

Avoiding Rocks

Dartmouth is a relatively easy entrance with deep water and the main hazards are well buoyed. But there are some isolated submerged or semi-submerged rocks around that regular sailors in the area need to be aware of, especially if sailing close inshore to cheat the tide while racing.

Following a recent incident this is a reminder of the rocks that you most need to be aware of. We would emphasize that you should be familiar with and use charts in addition to chart plotters and GPS, plus navigational aids such as buoys and transits.

Most of the submerged rocks are only a problem at LW Springs. In an evening there will always be at least 1m of tide over Chart Datum (evening low tides are always neaps at Dartmouth), but at midday a spring low tide can be 0.2m BELOW Chart Datum (CD).

Nimble Rock

This isolated rock is a hazard on the way to Berry Head, about 1.25 Nautical Miles (nM) North East of the Mew Stone and 0.3nM SE off Scabbacombe Head.

It is easy to avoid as it is in line with Eastern Blackstone Rock and Start Point Lighthouse. So, if you can see Start Point lighthouse you will miss it. Easy, except in poor visibility when GPS or chart plotter is needed. It is usually marked by fishing buoys or even a boat fishing.

Position: 50deg20'.827N 3deg30'.528W 1metre below Chart Datum

Rocks inshore of the Mewstone

There are a number of hazards in the channel between the Mew Stone and the shore and unless you have a shallow draft, a good chart and a good reason we would suggest avoiding this area altogether.

West Rock

This isolated rock is awash at LAT and so can be hit at anything less than half neap tide. It is about 200 metres NNE of West Rock Buoy. All our racing instructions specify passing seaward of West Rock Buoy to avoid this hazard.

Position 50deg19'.960N 3deg32'.406W awash at CD

Bears Tail

This inshore rock is 150m metres due south of Inner Froward Point. By staying in at least 10m of water (plus tidal height, say 13m) you would miss it. Kingswear Castle needs to well open of the shore to clear.

Position: 50deg20'. 20.055N 3deg32'.663W dries 0.6m at CD

Castle Ledge (Old Castle Rock 1m below CD)

We probably all sail over this area inshore of Castle Ledge Buoy with apparent impunity. The ledge is North East of the buoy 2-4m below chart datum but Old Castle rock is only 1.8m below CD, roughly mid way between the buoy and the shore.

Checkstone

Checkstone Buoy is only 35 metres due East from Kitten Rock (1.8m below CD) and is there for a purpose. Stay to the east of it or very close if using Checkstone as a rounding mark. There is a shallow ledge 0.3m below CD $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way from the shore to the buoy.

Meg Rocks

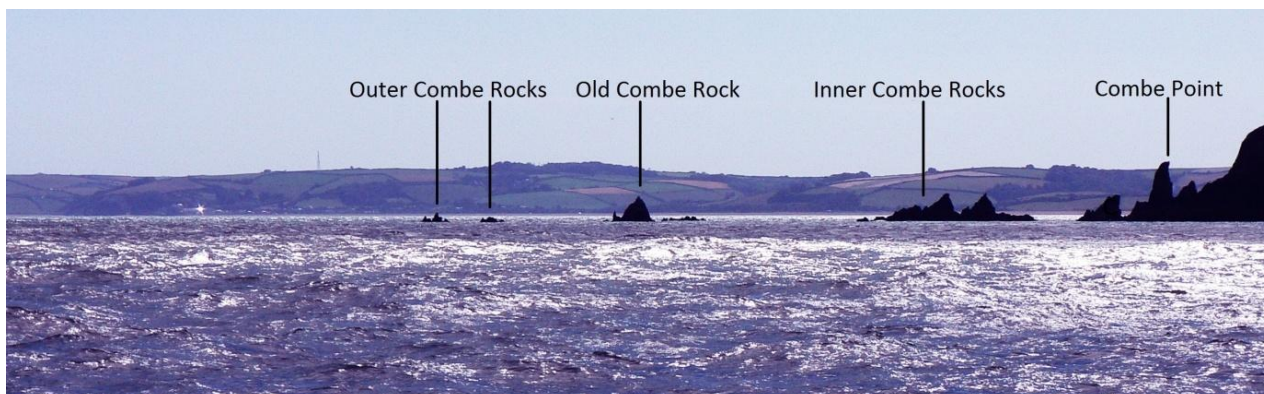
These rocks north of Combe Point dry 3m. Kingswear castle clear of Blackstone Point will clear.

Western Blackstone Rocks

The rocks themselves never cover, but not only have eastward extensions but also isolated rocks 75 metres West and SW at 1.5 and 1.2m below CD, so avoid at anything less than 2m of tide. The passage inshore is otherwise clear.

Homestone

This is 0.9m below Chart Datum so can be (and has been) hit at extreme low tide by a deep keeled yacht. It is about 275m due West of Homestone Buoy and in an area we usually sail across obliviously. At extreme low tide (less than 1.5m above CD) avoid. Keep Kingswear Castle well clear of the transit with Western Blackstone.



Combe Rocks and the Dancing Beggars.

Combe Rocks are the well known rocks (often erroneously called the Dancing Beggars which is actually a rock 0.8nM further West) with a series of steep pinnacles always visible off Combe Point.

The dangerous ones are Outer Combe Rocks about 100m due East and another one 100m South West of the visible one, which cover at 2.7 to 3.7m of tide, so could be hit even on a 5m metre tide.

There are two transits that JUST clear these rocks.

1. If you can see Kingswear Castle clear of the extreme point of Blackstone Point you will just clear East of all the rocks, OR
2. If you can see Eastern Blackstone Rock clear to seaward of the Mew Stone you will just clear south of all the rocks.

I suggest one lunchtime on a low Spring tide go out and have a look at the transits, just to scare yourself!

Warning and Disclaimer.

This is a list of the main hazards around the entrance to the River Dart and is for general guidance only and should not be relied on for navigation. You should use large scale local charts of the approaches to satisfy yourself of the areas that are safe to sail in, and make sure you know the transits that keep you clear of the rocks.

Charts

Admiralty chart 5602-10 (part of the Leisure Folio SC5602) and SC2253 shows the area in detail.

Sailing Committee, Royal Dart Yacht Club, updated 13 August 2015