

### Key Information

The Mawddach Estuary has to be one of the most beautiful estuaries in the UK. Surrounded by mountains, it flows through spectacular countryside and is steeped in history. And, if you time it right, you'll get tidal assistance all the way!

#### Start:

The Promenade,  
Barmouth LL42 1NF

#### Finish:

Penmaenpool Car  
Park LL40 1YD

#### Portages: 0

**Time:** 1.5–2.5 hours

**Distance:** 6.5 miles (one-way)

**OS Map:** Explorer OL23

Cadair Idris and Llyn Tegid



#### For more

information

scan the QR code  
or visit:

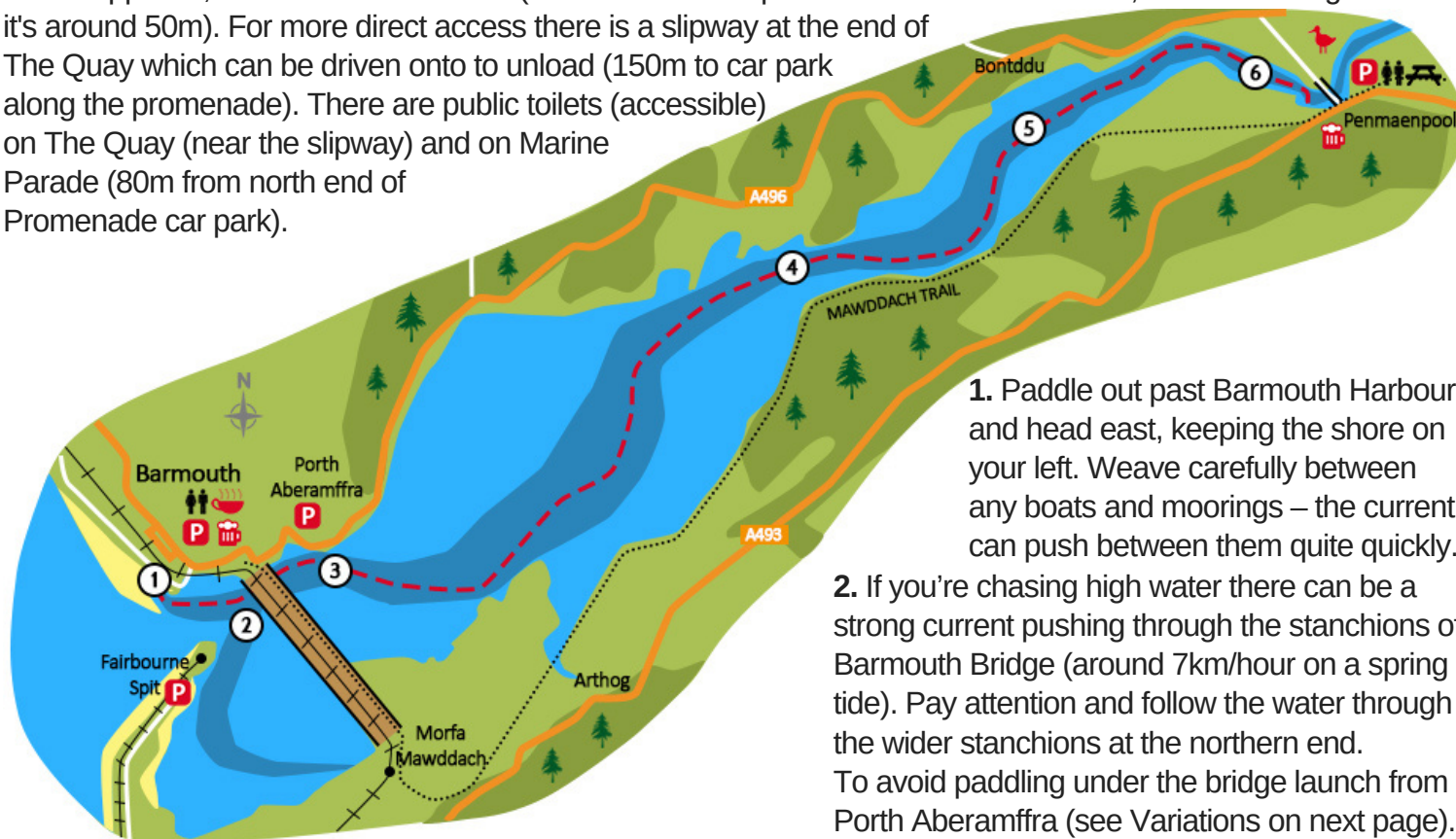
[bit.ly/3iewKF5](http://bit.ly/3iewKF5)



This is a tidal trail – if you aim to arrive at Penmaenpool at high water (approx 30 mins after high water at Barmouth) you'll get tidal assistance and fewer sandbanks. For tide times, visit: [www.ukho.gov.uk/easytide](http://www.ukho.gov.uk/easytide)  
This is an open stretch of water that is exposed to the wind, which can have a serious impact on the conditions and the ability to paddle. A strong wind can create waves and difficult, choppy conditions. Check the forecast and choose a calm day. Avoid the 'return' option in SW winds.

The sandbanks shift continually: the exact route/channel may be different to the map below or to OS maps etc. If in doubt, the harbourmaster at Barmouth is a good source of local knowledge.

Park at the south end of Promenade car park (pay and display, accessible bays). Access the water via the sandy beach opposite, inside the harbour wall (distance from car park to water varies with tide; 2hrs before high water it's around 50m). For more direct access there is a slipway at the end of The Quay which can be driven onto to unload (150m to car park along the promenade). There are public toilets (accessible) on The Quay (near the slipway) and on Marine Parade (80m from north end of Promenade car park).



1. Paddle out past Barmouth Harbour and head east, keeping the shore on your left. Weave carefully between any boats and moorings – the current can push between them quite quickly.

2. If you're chasing high water there can be a strong current pushing through the stanchions of Barmouth Bridge (around 7km/hour on a spring tide). Pay attention and follow the water through the wider stanchions at the northern end. To avoid paddling under the bridge launch from Porth Aberamffra (see Variations on next page).

3. The flow eases a little after the bridge; now is the time to find and follow the deepest channel (go with the flow!). If you do get beached, as the tide is rising, you won't have to wait long till you're afloat again (alternatively the sandbanks are fairly firm to stand on). Take in the stunning views of Cadair Idris (893m) to the south and Diffwys and the Rhinogs to the north. Keep an eye out for wildlife too; the estuary is usually busy with wading birds and gulls.
4. As the estuary narrows the flow can pick up again, so enjoy the flow and the spectacular scenery.
5. The village of Bontddu is on the left shore, which was the centre of a mini-gold rush in the late 1800s!
6. When the wooden toll bridge comes into view, head towards the right shore. The get-out is in a field on the right, about 200m before the bridge. Look out for a line of trees on the outside of the bend and aim for the far end of them. A footpath runs across the field to a gate in the corner and a track beyond. There is a layby by the gate which can be used to load boats (but not for parking). (Access to layby: 50m, grass.)  
Parking is either in the George III Hotel (for patrons only – however, maybe reward yourself with some well-earned refreshments?) (Access: 150m, gravel/tarmac, accessible bays.) Or in the Penmaenpool nature reserve car park (accessible bays), which has a picnic area and toilets (accessible). (Access: 300m, gravel/ tarmac.)

## VARIATIONS

If you want to avoid paddling under the bridge, launch from Porth Aberamffra (about ½ mile east of Barmouth, on the A496). Park in the layby and cross the road to the harbour and slipway opposite. This is gated but has pedestrian access (100m from layby to slipway, tarmac).

Fairbourne Spit is an alternative launch to Barmouth, on the opposite/south side of the estuary. There's a car park at the end of Penrhyn Drive North, with a gravel track (driveable) to the water. The distance to the water varies with the tide; 2 hours before high water it's about 30m (gravel/grass). There are no facilities here but it tends to be quieter than Barmouth. You can still paddle to the wider spans at the north end of Barmouth Bridge from here; however, the tide will be carrying you towards the bridge so pay attention and paddle positively!

If you'd like to do a return journey, and paddle back to your starting point, wait for the tide to turn at Penmaenpool and then follow it back. This will be a falling tide so don't delay and choose your channels carefully; if you get beached it can be a long drag to the water! Check the forecast as a headwind can be an issue and can create waves and very challenging conditions. A SW wind is definitely best avoided. Top tip: on your paddle upstream, pay attention to where the deepest channels are so you know which to follow on the way back.



*North end of Barmouth Bridge at low water*

*Photo: Pete Catterall Photography*



*Penmaenpool toll bridge at low water*

*Photo: Pete Catterall Photography*

In the 18th century the Mawddach Estuary was a busy shipbuilding centre – over a hundred ships were launched between 1770 and 1827. They were built in the estuary's creeks using oak from the nearby woodlands, and then towed by rowing boat to Barmouth to be rigged.

Shipbuilding wasn't the only industry in the area: in the 19th century Bontddu was at the heart of a brief gold rush. The remains of the Clogau Gold Mine lie in the woods behind the village; it was one of a series of goldmines working a seam along the north shore of the estuary and up towards Coed y Brenin. Although the mines closed many years ago, prospectors still pan the river for gold.

Barmouth Bridge was built in 1864 to carry the main coastal rail line across the estuary. A drawbridge was located at the north end to allow tall ships to pass (the wide spans you may have paddled under). It is the longest timber viaduct in Wales and one of the oldest in regular use in Britain. It is unusual as it has a footbridge as well as a rail bridge.

The rail line from Dolgellau to Morfa Mawddach closed in 1964 and is now the Mawddach Trail – a level and wide leisure trail that runs for 8 miles between Dolgellau and Morfa Mawddach (and onto Barmouth via Barmouth Bridge).

Penmaenpool reedbed is one of the largest in Wales and is an important habitat for wetland birds such as redshank and merganser. It is also a perfect habitat for otters which breed and hunt along the river.

Further information can be found at the following websites:

[www.canoewales.com](http://www.canoewales.com)  
[www.britishcanoeing.org.uk](http://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk)  
[www.gopaddling.info](http://www.gopaddling.info)  
[www.ukho.gov.uk/easytide](http://www.ukho.gov.uk/easytide)



## Safety and Licences

We want you to enjoy a safe trip, so here are a few tips for staying safe and paddling responsibly

**Paddle Safe. Be prepared and take the right kit:**

- Wear a correctly sized buoyancy aid
- Mobile phone – in a waterproof case
- Whistle – to attract attention in case of emergency
- Map and/or route description
- Appropriate clothing for the weather conditions +spares in a dry bag
- Food, drink & suncream!

**Paddle Responsibly. Respect the natural environment and other users:**

- Respect other waterway users #sharethespace
- Be environmentally aware, minimise your impact
- Ensure you have the correct licence if required
- Observe navigational rules – keep right and give other users space
- Check, Clean, Dry after every trip!

**Licences:** The waterway on this trail doesn't require you to have a licence to paddle on it. However if you paddle regularly you should consider becoming a member of Canoe Wales (or British Canoeing if you live in England). Membership gives you a whole range of benefits including a licence to paddle on 4500km of Britain's waterways and Civil Liability Insurance, worth up to £10 million. Not only will membership help save you money, it will give you peace of mind when out on the waterways. For more information on Canoe Wales membership please click [here](#).