

Loch Craignish

Last updated March 1st 2022



Loch Craignish is tremendously attractive in a low-key sort of way — no mountains or beaches, just knobbly hills, islands and water. There must be many more than just the 'official' anchorages to explore with walks ashore, all within easy striking distance of the pub, marina and shop at Ardfern — ideal for family cruising. As Cowper put it: *"The loch is worth exploring for all the strange nooks it possesses, and the very beautiful scenery"*¹. If the scenery looks a bit familiar to film buffs, then you are right, the boat chase in 'From Russia with Love' was filmed here (as a substitute for Turkey!)². For detail about the area take a look at the Craignish website³.

Ardfern

Ardfern⁴ has been our boat's winter home for many years so I cannot escape a personal bias for such a nice place. The marina⁵ is sheltered (ph 01852 500247), the chandlery is the best in the area, the staff are exceptionally friendly and will fix all the broken bits, it is a good place to

¹ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today. His obituarist in *Yachting Monthly* wrote in 1930: *"From his earliest days Mr. Cowper took cruising to heart and probably did more to popularize this particular way of life than any man of his day. It is almost inconceivable to us now the prejudice which then existed in the public mind against the man who did not employ hands aboard his yacht. But it was through this veteran singlehanded sailor's adventures and writings that the public began to recognize small yacht cruising as a sane man's pastime"*.

² <http://www.scotlandthemovie.com/movies/russiac1.html>

³ <https://www.craignish.info/>

⁴ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/ardfern/ardfern/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.ardfernyacht.co.uk/index.asp>

leave a boat for a bit, and the countryside around is Argyll at its knobbly best. Of course it is quite a way up Loch Craignish and not a place to escape from people in the height of summer, but there are compensations as well as the marina facilities: the pub, Lucy's café, the shop, and the walks.

Out of the marina to the left you get to an extremely well-stocked shop in a couple of minutes. You can pre-order your provisions if you give them a bit of warning (ph 01852 500298). In another few minutes you get to the Galley of Lorne,⁶ a hotel and pub which has a cosy bar with open fires, and meals (by no means cheap). You can choose from the same menu in the rather large and wide-open restaurant (the view is good if you get a table by the window). A big plus is that they pride themselves in always having several real ales, and they really do, as well as the stuff that froths and bubbles out of taps (ph 01852 500284). Lucy's café⁷, opposite the pub, opened in the middle of the 2020 pandemic, is now getting going, with very good reports. Wholesome food, delicious cakes, closed in the evenings (ph 01852 500781). Just past the Galley you will find the early 19th century parish church⁸, a bit dilapidated on the outside with a couple of curious painted walls to give the impression of windows, the inside is plain and serene. The painted woodwork gives a charming sense of airiness.

If you turn right out of the marina you get to the village hall⁹ in about 10 minutes, opened in 2005 after years of fund-raising. It hosts many activities so check their website to see what is on when you are around.

A nice easy walk is to turn right just after the primary school and keep going up the hill and on until eventually you go down a hill and get to Craobh Haven. Then walk back again.

Bàgh na Cille

Just a bay, useful in a westerly wind, but nothing particular ashore despite the name suggesting there might be an old chapel somewhere.

Bàgh Dun Mhuilig

Not an official anchorage, but easy to anchor off the old shed in quiet conditions, but watch out for the seagrass restoration project in the shallow water, fortunately too shallow for anchoring¹⁰. Visible on the hill just up from the anchorage, you will see the old parish church of Kilmarie (or is it Kilmorie?)¹¹. Wander up and take a look both at the view up and down the loch, and at the early 13th century chapel. Some restoration work was done here in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and later still the 14th and 15th century graveslabs were moved into the chapel under a cover at the west end. The chapel was abandoned in the late 17th century when the parishioners went off to worship in Ardfern on the site of the church that was later

⁶ <https://www.galleyoflorne.co.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/lucysardfern/>

⁸ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/ardfern/craignishparishchurch/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.craignish.org.uk/cvh/>

¹⁰ <https://www.seawilding.org/seagrass-project>

¹¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22581/craignish-old-parish-church>

built in the 1730s. This is a nice spot to meditate, indeed I found an elderly biker doing just that one early spring day.

Eilean nan Gabhar (Goat Island)

This is a popular anchorage, not surprisingly as it is so close to Ardfern, but you can get it all to yourself in the spring or autumn. There is nothing much special to do but one can scramble around on the rocks, both on the east side of the island where the anchorage is and rather better just over the rise on the west side with great views up and down Loch Craignish. The undergrowth is rather impenetrable in the summer.

Eilean Macaskin

As well as landing on the island from the Eilean nan Gabhar anchorage, there is a bit of an anchorage off a small wooden house at the northeast corner of the island, but don't venture too far into the wee bay — it's shallow! From here there are pleasant strolls up through woods and bracken to the north-south ridge from which there are great views, particularly from the north end up the loch. Just down the east side of the ridge towards the north end you will find a ruined black house. The crudely built walls are only a couple of feet high but the rounded ends are clearly there, there was a single door into the main house, and another internal door with its lintel leading into the byre. The island was apparently inhabited until the end of the 19th century.

Eilean Rìgh (King's Island)

I have never been very encouraged to land here, somehow it seems a bit too intrusive on the clearly very private owners of this small island, whoever they may be nowadays. Silly really because I imagine they are hardly ever there, flying in and out to their helipad. The island seems to change hands quite often and in 2012 was up for sale for £3 million. Islands do indeed attract many but ultimately satisfy few. The all-black RIBs and motorboats on the pontoon have a rather sinister look about them, hardly encouraging. Another problem with the anchorage is the strange sound emanating from the fish farm when I was last there — seal-scaring I suppose.

Stewart's bay

This small bay more or less opposite Eilean nan Gabhar makes a nice stopover with the wind off the land from the east. Ashore there are fabulous wild flowers in the spring — a carpet of sea pink, meadows full of bluebells. Hidden in the deciduous woodland are old and crumbling stonewalls, so presumably this area was once farmed, although it is a very remote part of Argyll these days