



visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

www.facebook.com/VisitStrangfordLough

www.twitter.com/VisitStrangford

all the family as you watch nature take its course throughout the seasons. Experience Strangford Lough time and time again, finding something for kids' hair as you take a fabulous boat trip on the Lough. Take time out to enjoy the natural events happening in the area throughout the year. ...and its wealth of fantastic attractions and stunning array of natural beauty.

# Welcome to Strangford Lough...



# Play / Rewind / Pause /

leavenoiraireland.org

For more information visit

be active

Canoeists are encouraged to report sightings of cetaceans (whales, porpoises and dolphins) and basking sharks.

wildlife sightings

www.canoei.com

For more information on canoeing, visit

Outdoor Concepts

028 9043 7048

Mobile Team Adventure

028 9180 0809

Life Adventure Centre

028 181 1311

Mike The Bike

028 4372 0714

Clearys Adventure Centre

028 4372 3933

Action Outdoors

028 4482 1317

Hit Information

### In an emergency dial 999

(VHF radio or mobile phone, flares etc), first aid kit.

Carry adequate basic safety equipment - spare clothes, extra food, warm drink, bivvy bag and means of communication.

The Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI) recommends that paddlers leave details of their journey with the Coastguard and a responsible adult.

Consider attending a recognised training course which explores skills, safety and environmental issues.

You do not need to be a strong swimmer but you will need the water confidence to deal with a capsized boat and so carry a whistle.

Remember - a canoe may be difficult to see from a larger craft competing in races.

Wear adequate buoyancy in the form of a personal life jacket restricted to deep water channels.

A ferry operates across The Narrows between Strangford and Portaferry every 15 minutes.

Should only be tackled by appropriately experienced canoeists.

The Narrows has extremely powerful tidal currents which should only be tackled by appropriately experienced canoeists.

Canoeing is an adventure sport and as such should be treated with respect. If you are new to the sport, it is advisable to join an organised club where expert coaching can be provided. (Details of clubs and courses can be found at [www.canoei.com](http://www.canoei.com).) When taking part in canoeing consider the following safety advice:

## East Coast of Northern Ireland

The East Coast Canoe Trail, approximately 70 nautical miles long, offers more adventure than the mainly low-lying shores and sheltered sea loughs might suggest. Negotiating choppy tidal races to visit lighthouse islands and skirting hundreds of small reefs known as pladdies add spice to this journey.

The drama of chalk and basalt cliffs of the east County Antrim coast gives way to a low-lying rocky shore broken by numerous sandy beaches in County Down. The tidal range increases southwards to Strangford Lough. There are optional excursions out to islands such as the Maidens (County Antrim) and the Copelands (County Down) as well as the sheltered waters of Larne Lough, and the trail also takes you into and across Belfast Lough.

The starting point is at Waterfoot beach south of Cushendall and the route mirrors coastal roads most of the way to end at the turbulent Narrows and the attractive village of Portaferry at the mouth of Strangford Lough. There is the choice to paddle the four sections in either direction, southwards as described here, or north.

Thus the East Coast Trail offers stretches of relatively easy paddling for the less experienced canoeist and, for the more adventurous, challenging tide races, overfalls and windswept island circuits. Seals, seabirds, an almost 500 million geological time span and a varied human history linked to nearby Scotland add interest to this side of the North Channel and Irish Sea. There is a good range of slipway access points, beach haul-outs and picturesque resting spots.

## Strangford Lough Canoe Trail

This stunning sea lough offers no less than 80 square nautical miles of paddling playground! From the fast-running tidal channel in the south, to the more gentle waters around the islands there is something for canoeists of all abilities.

The trail is also home to Northern Ireland's first 'bothy' which provides basic shelter and useful facilities for paddlers on Salt Island.

This island-studded sea lough is the largest inlet in the UK and Ireland. It is approached from the Irish Sea through the (5 nautical mile) fast-running tidal Narrows which opens out into more gentle waters.

The Viking invaders who arrived in their long boats through the fast flowing waters called 'The Narrows' bestowed the name Strangfjörth or 'place of strong currents'. This is a section of the canoe trail that requires a high level of expertise and it provides an excellent challenge for the experienced paddler!

The Rouden Wheel is a series of whirlpools, boils and swirling waters, which is caused by pinnacles of rock on the seabed. This area should be treated with the utmost caution.

By contrast, the calmer waters of the main shallow basin further north gave this Lough its old Irish name 'Lough Cuan' meaning sheltered haven. Here paddlers will find a myriad of channels and routes to explore, as well as the chance to discover some of the country's finest scenery.

Designated as Northern Ireland's first Marine Nature Reserve, Strangford Lough is internationally renowned for its abundance and diversity of habitats and species. Over 2000 marine animal and plant species have been found, most unique to this area. Look out for seals, Arctic Terns, Irish Hares, porpoises and much, much more!



Strangford Lough

visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

For more information contact any of the following Visitor Information Centres:

**Ards Tourist Information Centre**  
31 Regent Street  
NEWTOWNARDS  
BT23 4AD  
☎ 028 9182 6846  
@ tourism@ards-council.gov.uk

**Downpatrick Tourist Information Centre**  
The Saint Patrick Centre,  
53a Market Street  
DOWNPATRICK  
BT30 6LZ  
☎ 028 4461 2233  
@ downpatrick.tic@downdc.gov.uk

(seasonal office Easter – end August)  
**Portaferry Tourist Information & Visitor Centre**  
The Stables, Castle Street  
PORTAFERRY  
BT22 1NZ  
☎ 028 4272 9882  
@ tourism.portaferry@ards-council.gov.uk

All Maps in This Document: This is Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2013 CS&LA156.



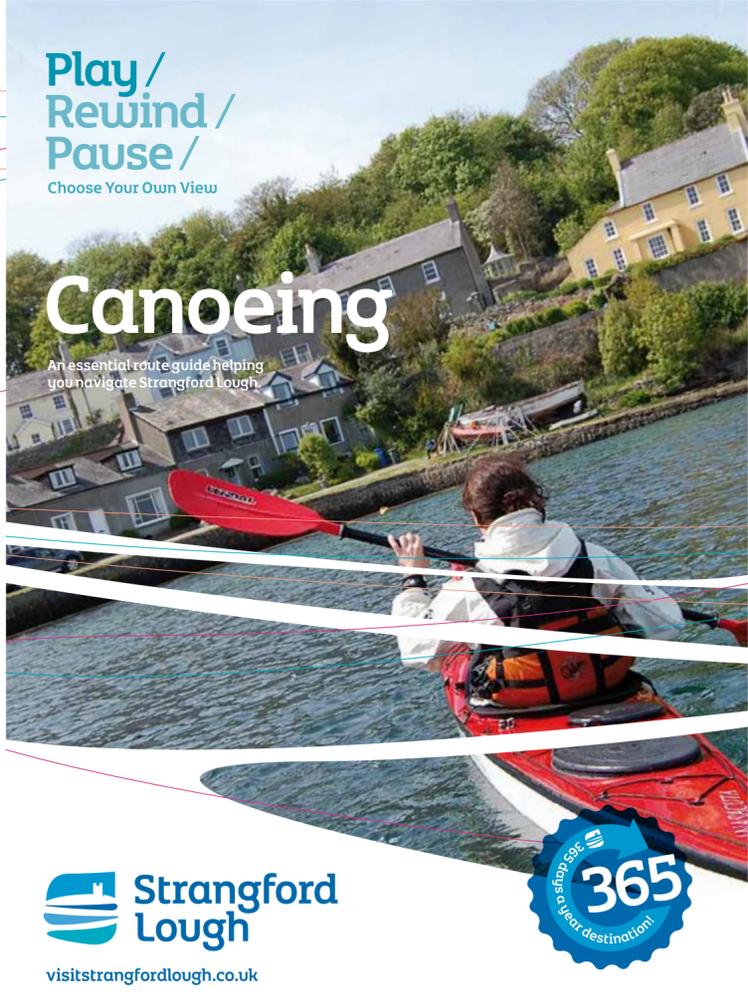
The information in this guide is correct at the time of print and every care has been taken to ensure accuracy. However, Ards Borough Council and Down District Council cannot accept responsibility for any errors, omissions or changes which may occur. All liability for loss, disappointment, negligence or other damage caused by the reliance on the information contained in this guide, or in the event of bankruptcy or liquidation of any company, individual or firm mentioned, or in the event of any company, individual or firm ceasing to trade, is hereby excluded. ©2013.

# Play / Rewind / Pause /

Choose Your Own View

# Canoeing

An essential route guide helping you navigate Strangford Lough.



visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

365 A Year Destination!

Strangford Lough

visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

Strangford Lough

visitstrangfordlough.co.uk



This is Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2013 CS&LA156.

## Trail One

### Sketrick to Killyleagh

This itinerary has been compiled using an estimated paddling speed of 2 knots (roughly 4 km per hour). Although most 'weekend' paddlers will be comfortable paddling at 3 knots, this calculation allows for exploring, refreshment breaks and photo stops. The timing estimations assume light or calm winds and do not make allowance for the help or hindrance of tide.

It is important to check the weather forecast before setting off. Reasonable shelter can be found amongst the islands, however it is worth noting that some areas dry out completely at low tide and it is wise to consult the OS Map or Admiralty chart for this information.

Numerous busy sailing clubs operate from bays and inlets all along this section of coastline – paddlers should remain vigilant and give sailing boats a wide berth where appropriate.

The overnight camp is on Salt Island. Camping is permitted free of charge on the north side of the island, however the bothy (GR J531500) must be pre-booked and a key collected prior to departure at one of the agreed keyholder venues.

**Distance:**  
34 Km

**OS Map:**  
Sheet 21

**Nearest Town:**  
Killyleagh

**Route Shape:**  
Linear

**Points of interest:**  
Ballydom Lightship, Sketrick Castle, Islandmore, Island Taggart, Killyleagh, Delamont, Salt Island, Strangford, Ballyhenry

**Access Point:**  
Sketrick J523627 - J523627

**Egress Point:**  
Killyleagh - J530525



#### Day One: 18km (9NM) Sketrick to Salt Island

The trip starts at Sketrick where there is limited roadside parking adjacent to the slip. If leaving a car, paddlers are advised to park in the large council owned car park (with toilets) 500m further south along the road. The closest services to the access point are located at Balloo village (GR J497607), these include two well-stocked grocery stores, a petrol station and an award-winning restaurant/pub.

From here, the route travels east around the back of Sketrick Island (GR J526626) and then south towards Killyleagh (GR J530525), roughly following the western shore of the Lough. The paddle weaves its way between the islands with exact route a matter of personal choice, however wind strength, state of tide and time available may all influence the decision.

The western shore is a fascinating maze of submerged drumlins and hills – this is an extension of the 'Basket of Eggs' countryside visible on the mainland and is unique to County Down. Many islands are worth visiting on the journey south, however landing is only recommended on a limited number of islands owned by the National Trust; running south these are Darragh Island (GR J538603), Island Taggart (GR J535545), Green Island (GR J537512), Salt Island (GR J531502) and Gibb's Island (GR J509496). Also, Ballyhenry Island (GR J574520) on the eastern side of the Lough at the head of the Narrows.

The launch point at Sketrick provides a good view of Sketrick Castle. Built during the 16th Century, it was destroyed during a ferocious storm in 1896 leaving the ruins visible today. The castle is one of 16 tower houses sited along the Lough's shores. Adjacent to the launching slip is the Ballydom Lightship (GR J528628). Now serving as a clubhouse for a local yacht club, the 'Petrel' Lightship was built in 1913 and arrived in Strangford Lough after it was decommissioned in 1968. The sea around Sketrick is also a popular fishing ground for Herons. They can often be spotted flying between islands or standing quietly by the waters edge.

If seal spotting is on the agenda, Green Island Rock (GR J544602) adjacent to Darragh Island is worth closer inspection as this is a popular 'haul out' for common seals.

From Ringahaddy Sound (GR J537583) between Islandmore and the mainland, a small dwelling on the western side of Islandmore is visible. The building, also known as 'The Blue Cabin' is now immortalised in a book of the same name documenting modern day island life on Strangford Lough.

Further south again, Island Taggart (GR J535545) is a good place to stop for refreshments and stretch the legs.

#### Salt Island / Bothy Bookings

The Bothy is located on Salt Island on Strangford Lough just south of Killyleagh. It is a bunkhouse which provides basic accommodation for canoeists and was restored in June 2008.

**Salt Island Bothy / Campsite**  
☎ 028 4488 1204  
➤ www.nationaltrust.org.uk

#### Day Two: 16km (8NM) Salt Island to Killyleagh

Day 2 itinerary explores the islands within the Quoile Estuary before journeying to Castle Ward Bay (GR J580498), and then Strangford (GR J589498) (if time and tide permit), before returning to Killyleagh.

Leaving Salt Island, it is possible to island-hop north east towards Strangford. For the enthusiastic, a short diversion can also be made to take in Green Island. Beware – the area between the islands and the mainland to the south dries out at low tide.

As paddlers approach the Narrows, the effects of tide become more apparent. For any paddling in the vicinity of the Narrows it is important to take account of the tides and pre-plan accordingly. Within the Narrows itself, spring tidal rates can reach 8-10 knots at the narrowest point. At some states of tide it is possible to make progress against the tide in eddies close to shore.

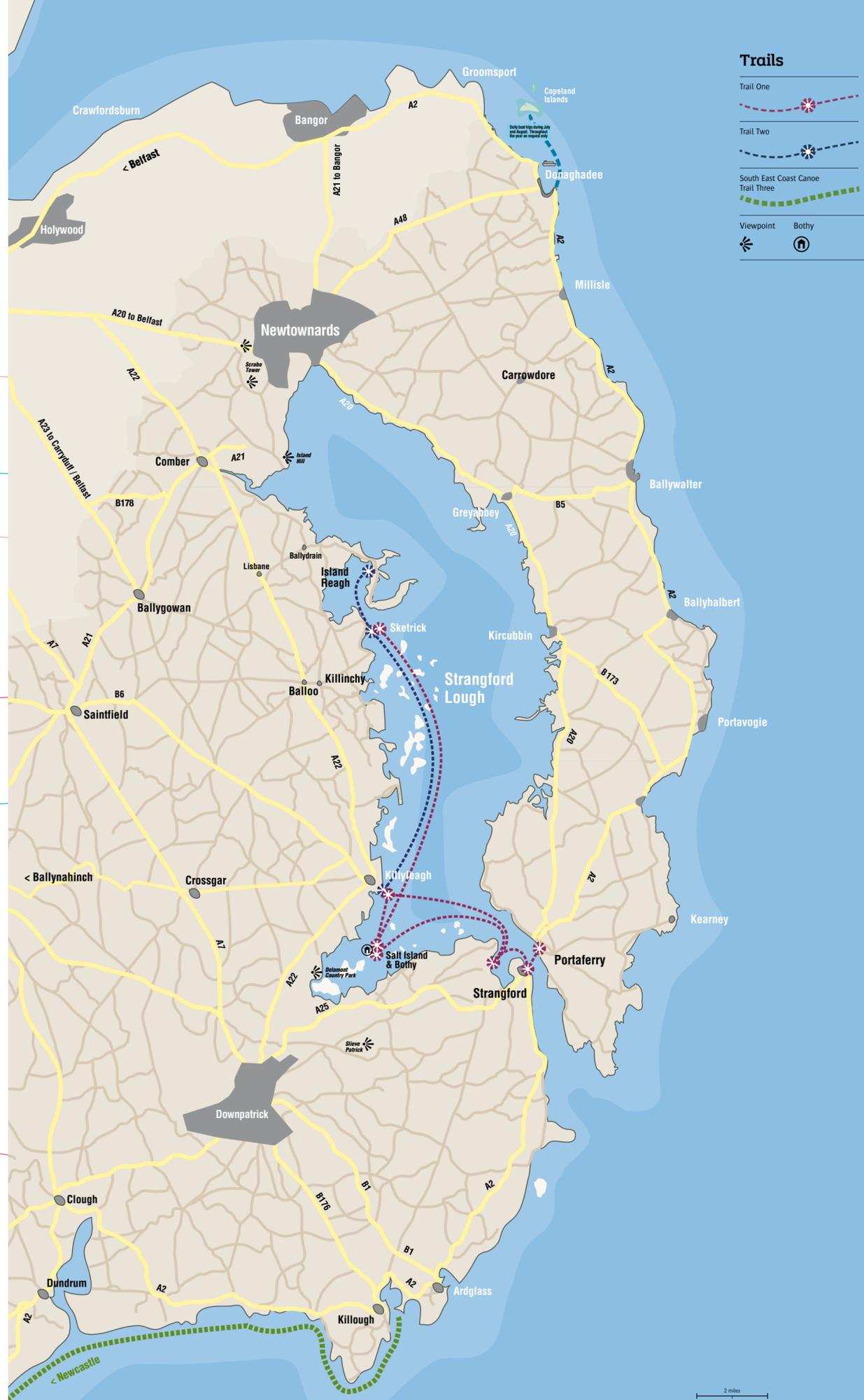
Approaching Castle Ward Bay, Audley's Castle comes into view. Built in the 15th Century, this towerhouse stands on a rocky height overlooking the Narrows. The castle can be accessed by a short walk from a suitable landing point on the shore below. At low water, Castle Ward Bay dries out leaving extensive mudflats.

If time allows and tidal conditions are favourable, it is worth paddling on to Strangford village. On this stretch, great care should be taken to stay clear of the ferry which crosses every 15 minutes between Strangford and Portaferry.

Strangford harbour has numerous slipways, however the agreed canoe access slipway sits in the centre of the harbour area at GR J589497. Strangford is a picturesque village with a good pub and restaurant, and a grocery store, all within easy walking distance from the harbour area. The village is a good spot to bide time while waiting for the tide to turn.

If tides are not favourable for a trip to Strangford, or paddlers want to avoid the Narrows completely, it is possible to cross to Ballyhenry Island (GR J574520) on the opposite side of the Lough, striking out from Audley's Castle or before. The island is owned by the National Trust and landing is permitted. Just south of the island, in Ballyhenry Bay, the SS Empire Tana shipwreck lies exposed at all levels of tide. The vessel, which was originally involved in the WW2 war effort, sank shortly after being moved to Strangford in 1946. The return trip to Killyleagh is a 4km open crossing, or to avoid this, a slightly longer and less exposed trip can be made by island hopping back toward Chapel Island (GR J562513) an then continuing to the town.

From Strangford, paddlers should retrace the route past Audley's Castle and strike off for Killyleagh after Chapel Island.



## Trails



## Trail Two

### Killyleagh to Island Reagh

This itinerary has been compiled using an estimated paddling speed of 2 knots (roughly 4 km per hour). Although most 'weekend' paddlers will be comfortable paddling at 3 knots, this calculation allows for exploring, refreshment breaks and photo stops. The timing estimations assume light or calm winds and do not make allowance for the help or hindrance of tide.

It is important to check the weather forecast before departing.

It may be prudent to reverse the trip if wind speed and direction favour this. Reasonable shelter can be found amongst the islands, however it is worth noting that some areas dry out completely at low tide and it is wise to consult the OS Map or Admiralty chart for this information. Numerous busy sailing clubs operate from bays and inlets all along this section of coastline – paddlers should remain vigilant and give sailing boats a wide berth where appropriate.

The trip starts at Killyleagh (GR J530525), not far from the town centre, where obvious road signs point to the agreed canoe access point. Limited roadside car parking is available just to the south of the rocky shore access. The town itself is well serviced for any pre or post-trip needs with a grocery store, café, and numerous pubs.

From here, the paddle heads north following the western shore all the way to Island Reagh (Reagh Island, GR J525645), exploring as many or as few islands as time allows. Paddlers can choose the inside or outside passage around each island – the desire to seek shelter or avoid dried-out bays may influence route choice.

Island Taggart (GR J535545) is the first island encountered on the paddle north. Owned by the National Trust, landing and exploration is permitted. The island has been uninhabited since the late 1960s and the remains of a small settlement are still visible half way along. Notably, the island was used as a location for filming the 'December Bride', a story of life in the area in the early 1900s.

Travelling north again, the next point of interest is Islandmore (GR J542585), or 'Big Island'. The blue house perched on the western shore of the island was immortalized in the book 'The Blue Cabin', a recent story documenting island life on Strangford Lough. Running north again, landing is possible on Darragh Island (GR J538603), also owned by the National Trust. This marks the half way point of the journey and is a good opportunity to stretch legs and have some refreshments. Directly to the east of Darragh, Green Island Rock (GR J544602) is a popular 'haul out' for common seals.

The second half of the trip north offers many points of interest for the paddler. At Sketrick Island (GR J526626), the ruins of Sketrick Castle (east end of the causeway) – a tower-house constructed in the mid 15th Century, can be viewed from the water. The island also boasts a popular eating establishment, Daff Eddy's (adjacent to the castle), which is well worth a visit during or after the paddle. The pub-restaurant opens from 12 noon everyday.

Just north of Sketrick Island and adjacent to the mainland sits Ballydom Lightship (GR J528628). Now serving as a rather unconventional clubhouse for a local yacht club, the vessel operated as a lightship from 1911 until its decommissioning in 1968. It is possible to end the journey here, egressing at a small slip to the south of the lightship at GR J523627. Limited roadside parking is available.

Tidal currents run in the channels between Sketrick and Rainey Island, and between Rainey and Mahee Island, where they are particularly strong (up to 5 knots). This is a good area to practice moving water skills. If necessary, it is possible for the most part to sneak along eddies against the tidal flow.

Mahee Island is the site of Nendrum (GR J524636), a pre-Norman Monastic site, still with original ruins. This is located at the highest point of the island and is clearly visible from the water. The monastery was set up by St Machaoi in the 5th Century and has also been linked to St Patrick. Access to the site from the water is limited, however paddlers can land within easy walking distance on the north side of Mahee Island (GR J524638) at high tide. It is worth noting that the bay to the east of Island Reagh dries out to a distance of approximately 400 metres offshore, preventing access at low tide.

From here, a short paddle north leads to the egress point on the rocky shore beside the National Trust car park on Island Reagh (GR J526645), again not accessible at low water. The paddle can be further extended by egressing beside Rinnell Quay (GR J522654) at the west end of the causeway between the mainland and Island Reagh. Even at low water, paddlers can locate a deep water channel running towards the quay from the north. Limited roadside parking is available here.



## S.E. Canoe Trail Three

### Killough to Newcastle

From Killough, the low rocky shore continues to St John's Point, where the tall yellow and black striped lighthouse marks the entrance to Dundrum Bay. From here to Newcastle, a distance of 8 nautical miles as the crow flies, the scenery is dominated by the beach and sand dune system of the Murlough National Nature Reserve. In the distance, the distinctive profile of the Mourne Mountains comes into view.

Prior planning is essential when paddling this stretch of coastline as there is an army firing range extending almost 3 nautical miles out to sea off Ballykinler and the entrance to Dundrum Inner Bay. Canoeists should contact Belfast Coastguard for details of when firing is scheduled and plan to paddle outside of these times. If the firing range is in use, red flags (daytime) or red lights (night) are visible over the base, just north of the entrance to the inner bay. Out to sea, there are three yellow marker buoys marked DZ marking the outer perimeter of the range.

Dundrum Bay is relatively shallow, and is framed by sandy beaches, interrupted by only a few reefs and rocky foreshore. Landing is possible on the beaches almost anywhere along the shore, however canoe access requires a long beach trek at low water. The only break in the line of beaches is opposite the village of Dundrum, where a marked passage leads to the inner bay. Access here is tidal with landing possible at Black Rock and just north of the Downshire Bridge where there is a small turning circle for cars. The bridge is a good spot for developing moving water skills as the tide flows between its stanchions at rates up to 6 knots. The best conditions are 2 hours before and after high water, HW at the bridge is +0030 HW Belfast.

At the entrance to the Inner Bay, tidal flows can reach 3 knots on both the flood and ebb tide. Deep water surfing waves also form here on the ebb tide with swell from the south or east. Large numbers of common seals haul out on the Ballykinler shore. Overlooking Dundrum village is the medieval Dundrum Castle, while to the south, the Mourne Mountains rise steeply from the coastal plain, with Newcastle town at their foot. Approaching from Murlough, the Slieve Donard Resort & Spa marks the beginning of the sea front promenade. From here the beach begins to narrow, ending in the harbour at the foot of Slieve Donard - the highest mountain in the range. This is a drying harbour, built for the export of granite from the mountain quarries, and home to the RNLi offshore lifeboat. Above this, and visible from the sea is the 'Bogey Line', where a funicular railway transporting quarried granite once tracked down the mountain. At low tide, access can be gained at a stony beach adjacent to the south wall of the harbour.

With the exception of Dundrum Inner Bay entrance, tides along this section of coastline are weak.

**Distance:**  
16 Km (8NM)

**OS Map:**  
Sheet 29

**Nearest Town:**  
Killough

**Route Shape:**  
Linear

**Points of interest:**  
St John's Point Lighthouse, Murlough Nature Reserve, Dundrum, Newcastle

**Access Point:**  
Killough - J540356

**Egress Point:**  
Newcastle - J380315

This is Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2013 CS&L156.