

River Cam; Byron's Pool - Cambridge City – Ely

A placid water paddle that falls naturally into three sections as the water level drops at sluices and locks.

There is a right of navigation (historically) from Byron's Pool near Grantchester village (TL 436 546) down to the sea at King's Lynn. The Cam Conservators are the licensing authority for the stretch of the R. Cam from Silver Street in Cambridge to Bottisham Lock and the Environment Agency downstream of there.

Cam Conservators: river.manager@camconservators.org.uk Telephone 01223 863785 (office hours 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday). Since 2013 members of Canoe England are covered under the new block licence agreement. Non-members are required to purchase a licence from the Conservators.

Launch either (1) TL 436 551 Grantchester Mill. There is a lay-by east of the river here which will take about 3 cars. Launch on the west side of the Mill Pool.

(2) TL 438 549, east of Brasley Bridge on the Grantchester to Trumpington road. A footpath is signed on the north side of the road, indicating a path to the south. About 15 m down this path is a car height barrier and beyond this there is rough parking. The whole area of the wood has recently been landscaped with wheelchair-friendly paths and numerous platforms, most for fishing but some are canoe platforms (without a front board). A short distance upstream by footpath or water is Byron's Pool and the weir TL 435 545. There is rarely sufficient water over the weir for a good play. Be aware there is a draw-down current downstream of the sluice gate. Currently there is no right of navigation above the weir, but provided there is sufficient water it makes a good paddle. Do not paddle on the Bourne Brook for conservation reasons. This is the tributary joining the main river immediately upstream of the weir and straight ahead of you as you look at the main river along the weir top from the bank .

Within Byron's Pool and immediately downstream of it there are patches of newly accumulated silt which are soft and unstable and should be avoided.

A short distance downstream from the two launch points the two arms of the river meet.

The river then meanders pleasantly for about 3km. (The meanderings of the river can be monitored by the 'movement' of the University Library tower, a solid brick structure with a pitched roof, which 'shifts' from right to left to right of the river. In fact it lies to the west of the river).

After about 3 km a mill stream (Snob's Stream) leads off to the left. This mill stream is adjacent to a car park (Lammas Land, Newnham TL 448 574 and it is possible to start the paddle here. If it is a hot summer's day the car park becomes very congested. You are also advised NEVER to leave valuables in the cars, whether visible or not. Approach this car park from the A603 (exit off M11 signed Sandy & Barton but head into town). The main road takes a right angle to the left by traffic lights. You need to go straight ahead here, but in practise you have to turn left and go round the first roundabout and return to the lights and take a left hand road down a lane to a car park at the bottom right, with a height barrier. Launch in the corner of the car park diagonally opposite the entrance or walk over the first footbridge and launch on the other side of the mill stream. When in the car park facing the mill stream the main river is to your right.

There are toilets (20 p in winter) close to the car park and in the summer, ice cream also. Paddle into the main river. The folly immediately river right, upstream of the footbridge dates back to the days of swimming in the river. It is reputed to have been built by a Mr Hodson between 1902 and 1906, to watch over his daughter swimming in the ladies bathing area on the opposite side of the river, upstream of the bridge and well away from the men's bathing downstream of the bridge.

The main river continues under a footbridge – watch out for youngsters 'bombing' boats and taking delight in splashing everybody – and is embanked from now on, through the City. To the left is a building which used to be the basket store for the Men's Bathing Sheds dating from when all swimming was in the river before Cambridge City had an indoor swimming pool (mid 1960s). This building is now leased by Cambridge Canoe Club. The remains of concrete frontages can also be seen to the right of the river, frontages for swimming for the Perse School and the City Firemen. A road bridge (The Fen Causeway) is followed quickly by another footbridge before coming to sluices. (3.75

km) There are usually punts (also kayaks, canoes and rowing boats for hire) moored to the right of the river here and it is better to portage left, before the sluice on the left, at a point where there is a chain attached to the side of the bank, and where there are rollers on the footpath and down the bank (for punts). The rollers are not recommended for canoes. Take care below the sluice if only the left hand sluice gate is open as this pushes canoes into the wall. Also be aware that there is a concrete sill near the head of the sluice which is in very shallow water. Cambridge Canoe Club has operational use of the 'flippers' attached to the walls here. These are erected to produce a low play wave in this flat fenland landscape.

Follow the water round to the right (left arm goes to Newnham Mill only) keeping well left under the library of Darwin College, as the river is very shallow here, and join the main river before going under Silver Street road bridge. (Toilets to left of river here just before bridge, but through a gate which seems to be controlled by the punt hire firm so toilets may not be accessible 'out of hours'). This section of the river is the 'Middle River' and passes through the grounds of many of the older Colleges with private banks. It is also the location of an excessive number of punts, which may or not be under the control of the punters. A river bailiff is employed here in the summer to attempt to keep the river safe. The bailiffs tend to be rather aggressive, but a little politeness goes a very long way.

There are now many bridges in quick succession.

Silver Street road bridge – public road bridge

Wooden 'Mathematical Bridge' – Queens' College

Stone arch bridge for King's College

Clare Bridge – stone spheres on the parapet

4.5 km. Garret Hostel Bridge is a single span modern footbridge and is the only public crossing of the river between Silver Street and Magdalene (pronounced maudlin) Bridge.

Trinity Bridge – flood heights recorded on this bridge

New Bridge, St John's College - flood heights recorded on this bridge

Bridge of Sighs – an enclosed bridge, part of St John's College.

5.0 km Magdalene Bridge, adjacent to Quay Side, a very busy area with punts for hire. There is no public access to the bank here, but the punt firm Scudamores should allow use of the middle pontoon at Quayside during operating hours under the terms of their lease agreement with the City Council.

5.5 km Jesus Lock. Access from Chesterton Road but with parking meters and very restricted stopping and parking. Portage right by steps. Ice cream and toilets here to right. This is where most of the narrow boats stop when coming upstream.

Continuing downstream on the 'Lower River' it is necessary to paddle past the College boathouses and residential narrowboats. The rowers behave as if they own the river, so please take extra care here. The river is over-congested with rowing craft and the cox has poor visibility of the water immediately in front of their boat (they have to look 'through' their crew). It is important to paddle on the right of the river as this convention is strictly followed here, except at Ditton Corner where paddlers need to observe the 'change lane' signage for safety reasons. There are also many competitive rowing events throughout the summer especially, but not only, at weekends; but the Cam Conservators (contact details above) should be able to tell you about these when you make contact with the River Manager. Also a full calendar is available on the website

(http://www.camconservators.co.uk/events_all.asp) Published events are also displayed on the notice boards at Jesus Lock and Baits Bite Lock. Take direction from the race marshalls if you come upon a race situation. They will ensure you can pass when safe to do so.

There is access to the river near the Penny Ferry pub TL 469 599 (formally the Pike and Eel and now up for sale and closed) in Chesterton.

It is possible to paddle easily all the way to Ely (31.25 km).

11.7 km portage left at Baits Bite lock (TL 486 121). Access is from the north end of Milton village over the railway line.

14.7 km Clayhithe Bridge (TL 502 645). There is a slipway with adjacent parking at the Cam Conservators Clayhithe Depot; right bank opposite Bridge Hotel. If you wish to use this generously

offered facility for a car shuttle, please do so by arrangement with the River Foreman mobile 07802 862711.

15.5 km portage right at Bottisham lock (TL 508 657). Land early before the undercut cheesegrater and launch almost at the end of the lock cut avoiding all the safety barriers etc by walking away from the water's edge along the footpath. Access is from the west leaving the A10 by Car Dyke Road at the Slap Up pub on the Waterbeach bypass, and then turning east at the north end of the village, going over the railway line. There is a small car park here.

A very short distance after Bottisham Lock (TL 510 657) is the entrance right, to Bottisham Lode. This requires a portage. The Lodes are medieval canals used to transport goods to the Fen edge and this is the first of a series of four.

17.5 km Swaffham Bulbeck (TL 522 672) Lode to right.

21.0 km Reach Lode to right (TL 536 700). Very shortly after this on the right is a friendly pub *Five Miles from Anywhere* at Upware (TL 537 701). Access by road is tortuous, via the A1123 Stretham to Soham road. About 1 km east of the two river bridges is Upware Road, signed Upware. In Upware turn right to the pub just before the bridge (over the Lode).

23.5 km. The river passes under the road bridge of the A1123 Dimmock's Cote.

26.3 km. The River Cam is joined by the Old West River (the remnant of the R Gt Ouse which is not caught by the Bedford and Hundred Foot Cuts at Earith) at Pope's Corner TL 746 535. *The Fish and Duck* is the local pub here.

28 km. Entrance to Soham Lode (TL 540 764)

You are now in the home straight. Pass under two railway bridges before entering Ely.

31.5 km. Egress at Ely is left at the Maltings (TL 544 798), with a car park, toilets and a friendly pub.

Baits Bite to Ely is for those who like extensive skylscapes and isolation, true fenland scenery, but this is flat fenland and placid water, so it is easily possible to return upstream the way you have come!

Enjoy your trip.

May Block – updated June 2013.