

Some of the finest cliff scenery awaits you from the Giant's Causeway to Dunseverick Harbour, with layers of dark basalt interspersed with red layers of iron-rich laterite, but beware of reflected waves and downpunching close to the shore in strong offshore winds. The amazing regular basalt columns of the Giant's Causeway and cliffs, the Chimney's standing above the Amphitheatre and the long tain of Lacada Point in Port-na-Spannagh are highlights. The latter claimed the Spanish Armada treasures ship Girona in a storm in 1588 with few survivors from the hundreds of souls on board. Belfast's Continue past headlands and bays to the restored fishermen's bothy at Portmoon, where it is possible to stay by prior arrangement with the Causeway Coast Kayak Association. From here, it's a short journey to **Dunseverick Harbour**, once a busy fishing port, whose history is displayed in the small privately owned museum above the pier.

The route to the Causeway takes you past the mouth of the River Bush. The tongue of freshwater is a good indicator of tidal movement in the bay. 3km upstream is the famous whiskey distillery, and at the far end of the strand is a distinctive landmark of Runkerry House. The former Black-rock salmon fishery bothy perches on the rocks below. Watch out for the Millie Stone and a tide race rounding Runkerry Point. There are three caves in these cliffs, the first one - Runkerry Cave - being quite extensive.

The former fishing settlement of **Portballintrae** is now a mix of apartments and holiday homes but offers a welcome break before the rugged cliffs of the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site are encountered. The Blind Rock or 'Blind' guards the east side of the entrance to the bay and should be given a wide berth.

Ahead are the romantic ruins of Dunluce Castle. Its 700 year history and the views alone make it well worth a visit – landing is possible in the narrow channel just east of the spectacular cave that penetrates the sea stack on which the castle is perched. The salt and pepper effect of white limestone or chalk and black basalt is a regular feature of the coastline from here to Rathlin, a geological mix unique in Ireland. Binnacave, one of the longest on the coast, with its entrance facing north east, is worth exploring.

The **White Rocks** eroded limestone cliffs feature The Giant's Head, The Wishing Arch and a variety of stacks, caves and wave-cut platforms. In springtime, these cliffs are home to Black Guillemot colonies and salt-tolerant wild flowers.

The low cliffs of Ramore Head separate the West and East Strands of **Portrush**. Strong tide races occur at this headland, though the Skerries, and in the Sound. The islands which are privately owned have seal and seabird colonies which add interest as you paddle by.



White Rocks

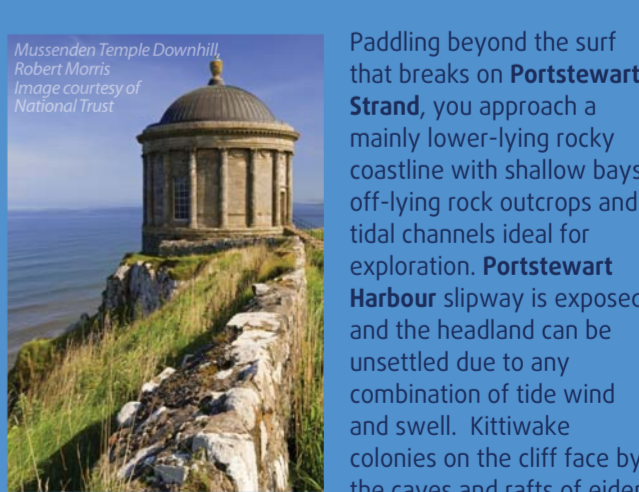


Martello Tower, Magilligan. Image courtesy of Richard Callen

The sand dunes and grasslands are part of the Magilligan Special Area of Conservation, full of colourful butterflies, orchids and other flora in summer. Waves frequently break on the Tuns Bank offshore, reputed burial place of Manannán mac Lir, a mystical sea god whom we'll encounter again further east.

Inland, the basalt escarpment of Binevenagh curves gradually seawards and the distinctive domed shape of Mussenden Temple, a local landmark, can be seen from some distance. Passing under the high cliffs at **Downhill**, cut by the Black Glen, you get a brief glimpse into the former estate of Frederick Hervey, the Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, known as the Earl Bishop, who had the Temple and other buildings erected in the late 1700s, all now part of a National Trust property. The railway line passes through two tunnels either side of the Black Glen and the sea cave close to Castlerock is worth inspection.

Past the small resort of **Castlerock**, twin piers guide the waters of the River Bann seawards. At the Barmouth there can be large standing waves with the ocean swell meeting the outflow of the Lower River Bann following heavy rain and on an ebbing tide. The boundary between the brown freshwater and the sea can attract porpoise, feeding seabirds such as Kittiwake, and other gulls.



Padding beyond the surf that breaks on **Portstewart Strand**, you approach a mainly lower-lying rocky coastline with shallow bays, off-lying rock outcrops and tidal channels ideal for exploration. **Portstewart Harbour** slipway is exposed and the headland can be unsettled due to any combination of tide wind and swell. Kittiwake colonies on the cliff face by the caves and rafts of eider amongst the wave cut platforms add to the experience.

Portrush, the end of this section, is one of Northern Ireland's premier holiday resorts, and there are ample diversions and facilities available if you choose to go ashore. Canoe access is from the small beach in the south east corner of the harbour. Contact should be made with the Harbour Master in advance of access and to confirm parking arrangements.

A magnificent cave opens past the east side of the islands and a little further on is the amazing chasm known as the Giant's Cut. At the chalk headland of Kinnabeg with its ruined castle and abandoned fishery it is possible to kayak through a tunnel in the headland at certain states of the tide. Beware of the reef and swirl around Carrickmannon Rock, where Ireland's Neptune Manannan mac Lir and his horse Eibar ruled the waves. A short paddle past the hidden wood of 'Mortkillew', a regular haunt for buzzards, takes you to a section of fine cliffs and caves finishing in Ballycastle Harbour.

Today, tourists can be thrilled or scared crossing the bridge, once used by salmon fishermen whose cottages remains tucked under the eastern cliff. Breeding razorbill, guillemot, Kittiwake and fulmar are noisy as you pass their colonies and, given enough water, kayak under the bridge.

Beyond the harbour there is a sand bank that breaks in seaward side of Sheep Island. A partial reef between the island and the former chalk quarry of Larrbane is best passed through the gap close to the sea stack. A spectacular staircase cave can be found midway along the limestone shore leading to the tiny archipelago of Carrick-a-Rède and its famous rope bridge.

Major geological faulting created the tilted rock stacks on the approach to **Ballyltoy Harbour**. This picturesque haven with its lime kilns was once a lively place where burnt lime was exported and fishing boats were busy. Note the extraordinary structure of Bendoo House on a corner above the harbour, where Cornish artist Newton Penrose (died 1978) laboured single-handed for forty years to create an eccentric home.

Whitepark Bay, with surf and tide rips, is dominated by the island's 7,000 years of human history is peppered with invasions, massacres and emigrations. Today's resident remains such as the bones of the now extinct great auk. Stone Age settlement where excavations revealed food gyphaea ("Devil's toenails", an ancient bivalve shell. Exposed beds of soft flss clay contain fossils, such as the

the smallest church in Ireland tucked in at the south end of the pier at Portbraddan (Port of the Salmon) is private, with the white and blue Millhouse. Others occasionally visit the shore below the holiday homes.

Rock stacks, small bays and banks of seaweed washed up century to the 1300s, this was a busy shore, the white typify the coast to White Park Bay. From the eighteenth century to the 1930s, this was a busy shore, where the dried smoke of kelp burners marking small kilns where the dried seaweed was melted down to produce kelp, rich in useful salts.

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Kinnbeg Castle, Kinnabeg Head



By Carrick-a-Rède



The North Coast Sea Kayak Trail can be followed in either direction, but travelling with the flood tide, this guide takes you west to east, from Magilligan Point in County Londonderry to Torr Head in County Antrim, then south to Waterfoot at the mouth of Glenariff, Queen of the Glens of Antrim. You can choose to paddle any one of the six sections, each offering something different. For the experienced sea kayaker there are tide races, overfalls, exciting Atlantic swells, hidden reefs to keep you alert, and a challenging but rewarding circuit of Rathlin Island. You will also find plenty of more moderate paddling to enable enjoyment of the varieties of scenery, wildlife and local history.

Ancient castles, the Giant's Causeway and a dramatic rope bridge are just a few of the tourist attractions. There is a good range of access points, from tiny and forgotten fishing piers to beaches of sand and cobbles and several lively harbours.

Wildlife treats include clamouring seabird colonies, inquisitive seals and the chance of sighting porpoise, dolphin and perhaps a whale (cetaceans). Landing places and their facilities are marked on the map and this information is not repeated in the text. Paddlers can extend their journey by continuing on the adjoining Foyle Canoe Trail or East Coast Canoe Trail.

Magilligan to Portrush (12NM)

The imposing defensive structure of the Martello Tower, built in the early 1800s, marks the launching place to start you on this north coast trail. Launch from the beach just below the Point Bar. Keep clear of the pier and its ferry boat crossing the narrows to Greencastle in County Donegal, and be aware of the military presence and security patrols when parking.

Between **Magilligan** and **Benone** there is a military firing range extending almost 3 nautical miles out to sea. When planning your journey it is essential to 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 on hoisted flagstaffs on the beach. There are no buoys marking the range out to sea.

Ballycastle has a busy marina and harbour with a regular ferry service to Rathlin Island. Canoeists should stay clear of the ferry slip and marina entrance and use the public slip closest to the marina only after contacting the Harbour Master. The huge profile of Fair Head (190 metres, just over 600 feet) with its massive boulder field below dominates this eastern corner. Layers of sandstone below the dark dolerite (a hard basalt beloved by rock climbers) glow warm in the evening sun, and the carboniferous rocks in this area are riddled with the adits of old coal and iron ore mines. The level site of the workings at Carrickmore feature falcons may be heard nearby.

Ballycastle to Waterfoot (16NM)

Heading west from the harbour under the white cliffs takes you past numerous narrow caves and chalk pillars. At Cooragh Bay, an old pier and ramp mark the landing site for building materials used in the construction of the West Moorlands and sheep pastures lie above the rugged shore on the way to **Cushendall**. Continuing south, the sandstones of Red Bay come into view. Your journey ends (or begins!) at the beach of **Waterfoot**, welcomed by the magnificent glacial valley of Glenariff, one of the nine Glens of Antrim.

Tens of thousands of seabirds – chiefly guillemot, razorbill, puffin, kittiwake and fulmar – come and go from their breeding colonies on the western and northern cliffs from May to August, and Atlantic grey seals haul out on isolated rocks. There are some spectacular sea caves along the north side. The eastern shore is more low-lying and very rocky, beginning at the Bruce and castle where Scottish king-to-be Robert the Bruce was said to have found sanctuary in 1307 and been inspired by a determined web-spinning spider. Heading for Rue Point, enjoy the fantastic rock columns at Doon Point, elder duck and seals below the ruins of the smuggler's house and coastguard station at Ushet Port. Paddling back to the harbour, you will find more seals hauled out at Mill Bay. Keep a respectful distance – they need to rest, dry out and digest their latest fishy feast.

Seabird Centre.

The island's 7,000 years of human history is peppered with invasions, massacres and emigrations. Today's resident population is around 70.

Rathlin is a challenging excursion, even for experienced paddlers. Crossing the sound from any departure point is best timed as close as possible to slack water. Two notorious tide races and overfalls are Slough-na-More on the SNM route from Ballycastle to **Church Bay** harbour, and the McDonnell Race off the East Lighthouse. There are other turbulent areas at all major headlands, notably along the north side. Nevertheless, a circuit of the island, best done clockwise to take advantage of the island's complex tides, is a memorable trip. Porpoise, dolphin and whales are increasingly being sighted around Rathlin.

Cliffs give way to steep sheep-grazed slopes from Torr Head south to **Cushendun**. The narrow channel between Torr and the Mull of Kintyre opposite is worth watching for porpoise and minke whale. The only surviving salmon bag nets are fished in summer at Torr Head and Cushendun. The latter's distinctive architecture was the creation of Welshman Clough Williams Ellis and most of the village is owned by the National Trust.



Puffins Image courtesy of NIEA



Experience adventure, beauty and nature on Northern Ireland's

North Coast Sea Kayak Trail

This 70 nautical mile route around Ireland's north-east corner offers varieties of rugged scenery and wildlife that are unique. There is something for all kayaking abilities.Go for it!



Giant's Causeway

A more detailed synopsis of tidal information for the North Coast Canoe Trail is available at www.canoeing.com

The most powerful tides on the Causeway Coast are to be found in the vicinity of Torr Head and Fair Head where large overfalls can be expected and conditions are particularly dangerous in conditions of wind against tide.

The Causeway Coast is a blend of rocky shores and headlands interspersed with golden sandy beaches. The tides offshore flood east and the rate increases as it is forced between Ireland and Scotland with Rathlin Island at the entrance to the Irish Sea. There are a number of currents and counter currents experienced closer inshore. Overfalls and tide races are found at all the headlands with eddies often running between these. Care should be taken when wind is in opposition to tide given that this coast is exposed to the Atlantic swell. When planning a trip reference should be made to the Irish Coast Pilot, Irish Cruising Club Sailing Directions for the East and North Coasts of Ireland, Admiralty Tidal Stream Atlas NP218 and relevant Admiralty Charts.

Tidal Information

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The impressive dolerite escarpment of Fair Head is bisected by the legendary Grey Man's Path capped by a lintel of columnar basalt. Take care negotiating the fierce tide races around Fair Head and Torr Head - this journey is only suitable for suitably experienced and prepared canoeists. Between these two promontories is the wooded and geologically varied Murlough Bay, with its remote cottage (pige) set by another old fishing site. The harbour and slip at Torr offer welcome shelter and the opportunity to rest having rounded the spectacular headlands.

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Fair Head



Safety
Canoeing is an adventure sport and as such should be treated with respect. If you are new to the sport, it is advisable to contact a Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI) approved provider or club where expert coaching and local knowledge can be provided. Details can be found at www.canl.org.uk

When taking part in canoeing consider the following safety advice:

- Attending a recognised training course to develop skills and to acquire safety and environmental knowledge is very important for safe paddling on the coast.
- It is recommended that canoeists consult the relevant Maps, Charts and Pilot and obtain up to date information on weather and tides before planning a trip on the sea.
- CANI recommends that paddlers leave details of their journey with the Coastguard and with a responsible adult based on the shore.
- Carry adequate basic safety equipment - spare clothes, extrafood, warm drink, form of shelter, First Aid kit, means of communication (VHF Radio, mobile phone), flares, torch and whistle.
- Wear appropriate buoyancy in the form of a personal lifejacket or buoyancy aid. Canoe buoyancy should be sufficient to keep the canoe afloat if you capsize.
- It is not recommended to canoe alone - three boats is the minimum required for most rescues.
- Be aware of other water users such as sailing boats, ferries and commercial shipping. Canoeists should make allowance for the limitations and needs of larger craft that are less maneuverable and may be restricted to deep water channels.
- Many parts of the North Coast Sea Kayak Trail experience extremely powerful tidal currents and should only be tackled by appropriately experienced canoeists.
- At busy harbours, canoeists should inform the Harbour Master of their approach.

Winds and Weather

The Shipping Forecast, Inshore Waters Forecast and Coastal Forecast can all be obtained from the BBC website news.bbc.co.uk/weather BBC radio 4 broadcast a shipping forecast four times daily – 0048hrs, 0520hrs, 1201hrs, 1754hrs. Sea area ‘Irish Sea’

Non-emergency contacts

Police non-emergency (Northern Ireland) 0845 600 8000
Belfast Coastguard non-emergency +44 (0)28 9146 3933

Emergencies

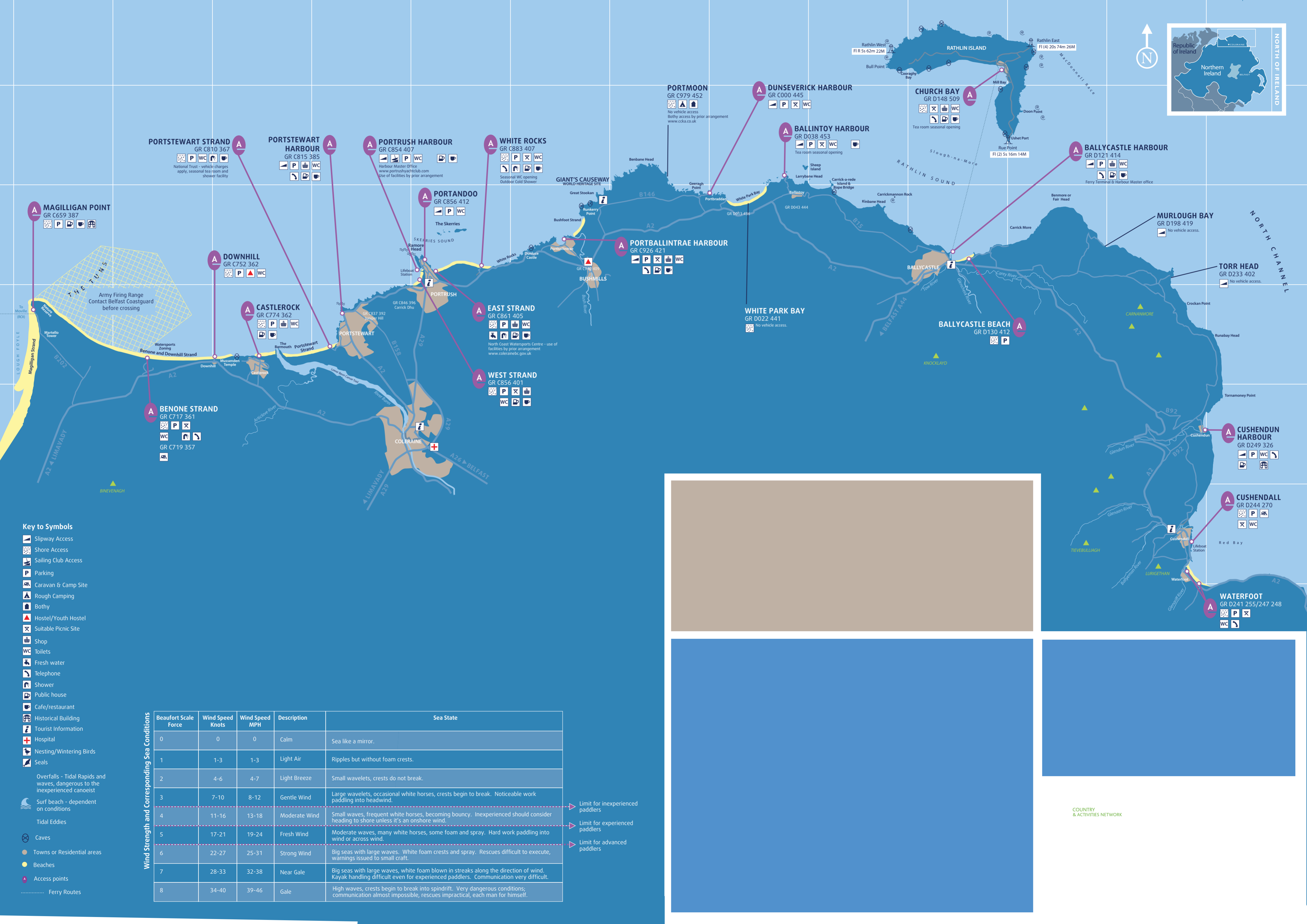
In the event of an emergency - **Dial 999 or 112** to contact Coastguard, police and ambulance. Use **VHF Radio Channel 16** to contact Coastguard

Harbour contact details

Portstewart Harbour +44(0)28 7034 7234
Portrush Harbour +44(0)28 7082 2307
Portballintrae Harbour +44(0)28 7034 7234
Ballycastle +44(0)28 2076 8225/ +44(0)78 0350 5084 VHF Ch80
Rathlin +44(0)28 2076 8225/ +44(0)78 0350 5084 VHF Ch80

Maps, charts and pilot

Maps required
OSNI Discoverer Map Series 1:50,000 Sheet 4 Coleraine
OSNI Discoverer Map Series 1:50,000 Sheet 5 Ballycastle
Other useful maps
OSNI Causeway Coast & Rathlin Island Activity Map 1:25,000
OSNI Glens of Antrim Activity Map 1:25,000
Admiralty Charts required
No: 2798 Lough Foyle to Sanda Island including Rathlin Island
No: 2199 North Channel - Northern Part
Other useful Charts - No: 2499 Lough Foyle
Publications required - UKHO Irish Coast Pilot NP40, NP218 Tidal Stream Atlas North Coast of Ireland and West Coast of Scotland
Irish Cruising Club: Sailing Directions East and North Coasts of Ireland



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