

TABLET & SMARTPHONE APPS ON BOARD

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Mobile apps on tablets and smartphones have become increasingly useful on board. They offer everything from mapping, weather information, safety aids, to on board entertainment and social networking. I have highlighted just a small number of the many available for popular devices such as iPhone/iPad or Android smartphones and tablets. They can be downloaded from Apple's App store, or Google Play for Android devices.

INTERNET ACCESS

Some apps require internet access others do not. Fast internet access is only available in areas with good 3G signal coverage, which is not available on much of the waterways with the notable exception of three.ie who seem to have excellent 3G mobile broadband coverage along most of the Shannon navigation delivering 5M bandwidth even in rural locations. You can use a smartphone to create a WIFI hotspot for your WIFI only tablet when on board, unless you already have a SIM card in a cellular tablet model. Another alternative is to use a portable pocket WIFI hot spot device. From extensive tests last year only three.ie seemed to have adequate rural 3G coverage. MIFI units allow up to five devices to connect when on board using WIFI (cost approx €20/month). I have used one to connect tablets and laptop with sufficiently fast internet access while on board, fast enough to watch streamed TV content and live sports. Other operator's 3G signals are limited to waterways passing through urban areas (eg Athlone, Carrick on Shannon, Killaloe, Dublin, etc).



GPS & NAVIGATION APPS

Mapping is one of the most useful apps on board. GPS mapping apps will only work on Apple or Android devices with a built-in GPS (eg iPad 3G+Wifi model) or in conjunction with an external Bluetooth GPS dongle. Navionics were the first to offer GPS maps covering the Shannon and Erne navigations back in 2007 and include inland coverage on the Navionics UK/Holland app which includes the coastal waters of the entire UK, Ireland and Holland. Inland coverage on Navionics

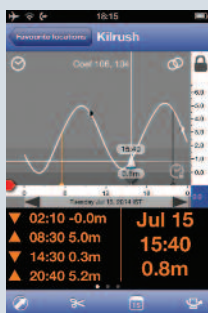


gives moderate situational awareness but lacks detail and has limited depth coverage. However the detailed coverage, colour shaded depth information, detailed harbour layouts, recommended routes and buoyage offered by the proven Garmin BlueChart Mobile app, and the soon to be released IWAi CSIG charts are excellent. The BlueChart Mobile 'North Western Europe' chart area includes the entire coastal waters of NW Europe in addition to the inland Shannon and the Shannon-Erne waterway. Coverage will be extended to the Erne later this year. One really neat feature of BlueChart Mobile is its ability to overlay real time Irish weather radar. It was primarily designed as a passage planning tool, but shows real time vessel position, speed and heading. At the time of writing this app has not yet been released on Android.

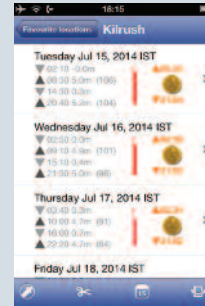


The excellent IWAi CSIG charts due to be released later this summer, will run on tablets and smartphone's using the free MemoryMap app and is the result of a community mapping project undertaken by IWAi members.

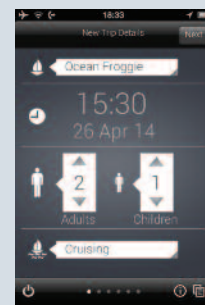
BlueChart Mobile, Navionics HD and MemoryMap do not require an internet connection while in use on board, only when at home as a once off exercise to download the required maps to your tablet or phones internal memory. The Google Maps app while lacking any marine features such as depth or buoyage, offers a degree of situational awareness with the map and satellite image views, but use with extreme caution because there is no indication of any underwater hazards or depths. An advantage of the Navionics and BlueChart Mobile apps is they include coastal waters and therefore coverage of the tidal Shannon estuary for those venturing into salt waters.



TidesPlanner is the best tidal app costing only €1.79 for an annual set of tide tables covering hundreds of Irish and UK ports



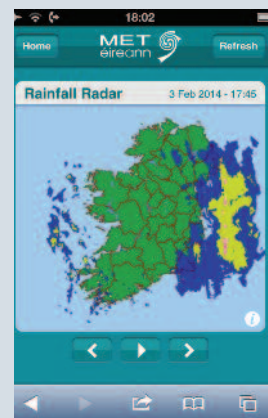
including Tarbert, Kilrush and Carrigaholt on the Shannon Estuary. TidesPlanner works off line as the database is stored on your mobile device. It can also display tidal stream currents, speed and direction. I use this app months in advance to plan trips, dates and times for coastal passages.



ISA SafeTrx is a new and useful safety app launched last year by the Irish Sailing Association. It allows you to log the start of a passage using your GPS enabled smartphone, specify the destination using a map, number of people on board, and expected estimated time of arrival. If you are late or do not tell the phone you have finished a passage, a nominated list of your chosen ICE contacts are sent an alert by text message and/or email.

Anchor Watch can be used on a smartphone to detect if your boat has moved outside a predetermined radius when anchoring overnight. If the anchor drags and the boat moves outside a safety radius an alarm sounds. Some versions allow a text to be sent to another phone in case you are not onboard when the anchor drags. Recommend phone is plugged into a charger overnight and placed near a window in your cabin because GPS eats phone batteries and needs to be sited near enough to wake you.

WEATHER APPS



Met Eireann's mobile web site www.met.ie is truly excellent offering simple but very informative displays based on a proven track record for accurate forecasts and real time weather data including the inland lakes and sea area forecasts. The real time rainfall radar is a unique and most useful feature of their website. The animated radar playback enables you to predict with some degree of

accuracy when rainfall is due to start or finish at your location.



Weather4D is an excellent visual animated weather forecasting tool offering wind, rainfall, cloud cover, temperature, wave and swell height information for tidal waters anywhere in the world. It is the app I depend on when making and planning long coastal passages but also useful inland. It only requires internet access when downloading the 7 day GRIB forecasts which are updated every four hours. It has the best visual presentation of weather information I have yet seen. Combined with Met Eireann I find these two apps deliver the best combination of marine weather data and forecasts.

INTERNET TV

TV and boats can be incompatible bed fellows either by choice or by technical limitation. However it can be useful and indeed entertaining to sometimes be able to watch TV or sports events on your tablet

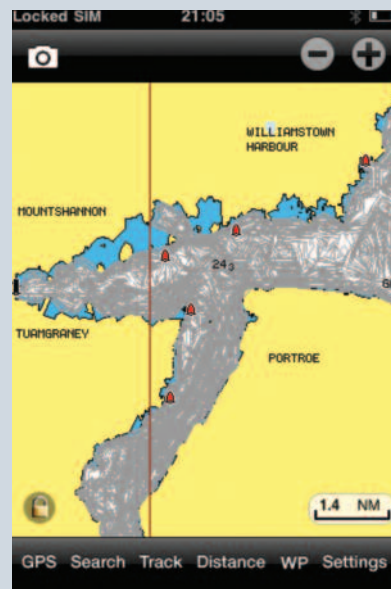
when on board. You will need a strong 3G mobile signal. The AerTV app requires €5.99 per month for Irish and UK BBC/ITV channels on a mobile device, but remains free on a computer. FilmOn offers free coverage of BBC/ITV channels in standard definition. SkyGo is an app for Sky subscribers to view a subset of channels live or on demand when away from home. Sky+ is a useful app that can send a remote record command to a subscribers sky+ set top when away from home. RTE Player and BBC Player offer free access to TV program playback in Ireland or NI respectively, especially useful for news and weather info. Video on demand apps such as Netflix on a monthly subscription offer an extensive choice of movies and TV programmes. If you are feeling technically adventurous you can hook your tablet or phone to your boats TV using a suitable AV cable and view on a larger screen than your mobile device.

PHOTO SHARING

Some folks enjoy taking photos and short video clips when on board using a smartphone camera and like to share them instantly with family and friends. Apps like PhotoBucket and Facebook allow you to achieve this. As soon as you take a photo you can use apps such as these to access your phones camera roll and upload the images to your Facebook page with the touch of an icon, or to your favourite photo hosting cloud service (eg Flickr, PhotoBucket, etc). Photos are large files and will need

decent 3G internet access speeds.

There are many more interesting apps offering specialist information such as the Lough Derg Trail with amenity information and historical guides. Combined with mobile internet, great navigation and weather apps, today's generation of mobile internet devices have proved game changers for on board technology and real time information. Smartphones and tablets have brought low cost and many free apps to our waterways. Enjoy but don't forget to enjoy the "real world" scenery instead of the virtual screen.



| Mobile Apps on Board | Net | Cost |
|---|-----|---------|
| GPS Maps + Navigation | | |
| BlueChart Mobile NW-Europe | | €55 |
| Navionics HD UK/Holland | | €45 |
| MemoryMap (IWAI CSIG Charts due summer 2014) | | €10 |
| Google Maps – no depth info | Y | free |
| TidesPlanner | | €1.79 |
| ISA SafeTrx | Y | free |
| Anchor Watch | | €0.89 |
| Weather | | |
| Met Eireann | Y | free |
| Weather 4D | Y | €7.99 |
| WeatherTrack | Y | €7.99 |
| Internet Live TV | | |
| FilmOn Free - BBC/ITV | Y | free |
| Sky Go (subscribers only) | Y | subs |
| AerTV – RTE, TV3, BBC, ITV | Y | €5.99/m |
| Internet TV On-Demand RTE Player | Y | free |
| BBC Player | Y | free/uk |
| Netflix | Y | €7/m |
| Sky+ (subscribers only) | Y | subs |
| Photo Sharing | | |
| Facebook | Y | free |
| Photobucket | Y | free |
| <i>Note: Items marked Y require broadband internet connection when in use</i> | | |

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