

## River Thames Culham Easy Trail

### Route Summary

Enjoy a paddle back in time and be part of history.

Culham Lock is a lock on the River Thames in England close to Culham, Oxfordshire.

Culham Lock is one the many locks on the River Thames and as early as the Domesday Book there is a record of a mill on the Thames nearby at Sutton Courtenay, where the river originally meandered. However, in those days the lock (probably a flash weir) was difficult to negotiate by boat due to the shallow river - and the tolls were said to be the highest on the Thames, making it unpopular with merchants using the river.

The lock was built of stone by the Thames Navigation Commission in 1809.

The associated weirs are on the old course of the river under the massive causeway which separates the millstream from picturesque Sutton Pools. The causeway is very old and was thought to have been built by Saxon labour

**Nearest Town** - Abingdon

**O.S. Sheets** - Landranger No. 164 - Oxford

**Start** - Culham lock

**Finish** – Same, out-and-back trip

**Waterways Travelled** – River Thames and backwaters

**Type of Water** - Some is flowing river, some of the water is still in ponds

**Distance** – 9 miles, taking 2-3 hours

**Licence Information** – A Thames Licence is required (<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/recreation/boating/31605.aspx> )  
Canoe England Membership includes a Thames licence (take your membership card with you as it is your licence)

**Local Facilities** – In Abingdon, and other nearby villages

**Vehicle Shuttle Required** - No

**Portages and Locks** – Portages at several weirs, all easy. No locks, except Culham Lock at both beginning and end

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## Description

Culham is a 'shrunk village' in that it is much smaller today than its original size. There are suggestions as to why this has happened and one is that the Black Death and poor harvests following wet summers in the 14th century led to a population decrease. The ingress point is above the lock, and the journey starts by paddling up stream to the point where Culham Cut joins the main course of the river.

Turn left onto the old river passing several weirs, about 50m before reaching the mill at the end of this section there are several portages on the left, which allow you to launch into the lower Sutton Pools. This area is well worth exploring before proceeding down stream and rejoining the main river below Culham Lock.

After passing the 'delightful' views of Didcot power station, and passing under a large girder railway bridge, Clifton Hampden Weir appears on your right. There is a small floating portage point on your right immediately after passing the weir; it is very easy to miss! Proceed onto the bank and through a gap in the fence, launching back into the weir stream at the end of the weir retaining wall.

You are now in the Long Wittenham back water. This little used section is the old river course and winds its way back to Clifton Hampden Bridge, by-passing Clifton Lock. Clifton Hampden Bridge is the ideal lunch stop, there is limited parking in the nearby village, if you only want to make this a one way 5 mile paddle.

The return trip is now an upstream 4 mile paddle. This time fork to the right and take the lock cut, either portaging or passing through Clifton Lock and then following the river back to Culham. Culham Lock is unfortunately one of the most 'canoe unfriendly' locks to get out at, as the staging is about 4ft above the water level. Fortunately the lock keeper is very friendly, it is well worth having a word with him at the start of the trip giving him some idea of the time of your return, he has always allowed us to lock up to the higher level to get out and take the easier route back to the car park.

## Useful Information

River Thames Conditions <http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

<http://www.culhamvillage.org.uk/>

<http://www.suttoncourtenay.co.uk/>

[www.rwe.com/web/cms/en/97538/rwe-npower/about-us/our-businesses/power-generation/didcot/](http://www.rwe.com/web/cms/en/97538/rwe-npower/about-us/our-businesses/power-generation/didcot/)

<http://thames.me.uk/s01420.htm>

[http://www.visitthames.co.uk/text/210/clifton\\_lock.html](http://www.visitthames.co.uk/text/210/clifton_lock.html)

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## 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.

### ***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

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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.

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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