

## River Thames Red Boards

British Canoeing recognise the Environment Agencies yellow and red boards cautionary procedures for strong stream conditions on the River Thames and the important guidance these provide to a wide range of river users, in particular; Narrow Boats, Cruisers and Sailing Boats. From a canoeing perspective however, it should be recognised that kayaks and canoes, in the hands of suitably experienced paddlers and leaders, have greater maneuverability and are generally more self reliant in a wide range of situations where other craft would be compromised.

For canoeists the River Thames provides a popular location for paddling, particularly when the flow increases for improving skills and experience. During such periods of yellow and red board conditions, however, additional precautions should be taken when venturing on to the river.

During periods of strong stream flow and particularly during red board periods the River Thames would most closely provide a 'Moderate Water' environment to paddlers and feature regular wave action, increased and irregular flow rates with small rapids and eddies around permanent and semi-permanent river features. All of these require some maneuvering, however, generally easy to navigate.

Those paddling the river during strong flow periods should therefore be suitably experienced for such conditions. They should understand the flow rates and implications on the stretch of river they intend to paddle, including the varying levels and undertake appropriate risk assessments. Those leading groups on such occasions should be a minimum of Level 3 Coach or 4 Star WW Leader, or of equivalent experience. Paddlers and group members should also be of a level of experience commensurate with or receiving training in Moderate Water environments.

If events are to be run on the river whilst under the strong stream conditions the event organiser needs to ensure that both the event staff and the paddlers are suitably experienced to deliver and participate in the event. This may require extra marshals and equipment.

The actual requirement and the wearing of buoyancy aids by paddlers will depend on a number of factors determined via standard dynamic risk assessment activity. This may include safety cover, the type of craft used, ability, circumstance. In each case the specific areas or sections of the river used must be considered carefully. While such moderate water conditions may not always produce observable waves, full consideration should be given to increased and irregular flow rates and obstructions or hazards.

British Canoeing also recognises that weirs on the river can also provide popular (and for appropriately experienced paddlers) safe opportunities to practice skills, however, it is also recognised that weirs can present dangers to paddlers and that they should be considered on an individual basis and afforded appropriate dynamic risk assessment activities as per all Moderate and Advanced White Water environments.