

# CASE STUDY

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## Snagging Incident - Town Falls, River Dee, Llangollen November 2022

### Introduction

Many incidents reported through British Canoeing's Incident Reporting Online Form contain significant events and key learnings. From time to time and with permission of those involved we will create a case study from an incident. Case studies enable us to share others' experience with the wider paddlesport community to help raise awareness of paddling safely.

### The Incident

First of all, it is important to note that all involved in the incident and rescue are fine and well. One Sunday, a group of four paddlers headed to Llangollen to paddle the section of the River Dee from Horseshoe Falls to Llangollen which was at a medium level. Three of the four paddlers decided to run a popular rapid on the River Dee known as "Town Falls". The paddlers had paddled this section on a previous trip in similar conditions. Two paddlers paddled down the rapid and waited in the eddies below. The third paddler capsized at the bottom of the rapid and was unable to roll. The water pushed the paddler near to the pillar of the right arch. While attempting to roll the paddler got "snagged". Although the paddler managed to remove their spraydeck and their boat floated away; the paddler was trapped face down underwater.

One of the paddlers paddled back upstream to the bridge and attempted to grab the trapped paddler to dislodge them, this unfortunately was unsuccessful. The other paddler who was downstream of the bridge paddled up to the bridge and able to exit their boat onto a small ledge and was able to make contact with the trapped paddler and used their knife to cut their buoyancy aid and eventually the paddler was freed.

By this time the paddler had been underwater for approximately 90 seconds. The paddler floated unconsciously downstream where one of the group managed to get their head above the water. The paddler was not breathing, their eyes were open, lips were blue, and hands were cramped. An exit point was identified and whilst moving the paddler downstream the paddler regained consciousness and had recovered enough to be able to grab the throw line which was waiting at the eddy.

At the time of the incident it was not clear what the paddler got snagged on but it has now been found that there is a serrated pipe at the base of the right arch, on the right hand side which is visible in low water but concealed in medium to high flows.



Image: paddler "snagged" underwater.

## Key Learnings

The key essence of this rescue being successful was time; a quick response and ability to get to the trapped paddler. The group acknowledged that their training and ongoing practice played an important role in the success of the rescue as well as carrying appropriate equipment for a white water environment.

## Good Practice

- Importance of carrying an appropriate knife when paddling in a white water environment
- Consideration of positioning on rapids to provide appropriate support to others
- Importance of attending training in white water safety and rescue
- Revisit and practise the skills and techniques learnt on the safety and rescue course
- Incident reporting to raise awareness and action as appropriate
- Carry a fully charged mobile phone in a waterproof case

## Conclusion

Learning from incidents and near misses is important for the future safety of the sport. To report an incident or notable event to British Canoeing please go to:

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/access-and-environment/access-to-water/incident-reporting>

For any questions or support please email: [safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk](mailto:safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk)