

River Cam, Cambridge to Grantchester

Easy Trail: 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 tranquil River Cam rises at Ashwell in Hertfordshire and meanders to Cambridge, flows along the 'Backs' past the historical colleges and then on to join the Ely Ouse and thus on to Denver Sluice. It is regularly canoed from Hauxton and is a statutory navigation from Byron's Pool.

Start and Finish Directions

Small (free) Car Park adjacent to the (now closed) Penny Ferry pub in Fen Road, Chesterton, CB4 1TX. TL 470670

Distance: 12 miles

Approximate Time: 3-8 Hours

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

Type of Trail: Out and Back

Waterways Travelled: River Cam

Type of Water: River navigation

Portages and Locks: One lock and one set of rollers each way, four in all.

Nearest Town: Cambridge

Start and finish: Fen Road, Chesterton, CB4 1TX

O.S. Sheets: Landranger No. 154 – Cambridge and Newmarket

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

Local Facilities: For location of pubs please see below

Description

Start at the small car park beside the river in Water Lane, Chesterton, just beside the now defunct 'Penny Ferry Pub' Paddle upstream (right). Keep to the right hand bank and look out for rowing eights! Just before the footbridge there is a small slipway which leads to the 'Green Dragon', the oldest pub in Cambridge. If 400 yards is too soon to stop, then remember it for the way back!

Continue along Riverside past the Technology museum, an old pumping station with a tall chimney, to Elizabeth Way Bridge and Midsummer Common. At 1.5 miles, you pass under Victoria bridge (Originally built to allow the residents of Chesterton, then a separate village, to have easy access to the city) and past the last of the boathouses and on up to Jesus Lock. Land on the left and carry round the lock, but stop for an ice cream before you get back on the water!

Now you are on 'the Backs'. Enjoy a leisurely paddle on past the colleges; unfortunately you can't land at any. Be amused by the antics of those who have hired punts; your good deed of the day may be to return a lost pole to an inept punter. There is a public landing place at Quayside (on your left, just before Magdalene Bridge) but you cannot leave a canoe there securely.

The colleges are: right (before the bridge) Magdalene (pronounced Maudlin'), left and right St Johns, left Trinity, Trinity Hall, Kings (and the chapel and the Wren Library), St Catherine's, Queens (both sides) and the Mathematical Bridge.



At 3 miles, pass under Silver St Bridge into the pool. Keep right, clear of the old mill stream. You can land on the left grassy bank and walk across to 'The Mill' pub, or land at the Granta which has a landing stage. Then, suitably refreshed, paddle round to the sluice, land on the right bank and portage up the punt rollers onto the upper river which winds leisurely towards Grantchester. Watch out for swimmers in the river; the clipped lawns and hedges of the Newnham riverside club are on the right bank. Please do not land here.

A small landing on the right at 5 miles leads to 'The Orchard'; a tea shop and garden made famous by Rupert Brooke. Walk across the field and enjoy a pot of tea and cake whilst precariously seated on ancient green canvas deckchairs – very period and very Cambridge!

A short right hand branch leads up to the Mill at Grantchester; Byron's Pool is a further half mile ahead on the left hand branch – again famous for 'skinny dipping' but now has a concrete weir and sluice.

You can land (on the left) at Byron's Pool and walk in the Nature reserve there; an interesting feature is the small fish pass that has been built to enable fish to pass the weir. Turn around, and do the whole thing again back to Chesterton; a very pleasant days outing.

For a shorter paddle, you can use the free car park at Barton Road, Newnham (CB3 9HX – TL 447573) which is open from 10.00 – 22.00 and has a 2.0m barrier. Launch onto the small cut which leads (right) to the river. Turn left to proceed to the Punt Rollers at Silver St and thus to 'The Backs' or right to canoe to Grantchester and Byron's Pool

Useful Information

The waterways in this trail are managed by Canal and Rivers Trust 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 [Canal and Rivers Trust](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.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](#)

When planning a visit to these waters it is advisable to check the events calendar for the numerous rowing races. Please comply with instructions from race marshals who will ask you to paddle between races. Events and other details for this waterway are listed at- www.camconservators.co.uk

Further useful information can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.camconservators.co.uk/jesuslock.html>

<http://www.rupertbrooke.com/>

http://lnr.cambridge.gov.uk/nature_reserve/byrons-pool/

<http://www.cucbc.org/bumps>

If you fancy a weekend canoeing in Cambridge, then there is a canoeist friendly bed and breakfast very close to the launch area in Fen Road; details at <http://www.twentysix.biz/>

Cambridge - <http://www.visitcambridge.org/VisitCambridge/Home.aspx>

River Cam - <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/canals-and-rivers/>

Ely - <http://www.ely.org.uk/>

Cam Conservators – Cambridge to Bottisham Lock (<http://www.camconservators.co.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 capsize

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.

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



Photo by James Carnegie

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](#).

*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 September 2013***

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