

River Great Ouse, Kempston Bedford to Great Barford, Bedfordshire

Moderate: Please be aware that the grading of this trail was set according to normal water levels and conditions. Weather and water level/conditions can change the nature of trail within a short space of time so please ensure you check both of these before heading out.

Route Summary

The Great Ouse is an easy river, and this trip has the contrast of pretty rural stretches, and the built-up area of Bedford which is crowded all through the year, being a busy county town. The start of the trail is 60 miles downriver from the highest navigable point on the river! The Ouse has been extensively modernised and canalised in recent years, after the old navigation fell into some disuse after the Second World War, reflecting the growing interest in pleasure boating in general.

Start Directions

Riverview Way, Kempston, Bedford, MK42 7FB – GR TL 024476

Description

The river is small and pretty above Bedford, and then after 2.3 miles, two railway bridges mark the approach to Bedford town, and paddlers should keep to the right side of the river to avoid the many rowers (at all times of the year, and of the day). There are two road bridges, and then a first weir, and Bedford Town Lock with a portage on the right side. There is parking here on the Embankment, the south side of the river.

Distance: 9.8 Miles

Approximate Time: 3 to 6 Hours

The time has been estimated based on you travelling 3 – 5mph (a leisurely pace using a recreational type of boat).

Type of Trail: One Way

Waterways Travelled: River Great Ouse

Type of Water: Controlled river – navigation (In high water, the Environment Agency may close the river)

Portages and Locks: 4 locks to be portaged

Nearest Town: Bedford

Start: Riverview Way, Kempston, Bedford, Postcode MK42 7FB GR TL 024476

Finish: Great Barford, above the lock and weir, Postcode MK44 3LQ
– GR TL 135517

O.S. Sheets: Landranger No. 153 Bedford and Huntingdon

Vehicle Shuttle is required

Licence Information: A licence is required to paddle on this waterway. See full details in Useful Information below.

At the next weir stream, there is a landing for public toilets and refreshments (café open summer weekends), near to the boating lake. This is a major recreational area, and very busy on a summer's day.

The river is split by a major island, and portaging around the right side soon after the bridge avoids another portage further down, where there is a weir on the left side. The river splits further down, a constant feature of the Ouse, where 'Cuts' have been built in former days to by-pass weirs, and insert a lock for boats. The 'New Cut' leaves on the left side, and the original river course takes a large loop to the right around Priory Country Park. After this point, motor cruisers are encountered much more.

At 4.5 miles is Cardington Lock, again the river splitting, with the main river going left through the lock, the right branch being natural river. Facilities for stopping here, with picnic tables.

The New Cut re-joins after half a mile and at 6.1 miles is Castle Mills Lock, with a portage right at the canoe platforms. The river leaves Bedford behind, passes under the main A421 road, and becomes more rural, with flooded gravel pits, and woodland. The river valley shows plenty of former occupation by both the Danes and Jutes, with earthworks on the banks.

The river winds to the right, near to the village of Willington, and at 8 miles is 'Danish Camp' on the right bank, well-placed for meals, tearshop, ice cream and wooden chalets, near to the ancient site of old Danish docks.

Willington Lock has a portage right at canoe platforms, and it is only a short distance to Great Barford, about a mile, with the village announced by the beautiful bridge, a long affair over the flood plain either side, and the landing just after it on the left bank. It is only a short distance up the grassy bank to the road for parking.

Finish Directions

Great Barford, above the lock and weir – Postcode; MK44 3LQ GR TL 135517

Vehicle Shuttle Required

Parking at the finish is alongside the parish church, just over some grass by the river, and above the lock and weir. Pub nearby. From Great Barford, the easiest way back to the start is probably via a minor road south of the river to Willington on the A603, into central Bedford, and then the B531, to Kempston High St.

Useful Information

The waterways in this trail are managed by The Environment Agency and require paddlers to hold a licence. If you are an existing British Canoeing member the good news is that your membership includes an annual licence for the waterways covered within this trail – please ensure you take your membership card with you on the water as this acts as your licence, if stopped with no licence, you will be at risk of being fined.

You can buy a licence directly from [The Environment Agency](https://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) for this waterway or by becoming a British Canoeing member you'll have a licence to cover you for a whole year. A British Canoeing membership gives you a whole range of benefits including licenses to paddle on 4500km of Britain's waterways and Civil Liability Insurance, worth up to £10 Million. If you are planning to paddle regularly this will save you great deal of money and hassle alongside having peace of mind. For more information on British Canoeing membership please [click here](https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk)



Further useful information can be found on the following websites:

www.visitgreatouse.co.uk

www.bedford.gov.uk

CANOEING SAFETY ADVICE

Spending an afternoon or day canoeing on a Canoe Trail can be a fun way to experience nature, help you to stay fit and healthy and enjoy spending time with friends and family. It can also be a dangerous journey, if appropriate safety guidelines are overlooked. To help make sure you remain safe at all times, read on to see our canoeing safety advice guidelines.

Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90% of all boating injuries are attributed to lack of proper footwear. Other canoe safe clothing includes hats, gloves, additional dry clothing, and layered items which can easily be removed. Take or wear a windproof top and course always wear a buoyancy aid - for children make sure the crotch straps are used.

Be sure to:

- Know the weather forecast and check the water conditions before you set out canoeing. There is an [Environment Agency](#) website where information concerning river levels can be found. We recommend checking this before heading out as the river levels can rise and fall quite quickly in wet or dry conditions.
- Observe navigation rules for this waterway.
- Check to see if there are any events on the waterways when you wish to travel.
- Check that your equipment is well maintained and ready for the water.
- Check that your boat has the required buoyancy to keep it afloat in the event of a capsized

ALWAYS be certain to let others know where you're going and when you're expected to return.

MAKE SURE that the journey you plan is within your capabilities.

MAKE SURE you never paddle alone.



Photo by James Carnegie

Equipment Checklist

Use the canoeing safety advice checklist below to make sure you have everything you need:

- Boat
- Paddle
- Buoyancy Aid
- Bailer/sponge
- Small First Aid Kit
- Phone (in a waterproof bag)
- Drinking water and snacks
- Suitable clothing for the weather

Environmental Good Practice

One of the great things about paddling a canoe trail is enjoying the journey and different environments that you paddle through. So when you are out on the water please consider the following things to help keep the wonderful waterways and environment as you found them and to avoid accidentally disturbing wildlife and their habitats.

- Take your **litter** home with you
- Keep **noise** to a minimum
- Where possible keep to any **designated paths or launching points**.
- **Do not "seal" launch** or drag boats to avoid wearing away natural banks. Float your canoe for launching, lift out when landing and carry it to and from the water.
- Canoe a **safe distance away from wildlife**. If you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.
- Familiarise yourself with the local area, its **sensitive places and protected areas**
- On rivers, **avoid paddling over gravel banks** in low water conditions – they may contain fish spawn.
- Ensure you **don't remove or damage any plants or animals** from the waterway as they may be protected or harmful if transferred to other catchments
- When clearing litter left by others, **handle it with care**.
- **Be the eyes and ears on the water**. Report pollution, wildlife problems, damage, incidents etc to the relevant authorities: **Canal & River Trust**, Emergencies: 0800 47 999 47
RSPCA for wildlife and animals in distress: 0300 1234 999 (24 hours)
Environment Agency: 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours)



CHECK, CLEAN, DRY

Help minimise the spread of invasive aquatic species and disease by following the campaign advice before putting your canoe and equipment in and out of the water (some invasive species can survive in damp or wet conditions for five or six days on water recreation clothing and equipment).

- **CHECK** all your equipment and clothing for living organisms and plants fragments. Pay particular attention to areas that are damp and hard to inspect.
- **CLEAN** and wash all equipment, clothing and footwear thoroughly away from water source. If you do come across any organisms, leave them at the water body where you found them. When practical, completely dry out all equipment and clothing before going to a new site.
- **DRY** all equipment and clothing - some species can live for many days in moist conditions. Dry your kit with towels. Make sure you don't transfer water elsewhere.

Canoeists and kayakers take environmental concerns very seriously and already follow existing voluntary environmental codes of conduct. You can find more information about canoeing and the environment in British Canoeing's two publications covering inland and coastal paddling '**You and Your Canoe**'. Both are available on the [British Canoeing website](http://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk).

*We have taken great care to ensure the currency, accuracy and reliability of this information. We cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions but where such are brought to our attention, the information will be amended accordingly. Users should be aware that environmental conditions outside of our control can change the nature of the Trail within a short space of time. It is recommended that weather and water conditions are checked beforehand, and tide timetables where applicable. **This trail was last reviewed in January 2013***

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