

Who Put a Datacentre Under the Sea?

Written by Marco Attard
08 June 2018

In the quest to find better ways to both store and power hardware Microsoft looks to the planet's final frontier-- the company has put a container-size prototype datacentre in the seafloor near the Orkney Islands.



The deployment of the Northern Isles datacentre at the European Marine Energy Centre is a milestone in [Project Natick](#), a years-long initiative researching ways of building and operating "environmentally sustainable, prepackaged datacentre units" able to live underwater for years. As Microsoft puts it, "more than half" of the world's population lives around 120 miles (or 193km) of the coast. Thus, putting datacentres under the water near coastal cities makes sense, since it means data has a shorter distance to reach such communities via datacentre demanding less power and maintenance.

The Northern Isles datacentre consists of 12 racks holding 864 servers and associated cooling infrastructure. It was built in France before shipping to Scotland, where it was attached to a ballast-filled base and deployed on the rock slab seabed, a surprisingly delicate operation involving 10 winches, a crane, gantry barge and remotely-operated vehicle.

Once the server made it to the deployment site, the remotely-operated vehicle retrieved a cable containing the fibre optic and power wiring from the seafloor for connection to the surface. The unit is designed to operate for 5 years without maintenance, and will be monitored for the next 12 months.

This is not the first time Microsoft put servers under the sea-- in August 2015 the Windows maker put "Leona Philpot," a server named after a character from the Halo game series, in the bottom of the Pacific Ocean for 105 days. It was also involved in underwater infrastructure, since last September it joined Facebook and Spanish telco Telxius in the [laying of 6600km of](#)

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[undersea cabling between the US and Spain.](#)

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