

Dalkey Island

Written by David Walsh

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O277-263 Sheet 50

An interesting small grassy island, it has a Martello Tower, a fort, black rabbits, goats and other furry creatures. No reliable water has been found but a well W of the church, just above the shore, is kept whitewashed. The views of Dublin Bay from both the Martello Tower and the ruined fort are well worth the trouble. Until a generation ago, the King of Dalkey Island was elected locally and crowned on the island, but the practice died out in the 1980s.

History

Vikings named it *Dalk Eyja* ("Thorn Island") and the Irish name means the same "*Deilg Inis*". Archaeological excavations have revealed Mesolithic Bann flakes, Neolithic hollow scrapers and Bronze Age arrowheads on the island. In the early medieval period, the island was a base for sea-going traders, importing goods from the Mediterranean and western France.

The medieval church is dedicated to St. Begnet. The lintelled doorway is a feature of the period prior to the 12th Century. The bellcote high on the gable above is likely to have been added later, possibly in the 15th Century. The high side walls might also have been raised about then. The fireplace at the E end was added when the church was used as a residence by soldiers and masons in the early 19th Century.

The Martello Tower and the gun battery were built in response to the threat of invasion from French forces around 1804 and 1805. The tower is exceptionally large. The original entrance is high up and was reached by a ladder. The present entrance (recently closed, unfortunately) is an insertion and leads directly into the magazine. The gun platform on the roof mounted two 24-pounder guns.

The gun battery is built into the granite cliffs on the southern tip of the island. While it is

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unimposing from the mainland, ships sailing into Dublin Bay would have had three large guns trained on them.

Embarkation

Embark from Bullock Harbour at O263-277, 3km NW, rather than the nearer Coliemore Harbour. Launching and parking is easier.

Landing

Landing is best at a little beach on the landward side of the NW corner, W of the church. There is also a little cove just inside the nearby pier. The beach here is usable except on the bottom third of the tide. A regular ferry runs from Coliemore Harbour opposite to the pier.

Tides

The tide runs strongly inside and outside Dalkey Island. Inside and outside the island, in Dalkey Sound and Muglins Sound, the tide turns at the same time, at Dublin HW and LW -0130. In springs, it turns at Dublin HW and LW -0200, achieving 2.5 knots.

Outside the Muglins the main coastal stream turns at Dublin HW.

One stream of the main flood tide swings around Killiney Bay and divides with one part eddying through Dalkey Sound and Muglins Sound (hence the timing differential). The main part sweeps E out to sea past the southern tip of the island. Overfalls occur where the streams reconnect, just off Sorrento Point at O273-261.

Expect bigger overfalls on the flood tide at the southern tip of the island. These are particularly big with a S or SE swell. Paddlers prefer to circumnavigate anticlockwise, especially on the flood, to avoid being pushed up onto the rocks at this point. If in doubt about the conditions, have a look first from a safe distance at Sorrento Point. Following the coast of the island will ensure you are in the full flow before you see the overfalls. A decision to turn back at this stage will mean paddling against a 2-3kn flow.

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