

River Wey

Guildford to St Catherine's Lock

Easy to Moderate Trail Grading

Route Summary

Enjoy a paddle along the Wey which was one of the first British rivers to be made navigable and opened to barge traffic in 1653. It is quite unusual waterway. The Wey has two separate sources in two different counties. The two River Weys unite near the historic Tilford Oak in Surrey

The Wey and its two Navigations flow across 87 miles (140 km) of countryside yet drop a mere 98 feet (30 m) by the time the waterway joins the Thames at Weybridge.

Nearest Town - Guildford

O.S. Sheets - Landranger No 187 – Dorking, Reigate & Crawley and No. 176 – West London

Start

Riverside Road, Bellfields, Guildford, just off the A320 by Stoke Bridge MR186/997512
Park in the Riverside Road but do check to see that there are no events on at the Waterside Centre (home of Wey Kayak Club) as the roads can be very full. Park down by the river to the left of the Row Barge Public House. Do not launch or land from the fenced public house grounds and use the small triangular area of land nearest the road bridge

Otherwise walk down to Wey Kayak Club and put on and off there.

From the A3, take the slip road off, and either left into Stoke Road, or right, and under the bridge into Stoke Road. First left into Maple Grove, turn right at the river.

For this trail you are going to paddle up stream to start with ie away from the bridge which has the word NAVIGATION across it.

Finish – Same as the start

Waterways Travelled - River Wey

Type of Water - Rural and urban river

Distance – 7 miles for an out and back trip to St Catherine's Lock

Canoe Trail Grading – Easy

License Information- A licence to paddle the River Wey is included in the Canoe England membership fee. Otherwise licenses can be obtained from The National Trust, Dapdune Wharf, Wharf Road, Guildford Surrey GU1 4RR tel 01483 561389

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

Local Facilities - In Guildford

Vehicle Shuttle Required – No

Portages and Locks - 3

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Description

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As soon as you leave the bank you have countryside on your left and a wide variety of houses to your right. The river meanders gently towards Guildford Town centre. The first bridge you pass under is the A3 and from then on in to Guildford there is a mix of countryside, pretty bridges, historic and industrial buildings. On your right just after the A3 bridge is Woodbridge Meadows. These natural meadows have some amazing wooden sculptures in them and they are well worth a look. Have a look at the car park gate entrance too.... sadly the barrier is too low for a car with a roof rack but the train and insect sculpture on the barrier make up for that! A few hundred yards further on the left is Dauphne Wharf and again it is worth a look. Keep a look for other boats on the blind bends at this point.

As you come in to Guildford the river appears to branch left and right. Debenhams will be on your left and it's the right hand side you need. Go under the footbridge and up to the sluice. This is your first portage by Millmead Lock. Portage across the island (an easy get out) and put in clear of the lock. There is a narrow boat hire company on the opposite bank next to the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre so do watch out for narrow boats. After a short distance the river bends sharply right. On the opposite bank is Guildford Rowing Club and also look out for rowers.

From here on you leave Guildford and head off into open countryside and the river continues to meander. If you are interested in geography there are some good examples of Ox Bow lakes here as well as other geological features created by the river.

Paddling along you will then come across a wooden footbridge, then a fork in the river ... take the right hand side as this is the main river channel (you have the option to return via the channel to the left and this is where you will come out!)

St Catherine's Lock is reached a few hundred yards further on. The lock is portaged on the towpath side and you may see the Highland cattle on the adjoining water meadow from this vantage point. The scenery is very rural and peaceful between the passage of trains on the nearby mainline. Back on the water; continue a few hundred yards, passing a weir on the left before the railway bridge.

To return to Guildford, land on the grassy bank between the weir and railway bridge to portage about the weir and transfer into the natural river course. It is a 50 yard portage to the get in point immediately below the weir. Take care as the water can flow quite quickly with a back eddy.

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From then on you can enjoy the pleasures of this meandering section of natural river, past the water works and ending up at the place where the river first divided.

At times of high flow the locks are padlocked and the waterway is closed to all navigation.

Useful Information

During the seventeenth century the river was made navigable to Guildford and extended in the eighteenth century to Godalming. The Basingstoke Canal and Wey and Arun Junction Canal were later connected to the river. The navigable sections are now owned by the National Trust.

The river has long been used as a source of power for mills, and many are recorded in the Domesday Book. At one point there were 22 mills on the river, and more on its tributaries. At various times they have been used for grinding grains, fulling wool, rolling oats, crushing cattle cake, leather dressing, paper production and gunpowder manufacture. Willey Mill was still in use in 1953 (Cox's Mill closed in the 1980's and saw the end of commercial traffic on the waterway). There were more watermills per mile along the River Wey than anywhere else in Britain.

This 15½-mile waterway linked Guildford to Weybridge on the Thames, and then to London. The Godalming Navigation, opened in 1764, enabled barges to work a further four miles upriver. The award-winning visitor centre at Dapdune Wharf in Guildford tells the story of the Navigations and the people who lived and worked on them. Visitors can see where the huge Wey barges were built and climb aboard Reliance, one of three surviving barges.

The entry to the Wey from the Thames is below Shepperton Lock and even though the river is very close to London you soon feel a sense of peace and remoteness. The river has been recorded in history as the Wegan (956–1225) and Waie (1190–1193). During the seventeenth century the river was made navigable to Guildford and extended in the eighteenth century to Godalming. The Basingstoke Canal and Wey and Arun Junction Canal were later connected to the river. The navigable sections are now owned by the National Trust.

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Maps and Guide Books

The National Trust has a map and guide to the Navigations, and a book of circular walks from the river. These are available at Thames and Stoke Locks, Dapdune Wharf, Pyrford Basin, Guildford Boat House, Farncombe Boat House and Guildford Tourist Information Centre.

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Nicholson Guide to the Waterways No. 7 with Ordnance Survey mapping. Published by Harper Collins.

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 work out and spend time with friends and family. It can also be a dangerous journey, if appropriate safety guidelines are overlooked. Always follow these basic rules.

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

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- 11. Footwear
- 12. Licence

ALWAYS be certain to let other 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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