

# River Cam and River Great Ouse- Cambridge to Ely

**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 River Cam rises at Ashwell in Hertfordshire and meanders to Cambridge, flows along the 'Backs' past the 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. These notes describe a day's exploration downstream from Cambridge to Ely, starting from Chesterton, downriver from the centre, and in the north-east area of the city. When planning a visit to these waters it is advisable to check the events calendar for the major rowing regattas in the reaches between Chesterton and Baits Bite Lock. Events and other details for this waterway are listed at <http://www.camconservancy.org/>. Please comply with instructions from race marshals; they will ask you to paddle between races. However the section is best avoided during the larger race meetings (e.g. the Bumps)

## Start Directions

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

## Finish Directions

Willow Walk, Ely – TL 545799 (CB7 4AT)

**Distance:** 13 miles

**Approximate Time:** 4-5 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 Cam and River Great Ouse

**Type of Water:** River Navigation

**Portages and Locks:** There are two locks to portage

**Nearest Town:** Cambridge

**Start:** Fen Road, Chesterton, TL 470670 (CB4 1TX)

**Finish:** Willow Walk, Ely – TL 545799 (CB7 4AT)

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

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

**Local Facilities:** Plenty of pubs enroute

## Description

Start at Fen Road – next to the Penny Ferry, and set off left – downstream. You can either paddle as far as you feel able or turn round, or you could go right through to Ely in the day, allowing 6- 8 hours for the journey. Keep to the proper side of the river (right) to avoid collision with rowing boats. After just over a mile is Long Reach', the location of The Bumps, a curious rowing tradition where a pursuing 'eight' has to 'bump' the boat in front to move up a place on the race ladder.

At the 'Plough' you need to change sides on the river and paddle on the left side; all about visibility round the bend for rowers. Baits Bite Lock (1.6 miles) – an easy portage on the left bank. 'The Bridge', Clayhithe (2.5 miles) offers very good food - the best on the river past the 'Bridge', look out for sailing dinghies at weekends; this is the Cam sailing club's reach. At Bottisham Lock, 3.2 miles, portage right. This is a horrible lock side made of giant cheese (or canoe) grater and small walls and railings make the portage even trickier. It is good to help one another here!

Once past the lock the Environment Agency is the navigation authority. Bottisham Lode goes off on the right soon after; if you want to explore the Lodes, they are all canoeable, but you will need the OS map to find your way. At 4.4 miles, Swaffham Lode leaves on the right. The Lodes are believed to be Roman in origin, dug for barge transport as there were few roads in the Fens. Reach Lode and the 'Five Miles from Anywhere and No Hurry' public house is at 6 miles on the right bank, with good landing and worth a visit.

Popes Corner is at 10 miles and here the Cam joins the River Great Ouse. On the corner is the 'Fish and Duck', which used to be an ideal lunch stop on the way to Ely and a good place to watch cruisers failing to make the tight turn from the Ouse into the Cam, but is now closed and being rebuilt. Turn left here onto the Old West River and you'll wind your way towards Huntingdon – another day! Carry straight on towards Ely along a fairly featureless and exposed section of Fenland River. Ely Cathedral is on the horizon for a long time and eventually gets closer. As you enter the town at 13 miles is 'The Maltings' restaurant. Pleasant, but our pub destination is just on the left, 'The Cutter'.

Ely Waterside is busy with cruisers and rowing clubs; there is a slipway on Waterside (river left) but it is always foul with swan droppings and parking is limited, hence the suggestion to carry on through the city to Willow Walk, where you left the car!

## 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](#) 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](#)



There are many tourist attractions in and around the Cambridge area. 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.

Further useful information can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.camconservators.co.uk/jesuslock.html>  
<http://www.rupertbrooke.com/>  
<http://www.visitcambridge.org/things-to-do/byrons-pool-local-nature-reserve-p508261>  
<http://www.cucbc.org/bumps>  
<http://www.visitcambridge.org/VisitCambridge/Home.aspx>  
<http://www.visitgreatouse.co.uk/>  
<http://www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/river-cam>  
<http://www.ely.org.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 capsizing

**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](#).

*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 n September 2013***

© British Canoeing copyright 2015

*This material may be freely reproduced except for sale or advertising purposes provided it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as British Canoeing copyright and the title of the publication specified.*

