How to Use an Anchor Watch App for Sailing: Step-by-Step Guide

Learn how to use an anchor watch app for sailing with this complete step-by-step guide. Set up Boat Knot Meter in minutes — no experience required.

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Online version: https://appstoryo.com/en/blog/how-to-use-anchor-watch-app-sailing



Why a Step-by-Step Guide for Anchor Watch Apps?

The concept of an anchor watch app is simple, but using it correctly — setting the right radius, understanding what triggers the alarm, and knowing how to respond — makes the difference between a safety tool that protects you and one that wakes you up with false alerts every 20 minutes. This guide covers everything you need to know about **how to use an anchor watch app** effectively, using Boat Knot Meter as the example throughout.

Download Boat Knot Meter free on the App Store and follow along with this guide on your next anchoring.

Before You Anchor: Preparation

Check Your GPS Signal

Before leaving the dock or mooring, open Boat Knot Meter and confirm your iPhone has a GPS lock. The app should display your current position and speed. In areas with clear sky visibility, GPS locks within 30–60 seconds. If you are anchoring in a narrow fjord, between tall buildings on a marina, or under dense cloud cover, GPS accuracy may be reduced — allow more time for the signal to stabilise.

Charge Your iPhone

An anchor watch running overnight will use battery. If your iPhone is at 20% when you anchor, it will not last through the night. Aim for 80% or above before starting a long anchor watch. A 12V USB adapter or power bank eliminates the battery concern entirely and is worth having on board.

Know Your Anchoring Conditions

Before setting your alarm radius, think about your specific situation:

- **What is the holding ground?** Sand and clay hold well; rock and weed are less reliable.
- **How much rode are you deploying?** A 5:1 scope in 5 metres of water means 25 metres of chain and rode. Your swinging circle radius is at least 25 metres plus your boat length.
- **What are the hazards?** Nearby rocks, shoals, moored vessels, or a lee shore all affect how tight your alarm radius should be.
- **Is the tide expected to change significantly?** A large tidal range changes the effective scope ratio significantly.

Step-by-Step: Setting Up Your Anchor Watch

Step 1: Anchor Your Boat Normally

Use your standard anchoring procedure. Drop the anchor, let the rode out to your chosen scope, back down on the engine to set the hook, and verify the anchor is holding by watching transits (fixed objects aligned on shore) or watching your GPS position for any movement.

Step 2: Allow the Boat to Settle

After the anchor is set, wait 2–5 minutes for the boat to find its natural resting position in wind and current. The boat will swing back on the rode and come to rest in a predictable position. Setting the anchor watch before this happens will give you a slightly wrong reference point.

Step 3: Open Boat Knot Meter

Open the app on your iPhone. You will see your current GPS position. If the speed display shows 0 knots or near-zero, the boat has settled and GPS is locked onto your current position accurately.

Step 4: Tap the Anchor Button to Set Your Reference Point

The main screen of Boat Knot Meter has an anchor watch activation control. Tap it to lock in your current GPS coordinates as the anchor point. The app confirms the point has been set. This is now the centre of your alarm circle — your boat needs to remain within the radius you set from this exact position.

Step 5: Set the Alarm Radius

This is the most important step. Getting the radius right requires thinking about your specific situation.

The minimum practical radius should be equal to the length of your rode deployed (your swing radius). If you have 30 metres of rode out, the boat can swing in a circle 30 metres from the anchor. Setting the radius to 30 metres means you will get an alarm every time the boat swings — that is too tight.

A practical formula: Set the radius to the rode length plus 50–100% extra. For 30 metres of rode, set the radius to 50–60 metres. This gives you early warning of genuine drag without constant false alarms from normal swinging.

In crowded anchorages where space is tight, you may need to reduce this margin. In open anchorages with plenty of room, you can set a wider radius to filter out normal oscillation entirely.

Step 6: Enable Background Monitoring

For the anchor watch to work while you sleep or go below, the app must be allowed to run in the background. When you set the anchor watch in Boat Knot Meter, the app requests background GPS access. Grant this permission. You will typically see a blue GPS indicator in your iPhone status bar showing the app is actively monitoring.

Step 7: Test the System Before Going Below

Before leaving the cockpit, take a moment to verify the alarm is active. You can do this by momentarily increasing the radius beyond your current position and then restoring it — the alarm indicator should respond. You do not want to discover at 3 AM that you forgot to activate background mode.

Step 8: Go Below, Go Ashore, or Rest

The anchor watch is active. Boat Knot Meter is monitoring your position continuously. You can put the phone down, lock the screen, and go to sleep. If the anchor drags, you will be woken by the alarm.

What Happens When the Alarm Triggers?

The alarm sounds immediately when your boat moves beyond the set radius. The sequence of actions when you hear the alarm:

1. **Stay calm** — you have time. The alarm is an early warning, not a crash notification.
2. **Check your position** — open Boat Knot Meter and see how far you have moved from the anchor point and in which direction.
3. **Look around** — get on deck and visually assess the situation. Where are you relative to hazards?
4. **Take action** — options include re-anchoring immediately, letting out more scope, starting the engine and motoring into position, or waking the crew.

Tips for Avoiding False Alarms

False alarms — when the alarm triggers but the boat has not actually dragged — are the main frustration with anchor watch apps. Here is how to minimise them:

- **Set a generous radius** — too-tight radii produce constant false alarms from normal swinging
- **Wait for GPS to stabilise** — GPS accuracy improves over the first few minutes after acquiring a lock
- **Anchor in good holding ground** — a well-set anchor does not drag, so the alarm never needs to trigger
- **Account for tidal swings** — as the tide changes, the boat may swing to a different position within the same anchorage

Download Boat Knot Meter and Start Your First Anchor Watch

Following these steps will have you running a reliable anchor watch in under five minutes. Boat Knot Meter makes the process straightforward: one tap to set the anchor point, one adjustment to set the radius, and the app does the rest.

Download Boat Knot Meter free from the App Store and run your anchor watch tonight. There is no better feeling than knowing your boat is watched over while you rest.

Whether you are a first-time anchorer or an experienced passage-maker, having a reliable anchor watch app changes your nights at anchor. Get Boat Knot Meter free now and sleep soundly on your next anchorage.

Cite as: Lubor Šimůnek (2026). *How to Use an Anchor Watch App for Sailing: Step-by-Step Guide*. AppStoryo, lapnito.cz s.r.o.. https://appstoryo.com/en/blog/how-to-use-anchor-watch-app-sailing
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