

Loch Creran

Last updated 6th January 2024



I'm really not sure if Loch Creran is worth the effort, unless you are desperate for a very classy meal at the Isle of Eriska Hotel. Somehow it is a rather dull loch for visiting boaties, albeit with nice mountains at the far end (but guarded by the road bridge) heading up towards Glencoe, and lovely woods too. The

roads down each side are obtrusive, and so are the houses. It is generally too populated for my taste. Anyway, anchoring in the loch is very restricted because it is now a Marine Special Area of Conservation. There are bedrock and biogenic reefs, the latter made from the tube-worm *Serpula vermicularis* (known as serpulid reefs) and the horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* (known as horse mussel beds) which can be all too easily damaged by anchors. Maybe boaties should leave the place to the worms and visit by road.

Barcaldine

Creran Marine (ph 01631 720308) has visitor moorings and boat services¹ but there seems little to attract one ashore. It all seems a bit 'industrial' these days.

Creagan

There seems to be nowhere to walk here except along the busy road — hopeless. And the traffic is noisy. This must be more for Mr Toad than Ratty (if you have not read *Wind in the Willows*, you are not a genuine boatie). But there is the pub to repair to. In 2008 the old 18th century Creagan Inn² was completely taken to bits and rebuilt in a rather unattractive style, with a huge deck jutting out into the loch (ph 01631 730250). Architectural vandalism I'm afraid. The restaurant and bar were over-large and soulless. Not surprisingly it closed down in 2010. However, it was then sold and reopened under much more promising new ownership in 2011 — to Allan and Liz Crichton. Since then it has gone through more than one change of ownership. I have not been there recently enough to know how things now stand. It only

¹ <https://creranmarine.co.uk/>

² <https://www.creaganinn.co.uk/>

seems to be open from Wednesday through Sunday, so check before you go. Covid has hit these sort of places very hard.

Glaceriska bay

A pleasant enough bay, attractive deciduous woods to wander around in, but that is almost it. However, you could walk along the small road through the woods to Port Appin and the attractions there, about 30 minutes max (see Lower Loch Linnhe). And en route, at the top of the hill in about 15 minutes, there is actually something rather good to look at — Druimneil House³. This is a calm and lovely 1850 country house. You can't go inside but the extensive gardens are free to enter and wander round. They are mostly woodland with shrubs, there is a lovely pond with dragonflies and a boy hanging on to a dolphin, and a walled garden too with plants for sale. The 25+ year restoration is still ongoing so not all of the beds are planted. And my espaliered apple trees are better pruned than theirs, although I am just an amateur! But, thank you so much Mrs Glaisher for letting us in, as ever shame on others around here who have closed their gardens to the public. So go there and donate to the upkeep of the gardens which must cost a bomb, best in the spring and early summer. And stay there too if you want a night ashore in a luxury guest house

Isle of Eriska

Not in the Sailing Directions, but there are moorings and a pontoon just after the entrance to the loch on the south side (watch out for the wash from work-boats going far too fast). The moorings belong to the very upmarket five-star Isle of Eriska Hotel (Spa and Island) sitting on its own private island of Eriska, connected to the mainland by a 1900 bridge⁴. Built in 1884 to a design by Hippolyte Blanc (what a marvellous name!), it was owned by the Buchanan-Smith family since 1973, who improved it bit by bit. In 2017 the whole place was sold to a Chinese family for a reported £2.2 million — they didn't aim to change the ethos, but were planning to do some renovations.

The website provides how-to-arrive instructions for helicopters, so you get the style. Very exclusive. However, do not be alarmed, boaties are welcome and ties are not needed for dinner in the hotel (one Michelin star, lost it in 2017, regained in 2019, currently lost again). So pretty classy food for sure at £75 for a three-course dinner, and an extensive wine list (01631 720371). The style is Baronial country house — the building, not the food. This really is a classic hideaway place, completely cut-off from everywhere by trees, so no views from your dinner table, except of the tiny putting green.

The walk around the island is brief and charming. Loads of wild flowers, and lovely trees with birdsong. Note the six-hole golf course which can be used — for a fee — by anyone, not just the residents. The 7th to 9th holes were out of action when I was last there, sunk in a bog — maybe the whole golf course is too, it is not mentioned on the hotel website. Check out the leisure centre which again can be used by non-residents and where you will find the Deck Restaurant, a much less formal place than the main hotel, and with a nice view, last orders at 1900, ideal for families with children, and for morning coffee.

³ <https://www.appinaccommodation.co.uk/gardens.html>

⁴ <https://www.eriska-hotel.co.uk/>

South Shian

This is the bay on the east side of Eriska, an anchorage dominated by boats on private moorings, and not all that interesting. There is a small slipway in the southeast corner just by the islets where you can land although it may be part of someone's garden (the house was an old inn, built in the mid 19th century). Then there is a walk of about a mile up a very quiet road (turn left at the cross roads) to have a look at a spectacularly perfect late 19th century restoration of the early 17th century Barcaldine Castle, a classical L-shaped tower house⁵. This was described in the Black Book of Taymouth, 1855, as 'ane greit hows in Benderloch in Lorne of four hows heicht'. It is privately owned and does up-market bed and breakfast (up to a minimum of £294 per night) which must be fun as well a costly (ph 01631 720598).

⁵ <https://www.barcaldinecastle.co.uk/>