

Introduction

Cullen HM 01542 831700 (located at Buckie)
Portknockie HM 01542 831700 (located at Buckie),

Both of these harbours are administered by Morayshire County Council from Buckie, there is no watchkeeper stationed at either harbour.

Of the two harbours, Portknockie is more accessible as Cullen is very tidal but on the other hand Cullen is the larger of the two towns and has more to offer in the way of shops and pubs. They both have inner and outer harbours and there are small pontoons in both inner harbours occupied by local boat owners.

Portknockie harbour is accessible at all states of the tide there being a least depth at the entrance of 2m and a fin keeler will stay afloat throughout the tide berthed against the wall just inside the outer harbour. You will only get in to Cullen a couple of hours either side of HW. Both harbours are open to the NW and in any set from the Northern quadrant there will be surge in their outer harbours; it is interesting to note from a close in Google Earth shot of Portknockie that there are a couple of local boats moored across the corners of the outer harbour away from the wall. The view of Cullen from the sea is dominated by the disused railway viaduct to the west of the harbour, whilst Portknockie harbour entrance is difficult to identify as the harbour wall is the same colour as the cliffs behind it (though the town on the cliffs overlooking the harbour is an easily identified feature from miles away)

Cullen is the older of the two towns, there having been a fishing village here since time immemorial. First settled by Picts, it has a rich history. The original village was around the mouth of the stream which flows into the bay beneath the railway arches; it moved inland up the banks of that stream but was eventually moved half a mile to the east which is the sight of the present town. It is said that the move to the east was made by one of the Lairds when they developed Cullen House, because the old town spoiled his view!!

Portknockie came to life in the seventeenth century and flourished along with Cullen during the height of the herring fishing; it's now mainly a residential village and, although it had, at one time, nearly fifty shops and businesses they have all but vanished and most people travel to Buckie for their domestic needs although there is a slightly larger Co-op in Cullen.

Like most of the other harbours on this coast the two towns flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a fishing villages; they were connected to the railway system (hence the viaduct) in the mid nineteenth century until the Beeching axe fell in the 1960s. The original decline in the towns' fortunes was not brought about by the diminishing fish stocks but, like the other small harbours, by the increasing industrialisation of the industry making them inaccessible to the larger, more profitable boats. Even today there are boats officially based in these harbours but which seldom use them, plying their trade out of Buckie, Burghead or Fraserburgh.

Both harbours are popular with recreational sailors on this coast from both Lossiemouth and Banff/Whitehills and for a cruising sailor from further afield with time to dally they are well worth a visit.

Approach

Cullen should be approached during the last half of the flood tide from West of North....

.... avoiding the reefs and rocks to the East of it. In strong northerlies you should not attempt entry. From Scar Nose to the West you can make directly for the white light house on the end of the North pier but it is better to hold out in deeper water until the harbour is broad on the port bow; that way you'll avoid the increasing swell and rocks closer inshore.

Portknockie should be approached on a South-easterly heading (143°T) from about 2 cables out; there are FW lead in lights at night which are against an orange street light back ground. There reefs and rocks out to a cable off shore both East and West of the harbour entrance. Again, the harbour is inaccessible in strong onshore winds.

Berthing

At both harbours the absence of a Harbour Master means...

... that you will have to decide yourself where to moor and you will probably find that the local skippers have taken the "choice" berths with the longest tide range.

At Cullen you will have to take the ground but at Portknockie it is possible to berth alongside in the outer harbour in a keel boat. In inclement weather you would wise to find a berth inside.

They charge £26 (2025) per night for visitors unless you have a "Rover ticket" (£75 per week). You should inform Buckie of your presence there so that they can send some one to collect the dues.

The Rover ticket is valid in Moray Council and Aberdeenshire council harbours - with the exception of Lossiemouth, Whitehills, Banff, Macduff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Aberdeen itself. So basically useless in just about every harbour you would normally use North of Stonehaven.

Alternatively you can pay **on line** [HERE](#)

Facilities

Basic: water and toilets are available on the quays but nothing else. No fuel, but you might find Gas or Gaz at Storch's hardware store in Cullen on the main street down to the harbour.

What To Do

At both villages you will have to climb away from the harbour to find everything, not that there is much of anything apart from a few pubs, paper shops and a fish and chip shop (Cullen only). Cullen has a good fishing tackle shop and also a Co-op of moderate size.

The pub at Portknockie (The Seafield Inn) does not have a bar menu but can do "toasties" and is dog friendly! There is always the coast bus service which runs in either direction. This route takes one past the Cullen Bay Hotel which is halfway between the two harbours and has an excellent menu. There is a cycle path between Cullen and Portknockie (along the old railway line) which is convenient for this hotel on a sunny evening. There is also a good pub on the harbour at Findochty; but you'll be going there anyway won't you?

[Restaurants & Places to Eat in Cullen - Tripadvisor](#)

History