



River Great Ouse
Kempston Bedford to Great Barford Bedfordshire
Easy to Moderate Trail

Route Summary

The Great Ouse is an easy river, and this trip has the contrast of pretty rural stretches, and the built-up area of Bedford which is crowded all through the year, being a busy county town. The start of the trail is 60 miles downriver from the highest navigable point on the river! The Ouse has been extensively modernised and canalised in recent years, after the old navigation fell into some disuse after the Second World War, reflecting the growing interest in pleasure boating in general.

Nearest Town - Bedford

O.S. Sheets - Landranger No. 153 – Bedford and Huntingdon

Start - Riverview way, Kempston, Bedford – TL 024476

Finish – Great Barford, above the lock and weir – TL 135517

Waterways Travelled – River Great Ouse

Type of Water - Controlled river – navigation (in high water, the Environment Agency may close the river)

Distance – 9.8 miles, taking between 3 – 6 hours

Licence Information – A licence to paddle the river is included in the Canoe England membership fee. Otherwise licenses can be obtained from <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/recreation/boating/31605.aspx>)

Take your Canoe England membership card with you as it is your licence too)

Local Facilities – In both Kempston and Bedford

Vehicle Shuttle Required - yes - Parking at the finish is alongside the parish church, just over some grass by the river, and above the lock and weir. Pub nearby.

From Great Barford, the easiest way back to the start is probably via a minor road south of the river to Willington on the A603, into central Bedford, and then the B531, to Kempston High St.

Portages and Locks – 4 locks to be portaged

Description

The river is small and pretty above Bedford, and then after 2.3 miles, two railway bridges mark the approach to Bedford town, and paddlers should keep to the right side of the river to avoid the many rowers (at all times of the year, and of the day). There are two road bridges, and then a first weir, and Bedford Town Lock with a portage on the right side.

There is parking here on the Embankment, the south side of the river.

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At the next weir stream, there is a landing for public loo and refreshments (café open summer weekends), near to the boating lake. This is a major recreational area, and very busy on a summer's day.

The river is split by a major island, and portaging around the right side soon after the bridge avoids another portage further down, where there is a weir on the left side. The river splits further down, a constant feature of the Ouse, where 'Cuts' have been built in former days to by-pass weirs, and insert a lock for boats. The 'New Cut' leaves on the left side, and the original river course takes a large loop to the right around Priory Country Park.

After this point, motor cruisers are encountered much more.

At 4.5 miles is Cardington Lock, again the river splitting, with the main river going left through the lock, the right branch being natural river. Facilities for stopping here, with picnic tables.

The New Cut re-joins after half a mile and at 6.1 miles is Castle Mills Lock, with a portage right at the canoe platforms. The river leaves Bedford behind, passes under the main A421 road, and becomes more rural, with flooded gravel pits, and woodland.

The river valley shows plenty of former occupation by both the Danes and Jutes, with earthworks on the banks.

The river winds to the right, near to the village of Willington, and at 8 miles is 'Danish Camp' on the right bank, well-placed for meals, teashop, ice cream at wooden chalets, near to the ancient site of old Danish docks.

Willington Lock has a portage right at canoe platforms, and it is only a short distance to Great Barford, about a mile, with the village announced by the beautiful bridge, a long affair over the flood plain either side, and the landing just after it on the left bank. It is only a short distance up the grassy bank to the road for parking.

Useful Information

www.visitgreatouse.co.uk

www.bedford.gov.uk

Recommended Next Trail

If you have enjoyed this trail why not try out one of the many trails available.

Safety Information

Spending an afternoon canoeing can be a fun way to experience nature, get a great workout and spend time with family and friends.. However, it can also be a dangerous journey, if safety guidelines are overlooked. Always follow these basic rules and comply with navigation rules- keep to the right of on-coming boats. Please be careful at points along the trail where there are sharp bends on the waterway and keep a look out at these points for oncoming traffic.

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Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90per cent of all boating injuries are attributed to lack of proper footwear. Other canoe safe clothing includes hats, additional dry clothing towels, and layered items which can easily be removed.

Be sure to

- Know the weather forecast before you set out canoeing.
- Familiarise yourself with the local area, it's sensitive places and protected areas.
- Leave the environment as you found it. Please read [You, Your Canoe and the environment](#)
- Take your litter home with you.
- Follow the navigation rules for the waterway you are on.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing. (No Seal Launching)
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- Canoe a safe distance away from wildlife.
- Check your equipment.
- Observe the navigation rules for this waterway.
- Check to see if there are any events on the waterways when you wish to travel.

Use the checklist below to make sure you have everything you need.

Checklist:

1. Boat
2. Paddle
3. Buoyancy Aid
4. Bailer/sponge
5. Small First Aid Kit
6. Penknife
7. Mobile telephone (in a waterproof bag....Please note that in some areas due to the location mobile telephone reception might be nonexistent)
8. Fresh drinking water
9. Sun cream, hat and sunglasses
10. Light waterproof jacket
11. Footwear
12. Licence

ALWAYS be certain to let others know where you're going and when you're expected to return.

Specific Environmental Information:

Please 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.

Canoeists and kayakers take very seriously environmental concerns and already follow existing voluntary environmental codes of conduct, including Canoe England's own guidance notes outlined in the "You your canoe and the environment" publication.

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By following the simple steps below you can ensure your presence is not detrimental to the freshwater environment, minimize and avoid accidentally disturbing wildlife and their habitats.

- Find out about the area before you go, noting its sensitive places, species and breeding seasons.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home with you.
- When clearing litter left by others, handle it with care.
- Leave the environment as you find it
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- 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.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing.
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- On rivers, avoid paddling over gravel banks in low water conditions – they may contain fish spawn.
- Constantly assess wildlife. If you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.

Be the eyes and ears on the water. Report pollution, wildlife problems, damage, incidents etc to the relevant authorities.

Canal & River Trust - Emergencies- Telephone 0800 47 999 47

RSPCA for wildlife and animals in distress – Telephone 0990 55 59 99 (24 hours)

Environment Agency - Telephone 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours)

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