Canoe and Kayak Licence Requirements

Waterways & Environment Briefing Note

On many waterways across the country a licence, day pass or similar is required. It is important all waterways users ensure they stay within the licensing requirements for the waters they use. Waterways licences are a legal requirement, but the funds raised enable navigation authorities to maintain the waterways, improve facilities for paddlers and secure the water environment.

We have compiled this guide to give you as much information as possible regarding licensing arrangements around the country. We will endeavour to keep this as up to date as possible, but we always recommend you check the current situation on the waters you paddle.

Which waters are covered under the British Canoeing licence agreements?

The following waterways are included under British Canoeing’s licensing arrangements with navigation authorities:

- All Canal & River Trust Waterways
  - See www.canalrivertrust.org.uk for a list of all waterways managed by Canal & River Trust
- All Environment Agency managed waterways
  - Black Sluice Navigation;
  - River Ancholme;
  - River Cam (below Bottisham Lock);
  - River Glen;
  - River Great Ouse (below Kempston and the flood relief channel between the head sluice lock at Denver and the Tail sluice at Saddlebrow);
  - River Lark;
  - River Little Ouse (below Brandon Staunch);
  - River Medway – below Tonbridge;
  - River Nene – below Northampton;
  - River Stour (Suffolk) – below Brundon Mill, Sudbury;
  - River Thames – Cricklade Bridge to Teddington (including the Jubilee River and Maidenhead Waterway);
  - River Welland; and
  - River Wissey
- Broads Authority waterways*
  - Norfolk & Suffolk Broads;
  - River Ant;
  - River Bure;
  - River Chet;
  - River Thurne;
- River Waveney;
- River Wensum;
- River Yare; and
- associated Broads and Dykes

- Basingstoke Canal (Basingstoke Canal Authority)*
- Bridgewater Canal (Manchester Ship Canal Company)
- River Cam – Cambridge (Silver Street) to Bottisham Lock (Cam Conservators)*
- River Avon (Warwickshire) – Alveston to Tewkesbury (Avon Navigation Trust)*
- Stroudwater Navigation*
- Wey & Arun Canal (Wey & Arun Canal Trust)*
- Wey & Godalming Navigations (National Trust)*
- Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal

*All the waterways marked with an asterisk above include Stand Up Paddleboards (SUPs) in the British Canoeing licence arrangement. We are working to include SUPs in more of our agreements in the future.

If a waterway is listed above, as British Canoeing member you can:
- Paddle any canoe or kayak (or a SUP on those marked with an *) – you are licensed as a member, and can paddle any boat you choose;
- Carry extra people – if you are in a canoe or multi-seat kayak your licence will cover the boat, as long as you are one of the people paddling it;
- Take advantage of British Canoeing’s third party insurance. Only you will be covered however – anyone in the boat with you, or other parties in separate boats, will not be covered.

**Your British Canoeing membership card acts as your licence.** You should keep this card with you at all times, as you may be asked to show it by a representative of the waterway you are paddling. If you are a new member and have not yet received your card, take a printout of you receipt-email with you.

**What if I want to take a friend?**

As described above, if you are taking using a two (or more!) person canoe or kayak your British Canoeing membership will cover all paddlers using it. However, if you will be using more than one boat, only the member’s boat will be covered. All other canoes/kayaks/SUPs in your party will need to be licensed. Usually licences purchased direct from the navigation authority will cover a specific craft, not the individual. Please check before purchasing if you intend for a licence to be used for different boats, if, for example, you may wish to switch between a canoe and kayak on different days.

Most waterways offer a variety of licences, from one day through to annual permits. You can usually buy these from:
- The navigation authority’s website;
- Manned locks;
- Waterways offices;
- Some marinas; and/or
- Some shops and museums operated by the relevant navigation authority.
If you are in any doubt we recommend contacting the navigation authority for the waterway you would like to paddle.

**Events on Managed Waterways**

If you are planning an event on a waterway covered by a navigation authority, you will need to check the licence requirements for the event’s participants. As an example, both Canal & River Trust and the Environment Agency require event participants (even those covered by the event’s insurance) to hold a day licence if they are not covered under either an individual British Canoeing membership or an affiliated club membership. We also strongly recommend initially informing the Navigation Authority about any events planned for their waterways, as they may have additional requirements such as Risk Assessments.

**What other waterways require a licence?**

Most lakes and reservoirs in England are privately owned and managed. Some allow access to unpowered craft, with most that do charging a fee for launching. We strongly recommend you look into the access, charges and conditions of use on any specific lake before you travel. British Canoeing membership does not current include any licences / permits for any lakes or reservoirs.

Please also see the additional section regarding the Lake District.

**Which waters do not require a licence?**

There are very few waterways with widely-recognised rights of access which do not require some form of waterways licence.

Those rivers that do not require a licence are:

- Exeter Ship Canal
- River Severn – upstream of Stourport, a CRT licence (or British Canoeing membership) is required below Stourport to the tidal reaches
- River Wye (Wales/South West England) – downstream of Hay on Wye
- River Little Ouse – Thetford to Brandon
- River Cam – from Grantchester to Bishops Mill Sluice (Silver Street), Cambridge
- River Rother (East Sussex) downstream from Robertsbridge
- Royal Military Canal

There are many other rivers across England where rights of navigation are contested. Please see our website, and British Canoeing’s Access Policy Statement for more information.

Please also see the section regarding the Lake District.
What about Tidal Waters?

All tidal waters carry a widely-recognised Public Right of Navigation (PRN), this includes tidal rivers, estuaries and the open sea. The PRN on a river extends to the rivers natural upstream tidal limit – regardless of any man-made obstacles in the way of the tide. For example, if weirs or sluices have been constructed on a river they would stop the river upstream being tidal – the PRN however does continue upstream, to its natural upstream limit. It can be difficult to ascertain a river’s natural upstream tidal limit (sometimes called the historic tidal limit). Ordnance Survey maps (1:25,000) mark the NTL (Normal Tidal Limit) for most rivers, but this is often the current limit which may be affected by man-made obstructions.

All estuaries and the open seas carry a PRN – however, they may be subject to some restrictions from a Port Authority. These would usually cover fees for launching in these areas, or restrictions covering safety for small craft, especially in major shipping areas. Before heading to an estuary or coastal location you are unfamiliar with please check to make sure the waters you wish to paddle are not covered by a Port Authority. Where there is a relevant authority always abide by any regulations in place. Fees charged by port authorities for the use of facilities or for water access are not included in British Canoeing membership.

Please be aware that tidal locations can be very tricky for inexperienced paddlers. They can be exposed and subject to strong flowing water, plus additional hazards such as sand banks and other, much larger, craft. These are great places for paddling, but make sure you are either with experienced paddlers or have conducted some instruction in paddling such waters to be properly equipped.

The Lake District

Many lakes and rivers across the Lake District can be paddled – though some require a day purchase which is either free or low cost. Where a permit (whether chargeable or free) is needed British Canoeing members will also need to arrange for this – these are not covered under our licensing arrangements.

You can find out more about paddling in the Lake District through the following links –

- General paddling information, including access points, trails and guides - http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/thingstodo/water/canoeingandkayaking

Some rivers in the Lake District have an Access Agreement, which has been designed to balance recreational access against the needs of the water environment. Most rivers in the area are not suitable for beginners. Details can be found via the links above (in the lake guides).

For any questions about accessing the rivers and lakes in the area please contact us via access@britishcanoeing.org.uk.
Can I use my licence in other countries of the UK?

In Scotland all rivers and canal carry a Public Right of Navigation and do not require any licence. Please respect other users and the environment if you are paddling any rivers in Scotland – the Scottish Canoe Association can provide more information on access for particular rivers check their website at http://canoescotland.org/

All Canal & River Trust waterways in Wales are covered by British Canoeing membership, and you can use your membership card as your licence in the same way as in England.

How do licences work for affiliated clubs & approved centres?

All the waterways covered by British Canoeing’s licensing arrangements for members (see list above) are included in the boat licence scheme for Affiliated Clubs. However, members of canoe clubs are only covered under the affiliated licence scheme if they are taking part in recognised club activities (from club sessions to river trips), in a canoe/kayak licensed by the club. Activities organised by club members that are not recognised club activities (e.g. privately arrange trips such as ‘peer paddles’) are not covered – club members taking part in such activities would need to be full British Canoeing members to be covered on waterways requiring a licence.

It is important that clubs and centres ensure all the boats in use are licensed, via an up-to-date return to British Canoeing. If it were found that clubs and centres were not licensing boats it could affect the contractual arrangements British Canoeing has with navigation authorities.

How do licences work for coaches?

Unless operating as a coach for an affiliated club, undertaking recognised club training activities (see above notes on licensing arrangements for clubs), coaches only carry a waterways licence for themselves as a British Canoeing member. Any participants on courses you run therefore require their own waterways licence (where necessary). Please contact us if you have any questions about this.

---

1There are three sections to the River Cam – 1) the upper river, from Grantchester to Bishops Mill in Cambridge is managed by the Cam Conservators, but does not require any licence; 2) from Silver Street to Bottisham Lock does require a licence, from the Cam Conservators; 3) downstream of Bottisham Lock the waterway is managed by the EA and requires their licence. A licence for sections 2) & 3) is covered under British Canoeing membership – see above.

2A licence is required from Shepway District Council for the canal between Hythe and West Hythe – this is not included in British Canoeing membership.