The original structure was built of stone, and it has since been in-filled and covered with concrete. It is undermined in places and major repairs are needed. In addition, the existing jetty is rather narrow for present-day requirements and lacks a suitable turning area.

A local group (the Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action Forum) have proposed that the jetty be widened and that a turning place should be established at the head of the jetty. They have discussed with the Council the possibility of purchasing the jetty for the community, or arranging a long lease. There is some uncertainty over securing funds to cover future maintenance and management costs should the project go ahead.

3.3.7. Others

There are several other access points in the project area, but these are on private land and are generally in poor condition. However, a number of these are interesting from a historical viewpoint and efforts to preserve them would be very worthwhile.

3.4. Moorings

Within the project area, there are moorings at Ullapool, Loggie, Leckmelm, Ardmail, Old Dornie, Tanera Mor, Camusnagaul and Laide. There are no moorings associations locally, and each individual is responsible for his or her own mooring. There are no public moorings available to visitors anywhere in the project area. There is a boat operating locally with the capacity to lay and lift moorings.

The inner, sheltered anchorage at Old Dornie, used by all but the largest of the local boats, is tidal, restricting its use significantly. Over recent years it has also become very congested with boats over the summer months, limiting its attraction as a base for boating tourism

In theory, the Crown Estate collects a rent for the use of the seabed for moorings, but the majority of those in the project area (with the exception of those associated with fish farms) are unofficial. At present there is no individual or organisation with clear responsibility for establishing how many moorings can be laid, where, or by whom. However, the situation is due to change in the coming months as a moorings association is being formed.

4. Value of this sector

Shore access is important for a range of activities in the project area. It is crucial for the local fishing and aquaculture industries to have safe moorings and landing sites, plus areas where boats and equipment can be brought out of the water for maintenance and repairs.

Recreational use of the sea by tourists and locals is on the increase. Sailing is a very popular pastime on the west coast of Scotland, and areas within a few days' sail of ports such as Oban or the Clyde see considerable numbers of yachts every year. Areas further north, such as the project area, are less heavily used by touring yachts, but the number of visitors to the area who bring their own small boats with them is increasing. Good public access points, including places where it is possible to launch small boats, are important to ensure that the area remains a popular tourist destination. Public moorings would also be of value, as would moorings at popular dive sites to prevent damage caused by anchors.

Many of the older piers and jetties in the area are important historically, and should if possible be preserved for their heritage value.

5. Key issues and priorities

This section seeks to identify the core assets, main issues, and current priorities for shore access and marine traffic in the project area.

5.1. Assets

- Ullapool Harbour and Old Dornie harbour have good facilities for local vessels.
- There are a number of unofficial pier users' groups in the project area, as well as other organisations taking an active interest in the management and maintenance of shore access points.
- The Ullapool Seafront Association has recently been formed, and this group aims to upgrade the slipway and facilities at Am Pollan in Ullapool.

5.2. Issues

- There is a shortage of good public access points to the sea around the project area, including sites where it is possible to launch small boats. The project area is increasingly popular for sailing, kayaking and other water-based activities, and public sea-access is important to the tourism industry.
- Many of the existing access points are in a poor state of repair and need considerable investment to restore and maintain them. Funds to repair and maintain access points are very limited.
- There are no public moorings in the project area.
- There is as yet no moorings association with responsibility for managing or controlling moorings in the area.
- Congestion of Old Dornie inner, sheltered anchorage.

- The sinking of the 'Jambo' on the Summer Isles in June 2003 highlighted the risk of ships running aground, and the related pollution concerns.

5.3. Priorities

- Establishment, repair and maintenance of an agreed public access point at which boats can readily be launched, in Loch Broom or Loch Kanaird.
- Upgrading and maintenance of Laide Jetty as a public shore access point in Gruinard Bay.
- Provision of public moorings in appropriate locations.
- Establishment of a local moorings association.

5.4. Interaction with other sectors

- Provision of good harbour and landing facilities is important for the local and visiting fishing fleets as well as ferry and cruise operators.
- Good public access to the sea, with facilities for launching small boats, will be of considerable benefit to the local tourism industry as well as to locals for recreation.

6. Development opportunities

There may be potential to develop a funding proposal to cover upgrading and maintenance of access points at Am Pollan and Laide, and possibly other sites, as was recently achieved for the upgrading of the jetty at Inverasdale on Loch Ewe.

There have been proposals to develop a marina in Ullapool, protected by a breakwater, to provide accommodation and facilities for both visiting and local boats. The facilities could be used by fishing boats as well as pleasure boats, as is the case in Gairloch. Likewise at Old Dornie a sheltered marina/pontoon development would address the combined problems of tidal inaccessibility and congestion of the inner, sheltered anchorage.

See the topic paper on Tourism and Recreation for more details.

7. Conclusions

Marine traffic in the project area has changed in composition over recent years, with the decline of klondyking and a gradual decrease in fishing, and a rise instead in the number of private pleasure boats using the area. The interests of the local fishery still need to be catered for as this remains an important economic activity in the area. Similarly, Ullapool harbour has to provide berthage for the Stornoway ferry and other large boats. Local variability in the composition of the fleet reflects the changing pattern of fishing effort with more creel boats than previously. The needs of recreational users may have to be taken more into account in the coming years, with a focus on the provision of better facilities and improved access, reflecting the significance of tourism to the local economy.

8. Acknowledgements

Much of the information in this paper was taken from a report to the PESCA programme on Shore Access by Dr Robyn Dutton, published in 1998, and 'Marine Facilities in Wester Ross: a feasibility study', also by Dr Dutton, produced in 2000 for Ross and Cromarty Enterprise. The information on Laide jetty was provided by the Laide Jetty Users Association.

9. Comments and additional information

Information in this paper was gathered from published documents, agency records, and local individuals and organisations. If any of the information in the paper appears incorrect, or if there are significant elements missing, please contact the Atlantic Coast Project Officer at the address below:

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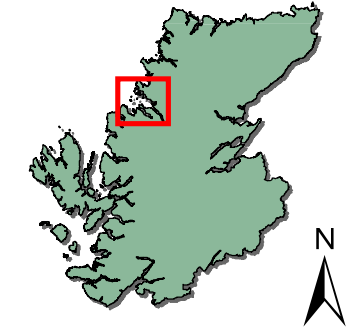
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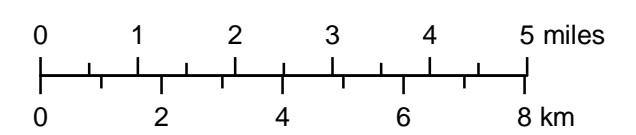
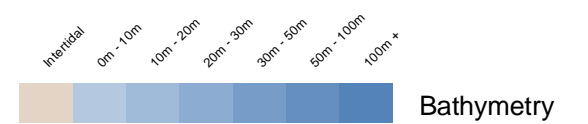
Atlantic Coast (Wester Ross) Project

Marine Traffic



Legend

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|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Topic: Marine Traffic | | Topic: Project Area | |
| | Anchorage | | Project Area Seaward Boundary |
| | Harbour | | |
| | Jetty, Private or Public Access (Council Owned) | | |
| | Pier, Private or Public Access (Council Owned) | | |
| | Slip, Private or Public Access (Council Owned) | | Settlement |
| | Local Cruises | | Main Peak |
| | Local Ferry | | Trunk Road |
| | Ferry Traffic | | A Road |
| | | | B Road |
| | | | Other |



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