

THE KINCRAIG CHAIN WALK

Sailing in the confines of a pocket cruiser gives one an appetite for a walk and Elie has plenty of attractions for those on foot. The Kincaig Chain Walk is one, more of an easy climb than a walk, it is a low water traverse round Kincaig Point with fixed chains for aid. While the boat is dried out in the harbour waiting for the tide the chain walk provides an unusual diversion. Some previous climbing or scrambling experience is useful preparation. It is no place to discover an aversion to heights as there are no escape routes. The only options are to retrace ones steps or continue.

From seaward Kincaig Point is a very prominent feature. Although only rising to 63 metres above sea level its cliffs, radio mast, caves, wartime fortifications and basalt columns draw the eye; the surrounding country being low lying. Those who don't like heights can follow the Fife coastal path which goes over the top of the point. There to be rewarded with views across the mouth of the Forth and wartime defensive remains to explore. Commanding a panorama of the Forth the wartime coast watchers would have known the feature would probably attract early attention from any exploring enemy, quite a stimulus to concentration.

As an alternative to Elie harbour one can anchor off or for bilge keelers dry out in Shell Bay but the slightest swell or wash from a passing tanker when settling on the sand can give the boat a fearful bumping, especially on neaps as I discovered on an earlier visit. The sand is harder than you would imagine and 'hard as a pavement' is barely exaggerating.

Having settled the boat at the harbour, a walk through Elie and Earlsferry took me to the golf course where a track and path were followed round the back of the point to the west side. From here walking up to the second raised beach level the path branches off to the first chain. Close by two backpackers were pitching camp, a wonderful spot from which to view the sunrise over the mouth of the Forth and Isle of May.

There are seven chains counting the first up and down as one. The chains can be trusted, made of stainless steel, in perfect condition (2003) they are attached to the rock with expansion bolts. A series of excellent photographs and description of the chain pitches can be seen on the V-G website: <http://v-g.me.uk/Trips/T0647/T0647CW.htm> from which the accompanying photographs are reprinted by kind permission. More about the Fife coastal path can be found in "The Fife Coast" by Hamish Brown, Mainstream Publishing 1994 but much has been written about it.

The chain pitches tend to focus attention on the next hand and foothold but one should look wider so as not to miss the caves and the fluted basalt columns. Of cathedral dimensions, the columns arch above. You don't have to go to the Giant's Causeway or Fingal's Cave, we have them here on the Forth. At the base of the columns there is a shingle beach of dark basalt pebbles. I picked one up knowing how heavy and cold it would be to the touch, characteristics that come from its very fine grained structure and relatively low silica content. It is probably frowned on nowadays but I slipped it into my pocket as a souvenir, a tangible reminder as I write this.

Being overcast I didn't linger but worked my way steadily along the chains to the beach below the golf course. Here one rejoins the Fife coastal path. At the top of the beach I was met by a profusion of wild flowers, nutrients leaching down from the improved grassland of the golf course above doubtless being to thank for this. I almost walked on the entomology, two striking black and orange beetles (*Necrophorus investigator*) working very hard burying the body of a small rodent in the sandy soil, sustenance for the next generation.

Lower down the beach a picnic fire was still smouldering and a plastic fish box suggested it would be an interesting place to beach comb, the prevailing wind being onshore. By the same token this headland walk is pretty exposed to the elements but is a most attractive fair weather excursion. Next time I'll do the walk in reverse from east to west and spend longer looking at the caves and coastal defence remains. Another possibility would be to have a look at the Voes refuge beacon, a maritime curiosity and link with a by gone age.

Explorations ashore are part of cruising and the Forth has great variety to offer this sector of the sport, all the more so if one anchors off, adding the challenges of planning, finding good holding and being ready to depart quickly should the weather change.

Paul Shave, yacht Blue Spindrift, February 2005.

SUBJECT TITLE: KINCRAIG CHAIN WALK, KINCRAIG POINT, FIFE.

Subject: A scramble round a rocky headland with fixed chains for aid. The route passes caves and basalt columns. On the headland above there are remains of wartime fortifications.

Warning: This is a LW excursion. There are no escape routes. The only ways off are to retrace ones steps or continue. Whilst easy climbing, some of the sections are quite exposed. This is no place to discover you don't have head for heights.

Chart No: 734 **Lat/Long:** 56° 11'.2 N 002° 52'.0W

OS 1:50,000 sheet number 59 **Grid Ref.:** NT 466997

Subject description: This traverse of Kincaig Point should be the highlight of the Fife coastal path. In fact it receives little publicity.

From the West, walking up to the second raised beach level the path branches off to the first chain. At the East end the route terminates on the shore below the golf course.

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Approach by sea: Off lying rocks mean this headland is best given a wide berth.

Directions by land: Elie is on the A917 coast road. From Elie take the road West to Earlsferry and leave the car there. Walk to the East end of the Chain Walk or take the track and path over the golf course and round the back of the Point to the West side.

Anchoring / Mooring: The most convenient base is Elie harbour, taking the ground on the visitor's berth. One can do the walk while waiting for the tide. Bilge keelers can take the ground in shell bay. Settled weather is needed for this as the sand is hard as a pavement. The wash from a passing tanker can give the boat a fearful bumping as she settles. Alternatively one can anchor off Shell Bay or in Largo Bay avoiding the gas pipeline anchoring exclusion zone. A crew is advised so that the dinghy is not left unattended.

Other local information: Facilities at the Shell Bay caravan site including Calor gas.

References / weblinks:

1. A series of excellent photographs and description of the chain pitches can be seen on the V-G website: <http://v-g.me.uk/Trips/T0647/T0647CW.htm>
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