

Boats of Loch Awe

Loch Awe

- landlocked (see map)
- deepest part is 93.6m (307ft)
- average depth is 32m (105 ft)
- longest freshwater loch in Scotland 41 km or 25 miles
- significant places:
 - St Conans Kirk,
 - Kilchurn Castle
 - Innis Chonnell Castle
 - Innishail
 - Fraoch Eilean
 - Ederline Boathouse
- around 20 ruins of crannog sites have been found on Loch Awe which were used from the Iron Age till around the 6th century AD. One is directly opposite St Conan's
- many clans lived around the shores of Loch Awe:
 - MacArthurs
 - Campbells
 - Stewarts
 - MacGregors
 - MacNaughtons
 - MacNabs
- Fish in Loch Awe:
 - brown, ferox and rainbow trout
 - perch
 - pike
 - roach
 - eels
 - migratory salmon and trout travel into the loch by the River Awe

Prehistoric and Clan Boats

These were simple watercraft used around the loch by clans. Wooden dugouts and coracle types made of branches and animal skins or reeds, both with wooden paddles. These were used for transport locally to move around the island clan strongholds and for fishing.

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Boats in the Medieval Era (500AD to 1500AD)

The Birlinn, a traditional wooden boat or small galley with a keel used with a sail and with oars for rowing. The boats held about 8 people and were very easy to manoeuvre around the loch.

The birlinn was used to navigate the long loch during conflicts with the vikings and clans.

Tradition says that The Lord of the Isles used these boats in the open sea and in sea lochs to defeat the Vikings whose galleys were flat bottomed, cumbersome and not easy to turn around quickly.

John MacDougall son of the MacDougall Clan leader Alexander, probably used a birlinn on the loch to watch the outcome of the Battle of the Pass of Brander between the MacDougall Clan and Robert the Bruce's forces before escaping to England with his father.

Traditional Ferries (from the 1600s)

Small row boat ferries carried people, goods and livestock between local crossing points eg Portsonachan and Taycreggan

Arrival of the railway

By 1880 rail was used to transport goods and people. It brought tourists and commercial steamboats to Loch Awe

Well known Boats

From about 1870 to 1950 there were a total of 15-20 engine powered boats on Loch Awe

The Loch Awe (launched at the far end of the Loch in 1876)

The Ben Cruachan (later the Glen Orchy and refitted with a diesel engine around 1920)

2 Countess of Breadalbanes, the 2nd stopped about 1950

These took passengers, mail and supplies up and down the loch

The Decline

changing water levels and loss of businesses along with better roads led to the gradual end of the steamer services with the remaining steamers being largely for pleasure. The Countess of Breadalbane finished transporting passengers, mail and goods and left by road! In 1952 and resumed life on the River Clyde.

Modern Craft

1. The ferry used by Walter Campbell and his family was a catmeran which transported him and his family from the lochside to Innischoonian where his house was situated. P61 St Conan's guidebook Much later, after WW2, a causeway was built to get to the island
2. Nowadays you can see recreational boats mostly with engines on the Loch along with canoes and kayaks used by visitors to explore .