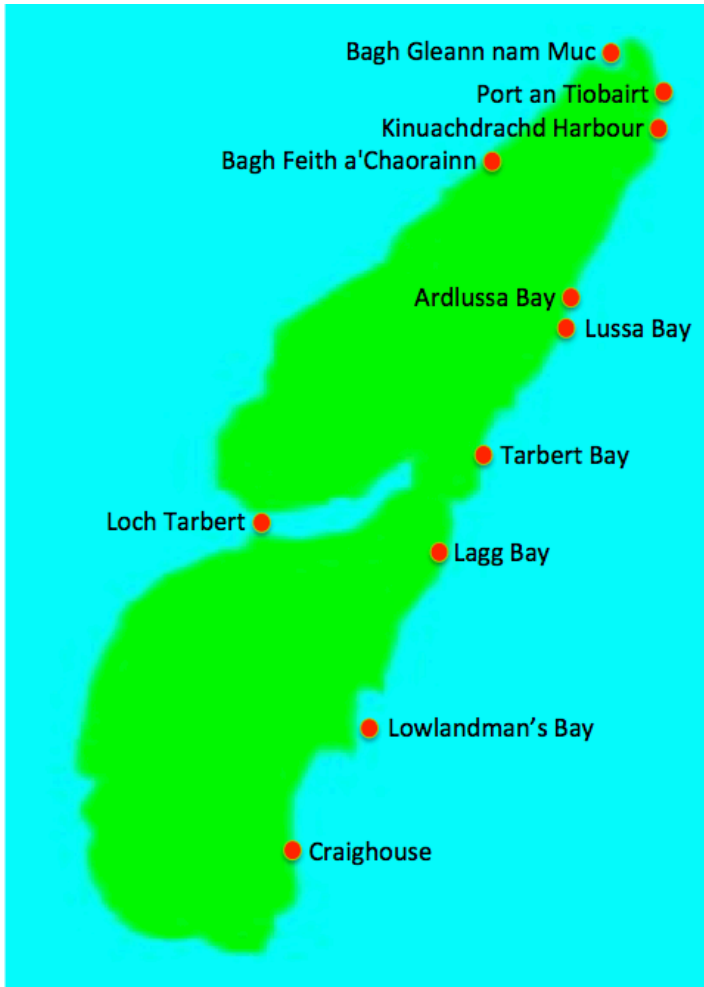


Jura

Last updated February 19th 2024



"Intimate as I am with Jura, I have little to say of it, and much less to say in its favour. The distant view of its mountains, remarkable, no less for their conical forms than their solitary reign, leads to expectations that are not realized¹. John MacCulloch's gloomy expectations of Jura in the early 19th century do not apply today. Jura² does indeed have remarkable mountains, but there are far fewer people nowadays (about 200), and there is but one whisky distillery. And the beaches are not all that superficially attractive because they are mostly grey sand. However, the island has a strong sense of community, maybe because there are not that many holiday homes — yet. Local information comes out on Jura Jottings every month on paper. The Jura Development Trust³ has an informative website. And check out the Jura Music Festival⁴ in September — given the shortage of accommodation you could do well on a mooring. Two anchorages stand out for their remoteness, even though this is still 'only' the Inner Hebrides — Loch Tarbert, a long and intricate loch on

the west coast, and Bagh Gleann nam Muc just off the Corryvreckan at the northwest tip. Finally, listen to Ian MacInnon's Jura and other local reminiscences on YouTube, including going to school with George Orwell's son⁵.

¹ The Highlands and Islands of Scotland, containing descriptions of their scenery and antiquities, Longman 1824, by the doctor and chemist, but mostly geologist, Dr John MacCulloch is rather hard work. It comes in four volumes that can be downloaded free from <http://www.electricscotland.com/travel/highlands.htm>. He himself was not a sailor but he certainly got around in OPBs (other people's boats).

² <https://isleofjura.scot/>

³ <https://juradevelopment.co.uk/news/>

⁴ <http://www.juramusicfestival.com/>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVmkUQolUfE>

Ardlussa and Lussa Bays

These two anchorages are connected by a pleasant 30-minute walk. From the slipway and pier at Ardlussa Bay walk up through the grounds of Ardlussa House (Victorian)⁶ with its wonderful meadow leading down to the sea. Of the seven estates on Jura this is the only one where the owners live all the year round. Hooray for the Fletchers! Estate owners who actually care about and contribute to the island (unlike perhaps the owner of the Ardfin Estate and Jura House who closed the gardens to the public, sold the cattle and laid off the man who looked after them who then lost his home and had to move to the mainland). The Fletchers used to edit the monthly 'Jura Jottings'⁷ and they do very good dinner (BYOB), bed and breakfast, and self-catering. In 2016 Claire Fletcher and a couple of friends started making Lussa Gin, available in the village shop and then all over Scotland and beyond — 7000 bottles a year, and counting!

Then walk on through the early 19th century farm buildings, fork left, along the road through lovely deciduous trees and on towards Inverlussa and Lussa bay, the end of the road where the few cottages were built for the workers at the unsuccessful slate quarry. Shortly before getting there you pass a small burial ground⁸ where you will find the tombstone of Mary MacCrain, died 1856 at the age of 128, so it says. And surprise, surprise by the beach there is a table with a walkie-talkie to summon tea and homemade cakes — and a sign: "Tea on the Beach"⁹. Excellent lemon drizzle cake too! Long may this facility survive. But maybe not available every day at the moment, so best to phone ahead 01496 820053 (if you can get a signal). The beach itself is fine, but typically for Jura it is rather grey sand.

Bàgh Fèith a'Chaorainn

This is a very pleasant bay on the remote northwest coast of Jura, one of several which are described on the Antares charts. The small sand and pebble beach is well hemmed in by the wild Jura landscape of small cliffs and in the summer very thick bracken. This makes exploring much beyond the shoreline difficult. However, it is very scenic so just enjoy sitting still and watching the sunset. There is a local seal colony occupying the tidal islands on the west side of the bay that will treat any visiting yacht with the usual curiosity and suspicion. A bit further south, Glengarrisdale bay is not on an Antares chart but looks doable. The main attraction here is Maclean's cave where the bones of some resident Macleans were deposited after they had been slaughtered by some marauding Campbells in one of those typically Scottish 17th century blood baths. Nowadays, the west coast of Jura is so remote that in the Second World War it is reputed that crew from German U-Boats came ashore to poach a deer or two for their suppers.

Bagh Gleann nam Muc (Bay of the glen of pigs)

This anchorage is more popular than you might imagine, given the tidal difficulties in the area. However, it is a great place to settle down and watch the sunset over Mull, with the rugged rocks all around. Anyway, there is plenty of room for several boats as well as intrepid campers on the beach. The beach itself looks pretty good for a barbeque although watch the swell when getting back in the tender. Walk up one of the small hills to catch the view, and of course

⁶ <https://www.welcometojura.com/plan-your-trip/where-to-stay/ardlussa-estate/>

⁷ <https://jura-jottings.co.uk/>

⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38647/jura-inverlussa-killchianaig>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Tea-On-The-Beach-123292397755283/>

walk round the north point of the island to look at — and listen to — the Corryvreckan¹⁰ (the cauldron of the speckled sea) in full flood (most impressive with a flood tide against a swell from the west).

In September listen to the roaring stags silhouetted on the surrounding hills at dusk — far more deer on Jura than people — about 5000 to 200. Strangely, Pennant reckoned there were only "*about a hundred stags*" on the island in the late 18th century, so either he got his arithmetic wrong or the numbers have increased remarkably¹¹. Also if the numbers were so low, why was the island's name derived from 'dyroe', Norse for deer?

Craighouse

To me, and anyone else who has competed in the Scottish Islands Peaks Race¹², this is a special place because it is where the fleet of yachts come in for the second stop to release their runners over three of the Paps of Jura. I used to do this run myself once, so Craighouse means pain to me. Later I just did the sailing bit, but even that can be a big pain if there is no wind and lots of rowing. Now I have retired from such frivolity although I intend to return as a geriatric competitor in 2024. The two runners are let off in the dinghy to 'enjoy' their run while the three sailors sort out the boat and have a rest. There is no time for any looking around. But, when just cruising and not racing, there is time and there is a lot to do at Craighouse, as well as just sit in the boat at anchor, or on one of the 16 moorings (pay at the hotel), and admire the view of the Paps as clouds swirl about their tops or the sun sets behind them.

This would not be too bad a place to pick up and drop off crew because for now there is a passenger ferry¹³ from Tayvallich (see Loch Sween) on the mainland in summer — you can get to Craighouse from Edinburgh in a total of about five hours, including a coffee stop in Tayvallich. But the ferry only survives on a wing and a prayer, plus a subsidy.

On a quiet sunny day, perch on the wall overlooking the small harbour (a Telford design built in 1812), eat an ice cream from the nearby Jura Community Shop (early 19th Century)¹⁴, gaze at the mountains of Arran over the top of Kintyre, and let the children play on the beach — it may be small and rather scrappy but the children love it nonetheless. Perhaps it is a touch too noisy hereabouts in the summer holidays when there seem to be an amazing number of boats coming and going, including noisy speed boats in good weather. There was once a bit of a cloud over the shop's viability, but in 2012 it was taken over by the Isle of Jura Development Trust¹⁵ who employ a shop manager, and in 2013 they got over half a million from the Big Lottery Fund to help with restoration and rebuilding. Make sure you do your bit and buy your stores there to benefit the local community, they need your custom much more than Tesco does. Wander past the hotel towards the pier to find Camella Crafts, and Konrad Borkowski's

¹⁰ <https://whirlpool-scotland.co.uk/>

¹¹ Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* 1772, Birlinn, Edinburgh 1998, is a surprisingly easy read, far from pompous, and less dated than one might have imagined. He had a real interest in everything he saw from what people farmed and ate, to a bit of history, to the flora and fauna, and more.

¹² <https://www.scottishislandspeaksrace.com/>

¹³ <https://jurapassengerferry.com/>

¹⁴ <https://juracommunityshop.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://juradevelopment.co.uk/news/>

photographic gallery. For delicious bread, phone Kirsty 07734 469268 who supplies the shop on Thursdays and may bake to order if you give her 24 hours notice.

The distillery¹⁶, founded in 1810, makes a pleasant ensemble with the surrounding buildings. The tacked-on manager's house looks like a small castle. There are tours and — of course — a shop for buying you know what (ph 01496 820385). Do not be misled by the 'standing stone' across the road in the small car park — it is a fake, erected by the distillery in 2011.

The Antlers (ph 01496 305317)¹⁷ is a bring-your-own-bottle bistro, café and restaurant in a very nicely restored building. In 2011 it was up for sale and then it too was taken on by the Isle Jura Development Trust who seem determined to keep it going — so use it! Breakfast is formidable, the coffee and cake are good, and there are some crafty things to peruse and buy.

The Jura Hotel¹⁸ built in 1834 has 17 refurbished rooms, a bar, showers round the back (refurbished in 2014), and excellent meals in the public bar, lounge bar, and dining room — try the ultra fresh langoustines (ph 01496 820243). And do try the cakes at teatime. It is all rather cosy with lovely views from the sitting and dining rooms, and the bar, and from some of the bedrooms too — with tropical trees in the foreground as well as the occasional stag at night-time. It was bought by friends in 2010 and so — by definition — it was a success! In 2022, having definitely done their bit for the hotel and the island, they sold the hotel to the Ardfin estate, but will stay living on the island. Let's hope the hotel continues to prosper. All in all, rather different to when Frances Murray visited in 1884: "The inn, or rather tavern was comfortless enough — the damp parlour full of smoke from a chronic blow-down in the chimney, the house resounding with drinking songs, fiddling, and laughing. The host and hostess were kind, but lacked the means to make us comfortable."¹⁹

The walk north through the village is pleasant. The church seems to have a semi-permanent collection of old photographs of Jura people. One of an early local GP with a cigarette in his hand! And there is an audio, Jura 'sound-scape'. The building was started in the late 18th century and there have been several waves of alterations since then. It is plain, calm and Scottish. There is a very useful playground just next to it. And nearby an outdoor table tennis table.

A bit further north, and up the hill a bit, there is an old village called Keils with the remains of crofting houses, some rescued by — I guess — incomers. Further up still is Cill Earnadil²⁰, an atmospheric graveyard. Here there is a serene view across the Sound of Jura to Kintyre. The birdsong and the sound of the rushing burn must drown out the minister's words. A good last resting place if only one was around to enjoy it. Unfortunately there is a ghastly concrete extension with horrible railings, particularly vile juxtaposed against the beautiful old rubble walls.

Look out for the plaque to Gillouir MacCrain who is said to have "lived to have kept 180 Christmasses in his own house", buried about 1645. This unlikely lifespan may be something

¹⁶ <https://www.jurawhisky.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/people/The-Antlers/100064866616249/>

¹⁸ <https://www.jurahotel.co.uk/>

¹⁹ Summer in the Hebrides, Sketches in Colonsay and Oronsay. James Maclehose & Sons, Glasgow, 1887. Page 78.

²⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38222/jura-keils-cill-earnadil>

to do with him being a Roman Catholic at a time when protestant Presbyterians were in the ascendant. Papish Christmas day in Scotland was banned but could be surreptitiously celebrated in peoples 'own houses' (only to be restored as a Scottish public holiday in 1958), and there were two calendars in use — the Gregorian and the Julian. So there were two December 25ths separated by a few days, two 'Christmasses' that could be 'kept' every year, as long as they were in your own house.

You can hire bikes from Jura Cycles (07562 762382) , or walk to, or take the bus to Jura House and its lovely gardens, as good as Achamore on Gigha. But don't. The gardens have been closed since the Ardfin estate was bought by an Australian hedge fund manager in 2010. He renovated and extended the house (no expense spared) and built for himself a world-class 18-hole golf course, along with hyper-luxury accommodation for paying guests (£20,000 a night for the full facilities apparently). Maybe he is expecting Donald Trump to call, certainly not little people like me. Perhaps one day this place will become a mouldering monument to the ludicrous wealth and social divisions of the early 21st century, like Kinloch Castle on Rum is a monument to the excesses of Edwardian society.

Kinuachdrachd Harbour

Kinuachdrachd harbour is a lush bay on the northeast tip of Jura, a lovely quiet spot. There is a small restored pier in the southern corner, for reasons I know not. The main and rather essential thing to do is walk 30-minutes south to Barnhill²¹. This is where the recently widowed George Orwell lived with his sister and young adopted son when he was writing *Nineteen Eighty Four*, already suffering from the TB which was to kill him in 1950. The book was actually finished in 1948 and so it is said by some that Orwell set it in 1984 by changing around the last two digits of the year. He surely can't have had the idea of such a dystopian book here, about as far away as one can get from what is normally but incorrectly referred to as 'civilisation' in the UK, and still have a roof over your head — it is the last but one house on the island, surrounded by fields and deciduous woods. Mind you, Barnhill is a fairly substantial house, but by all accounts it was not at all comfortable. However, it was very much where Orwell wanted to be, and where meeting local people he apparently shook off his longstanding prejudice against the 'Scotch.'²² There is still no tarmac road so far north, just a cart track suitable for Land Rovers and the like.

Lagg Bay

Not a lot here. The early 19th century house at the head of the bay may look like a pub, indeed it was once a pub — but no longer. The slipway and curving pier²³ are both marvellous early 19th century works, function and artistic structure satisfactorily combined, along with the third criterion for good architecture — delight. Built for the drovers to take cattle from Jura, Islay and Colonsay to the mainland. This trade died out not so long ago, the last Argyll drover died in 1957. The pier was also once used by the mail ferry to the mainland. And, in a major gale, to get the recent owner of the Jura Hotel to the mainland to be with his labouring wife in Edinburgh.

²¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnhill>, Jura

²² *Orwell's Island* by Les Wilson, Saraband, Glasgow, 2023

²³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38260/jura-lagg-harbour-jetty>

Loch Tarbert

A wild place indeed! This loch stretches for miles across the most uninhabited part of Jura, almost cutting the island in two. Apart from a shooting lodge at Glenbatrik on the south shore, and a few bothies, there is no obvious habitation (apparently the lodge is a summer retreat for Viscount Astor who owns the estate). Just moorland and a large number of raised beaches, so characteristic of Jura west coast geology. On a bad day it is dire, but on a good day it is fabulous as a getting away from it all place.

In days past it was a bit of a no-no for boaties. In the 17th century Martin Martin wrote *"it is not a harbour for vessels, or lesser boats, for it is altogether rocky"*²⁴. Even in 1938 John McLintock considered *"Loch Tarbert ... affords but little shelter, for its upper reaches are so rock-set as to be unnavigable, and lower down it is exposed to the west and tormented by fierce squalls from the hills"*²⁵. In poor visibility it is all but impossible to make out the leading lines (placed by the legendary Blondie Hasler after the second world war). But now with a chartplotter it is much easier to find your way around, and even easier with Antares charts.

There is, I understand, a lunch stop on the Antares Charts at An Sàilean, a small bay just at the northern entrance to the loch. I mention this because there are caves a few minutes to the northwest at Ruantallain where dead bodies were once kept until the weather was clement enough to ferry them across to Oronsay for burial (corpachs).

If there is another boat in the first anchorage, Cumhann Mòr Bay, you can go on through the first narrows to find any number of good anchoring spots, and further again through the second narrows although I never have. If you get to the head of the loch without hitting anything, you will have done very well. Cowper seems to have managed it in the 19th century without an engine, although he is not absolutely specific on this point²⁶. Maybe he was boasting

²⁴ A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland circa 1695. Martin Martin, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1994. The first good account of the Hebrides, and other islands. Written by a local ('a gentleman of Skye') in his 30s, who clearly travelled round all the places he wrote about, describing everything from the people, their religion, what they ate, farming, anchorages and lots more.

²⁵ West Coast Cruising. John McLintock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938. A between the wars account of not so much cruises in chronological order, but of the author's experiences on the west coast. However, there is too much history, fairy tales and misty Celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nonetheless, it gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing of what sort of boat he sailed, or with whom, and nor did he tell us anything about the people he met along the way. Or himself.

²⁶ 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.

The loch is an attractive place spoilt only, said a friend, by 'the noise of a motor boat towing a small rowing boat containing the remains of two stags!' I don't think there is much to see or do ashore that you can't see from the boat, although there are beaches to sun yourself on — on a good day.

Lowlandman's Bay

Cowper reckoned this "*makes a capital resting place*"²⁷ and so it does except I find it a bit bleak, and not that easy to get ashore because it is all very shallow at the edges and you have to anchor a fair way out. The houses (1861) on the northeast point of the bay were built for the lighthouse keepers who looked after the Skervuile light until it was automated.

The small bay in the southwest — Drum an Dunan — is much more cosy and protected with nice woods on the north shore. Loads of seals on the islands just to the south. There is a grey sand beach of sorts at the head of the bay and a bit further up a couple of challenging piles of stones — were these burial cairns or just a farmer heaping up stones from a cleared field years ago?

Port an Tiobairt

The most northern anchorage on the northeast coast of Jura, and the very last house too. It must take the owners well over an hour to drive down to Craighouse, in part over an unmetalled road. The most obvious thing to do here is to walk to the north tip of Jura and inspect the Gulf of Corryvreckan²⁸ before having a go at it by boat (on old charts it was quaintly referred to as the "cauldron of the speckled sea", the English translation from the Gaelic).

Murdoch Mackenzie's description in 1776 still stands today: "*Coryvrechan is a violent breaking sea, and whirlpool, formed between the islands of Jura and Scarba, which will wash over any ship's deck, and be apt to sink her, if the hatches are open*"²⁹. But, he also realised that if you get your timing right "*the sea in this Sound is as smooth as in other neighbouring parts*". Nonetheless, it has a much fiercer reputation than it really deserves, Cowper reckoned the Swellies in the Menai Strait were far more dangerous, although he didn't actually go through the gulf himself. Even earlier, Dr John MacCulloch made a good point in one of his 1824 letters to Sir Walter Scott: "*The hazards of the Coryvrechan, are of the same nature as those of the other narrow channels of the Western Islands, as well as of the Pentland Firth; and if greater, they may still be avoided, with similar precautions. But as this passage is seldom used by boats, and never by vessels, it has received, in addition to the exaggeration, the further ill character which attends all untried danger. Had it been as necessary a channel as the Kyle Rich*

²⁷ Cowper *ibid*

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Corryvreckan

²⁹ The very first 'Sailing Directions' must surely be those published by Murdoch Mackenzie in 1776. He was an Orcadian cartographer and hydrographer, and the first to produce recognisable charts of the seas around the British Isles while working for the Admiralty. You can find the book on line, and also many of the charts on line at the National Library of Scotland. Mind you, some of his measurements for distance would strike one as quaint. For example, the rock in Canna Harbour now incorporated into the pier he described as being "*about a pistol shot from the shore*".

*or Hoy Mouth, we should have heard far less of its horrors. Like those of the Mahlstrom, they shrink before the boldness of a fair examination*³⁰.

Of course the best time to look at (and listen to) the Corryvreckan is in a storm, with the flood tide against a swell from the west, while the easiest time to sail through is when it is calm and slack water (keeping to the south side). Not surprisingly the Corryvreckan has featured in at least one book and one film, probably many more. It was here that Jules Verne set the final scene of his novel, 'The Green Ray', and here too was the great drama in the film 'I know where I am going'. And also here George Orwell nearly drowned — if he had, there would have been no 'Nineteen Eighty Four'.

On the walk you will see deer and rabbits. Around the anchorage there is loads of bird song and in the anchorage there are loads of seals. It seems quite safe notwithstanding the rather unnerving sound of the tide racing by less than 100 metres away. Not a place to drag an anchor, or let the children loose in the dinghy. And you can walk down to Barnhill, rather further than from the Kinuachdrachd anchorage.

Tarbert Bay

The beach is a disappointment but behind it you will find a couple of standing stones, a burial ground with a small rectangular ruin of maybe a chapel (Cill Chaliuim-chille)³¹, and when I was there once a load of stags mixed up with some sheep. The dreadful large wooden hutted building looking like an industrial chicken farm is in fact the estate shooting lodge! Hardly 'Monarch of the Glen' style I would say. There doesn't seem much point but you could easily walk from here to the head of Loch Tarbert in less than half-an-hour, maybe to inspect the anchorage before trying to get to it from the sea.

³⁰ Rather hard work because it is very long and somewhat portentous is: The Highlands and Islands of Scotland, containing descriptions of their scenery and antiquities Longman 1824 by the doctor and chemist, but mostly geologist, Dr John MacCulloch. It comes in four volumes that can be downloaded from <http://www.electricscotland.com/travel/highlands.htm>. He himself was not a sailor but he certainly got around in OPBs (other people's boats).

³¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38659/jura-tarbert-cill-chaliuim-chille>