

River Ouse in Sussex Canoe Trails

1. Lewes to Hamsey return 5 miles
2. Barcombe Mills to Lewes 6 miles
3. Piddinghoe to Lewes return 12 miles
4. Piddinghoe to Lewes 6 miles



General Information

This small but interesting river rises in Slaugham, West Sussex and emerges from a lake called Mill Pond where it cascades spectacularly down a flight of steps. The River Ouse corridor comprises of over 140 miles of main river and tributaries.

Flowing East under the A23 dual carriageway, the river passes under the London to Brighton Viaduct at Balcombe. It flows on through the Sussex Weald passing north of Haywards Heath. The river now heads south on to Sheffield Park, where it runs alongside and under the Bluebell railway line.

The river continues to wind through charming countryside and is joined by the river Uck just north of Isfield and then on to Barcombe Mills. Having dropped over 200 feet and covered some 20 miles the river now becomes tidal.

A further six miles brings you to the historic town of Lewes, and another seven to Newhaven Harbour where the river the river meets the English Channel.



Opened in 2005, The Sussex Ouse Valley Way is a beautiful 42 mile journey that broadly follows the river from source to sea.

The habitat rich environment of the River supports a wide range of bird, mammal, and insect life, including some rare species of butterfly, the endangered water vole, and of course a considerable variety of birds including kingfishers, water rail, reed and sedge warblers, and grey wagtails. Buzzards can be frequently seen soaring overhead. Anglers fish the river for carp, pike and trout.

If you are lucky you may see a seal in the river or even on the bank. They have been known to feed and bask as far up river as Barcombe Mills

The 4 trails are on the tidal section of the river, so the tidal current will determine the timing and direction of any trip to be made.

Below Lewes, the river has been embanked and runs quite fast. Spring tides are more interesting than neaps.

With all of the trails either starting or finishing at Lewes, a visit to the town is recommended.

Did you know?

The Battle of Lewes 1264 saw hundreds of Henry III troops die as they tried to retreat across the river Ouse. Many of their skeletal remains lie under nearby railway embanking.

On March 28, 1941, Virginia Woolf the English author, essayist and publisher walked down to the river at Southease. She left her hat and cane by the river bank, placed some heavy stones in her coat pocket and drowned herself.



Close to the river is the Snow Drop Inn which commemorates the deadliest snow avalanche on record in the UK. The Lewes avalanche occurred on 27th December 1836, when a huge build-up of snow on a chalk cliff overlooking the town collapsed into the settlement 100 metres below, destroying a row of cottages and killing 8 people.

The Sussex Ouse Sea Trout are BIG and can be up to 15.5 lbs or more, in addition they can exceed 30 inches in length. With the heaviest average weight of any English or Welsh river, these fish show exceptionally fast growth and differ in behaviour from stocks in other rivers.



Lewes Bonfire is the town's most important annual event. The celebrations, which controversially involve burning an effigy of the Pope, are the largest and most famous Bonfire Night celebrations in the country.

The river was a commercial waterway, used by narrow barges during the 1800s as far up as Balcombe

The 11 million bricks required to build the Viaduct were brought up from Newhaven and would have passed through the now lost or disintegrating locks.

Rights of navigation for the non-tidal Ouse

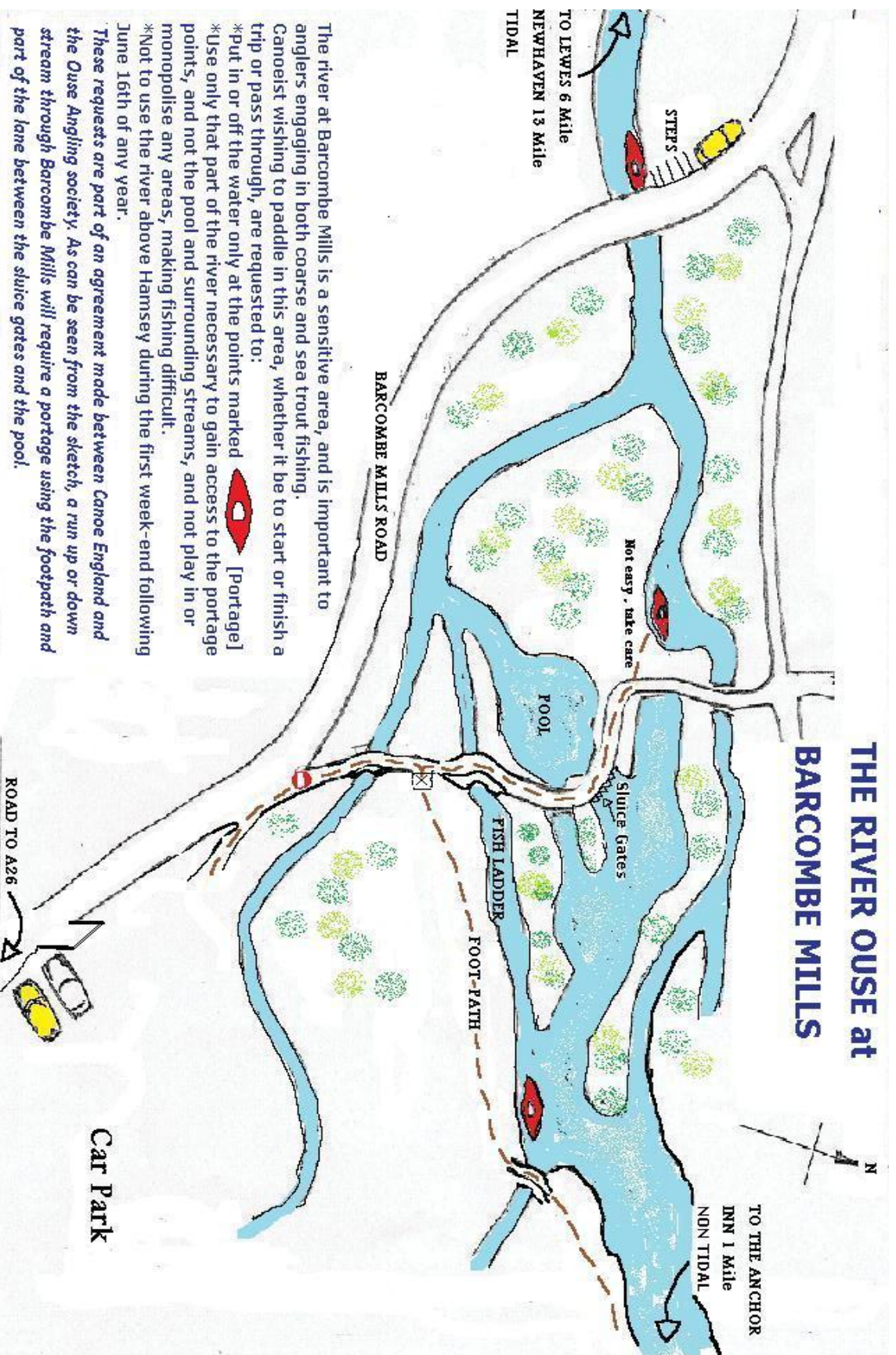
In general, the bed and banks of all rivers and canals are privately owned. There is, however, a right of access on all rivers and canals maintained as navigations subject to a payment for a license where required.

Although the Ouse as a navigation has been abandoned, the navigation act is not extinguished. During the warmer months people will swim in the river around the Barcombe Mills area, inflatables and sit on tops are popular and the Anchor Inn hires out rowing boats.

To paddle from Barcombe Mills please see the sketch map and notes as shown below. For more information on paddling the non-tidal river above this point, contact the Canoe England Local Waterway Advisor. Contact details from – <http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/riverinformationservice.aspx>

There is a further 18 miles of river stretching up into the Sussex Weald. The first 12 miles have a number of challenges and could only be paddled during the winter months when the river is in spate. A more practical start can be made from Sheffield Park or Gold Bridge near Newick, which can be paddled at almost any time of year.

THE RIVER OUSE at BARCOMBE MILLS



The river at Barcombe Mills is a sensitive area, and is important to anglers engaging in both coarse and sea trout fishing.

Canoeists wishing to paddle in this area, whether it be to start or finish a trip or pass through, are requested to:

- *put in or off the water only at the points marked [Portage]
- *Use only that part of the river necessary to gain access to the portage points, and not the pool and surrounding streams, and not play in or monopolise any areas, making fishing difficult.
- *Not to use the river above Hamsey during the first week-end following June 16th of any year.

These requests are part of an agreement made between Canoe England and the Ouse Angling society. As can be seen from the sketch, a run up or down stream through Barcombe Mills will require a portage using the footpath and part of the lane between the sluice gates and the pool.

Trail 1 - Lewes to Hamsey and return

This is a pleasant and easy paddle, 2-3 hours – trusting tide times are observed.

Distance - 5 miles. - as a circular route

Portages - maybe one at Hamsey weir and only if you choose to take the loop and cut described below.

OS Map - 198 Brighton and the Downs

Licence - not required.

Access arrangement - Do not paddle above Hamsey during the first weekend following the 16th of June of any year. See the information sheet / sketch map.

Time and Tide; You will need to start your journey 1 hour before high tide at Lewes. High tide at Lewes is one hour later than Newhaven.

A typical trip schedule could look like this;

- 11.00 Set off from Lewes [HT at Newhaven 11.00]
- 11.45 Arrive Hamsey. Lunch
- 12.45 Start return journey [on ebb]
- 13.30 Arrive back at Lewes

Tide timetables available from: <http://www.pol.ac.uk/ntslf/tides/?port=0011>

Start/Finish

The get in/ get out point is on the east side of the river under, or close to, the Phoenix Bridge [A26] GR 419104. There is a pay and display car park [postcode BN72AR. £3 for the day, free on Sundays] within carrying distance, this is behind the Harvey's Brewery.

The Journey

Having launched from under the bridge or nearby and heading upstream, you will soon leave Lewes behind and be in open countryside. On the left bank there is a foot path close to the river and beyond this is the main railway line that connects SE coast with the London to Brighton line.

Look out for the Llamas or Alpacas on the right bank

After about two miles the river forks and makes a loop around the isolated Hamsey church. You have the choice of the right hand branch, which is the natural and longer course of the river, or the left branch which is a cut [that was made to avoid the loop] which can be shallow and weedy especially at neap tides. Take the right hand branch around the loop and maybe use the cut for your return journey.

Hamsey weir is where the cut and river loop meet. If the river levels are high then the weir may be covered and safe* to pass, otherwise portage on the left bank. This is a good place to have a break / lunch before the return journey back to Lewes.





(Jan 2012)

**The Weir at Hamsey is controlled hydraulically and has sharp ^ shaped projections which are space 4ft apart along its length –if in doubt -keep clear and portage.*

Lunch time at Hamsey

Please note that the get in / get out point is relatively easy for access to the river at high water but can become more difficult as river levels drop and a steeper bank is revealed. So the longer you take to complete this trip the more effort will be required hauling your boats up the bank on your return at Lewes.

TRAIL 2. - Barcombe Mills to Lewes

Distance - 6 miles

This is an easy paddle, 3 - 4 hours – trusting tide times are observed. This trip involves a car shuttle. The car park (postcode BN72AR0 mentioned in trail 1 above is the finish and therefore where you will need to leave your vehicle[s].

Portages maybe one at Hamsey weir and only if you choose to take the loop described in the Lewes to Hamsey trail .

OS Map - 198 Brighton and the Downs

Licence - not required.

Access Arrangements - please refer to the General Information and sketch map for launching at Barcombe Mills

Time and Tide; You will need to start your journey 2 hours after High Tide at Newhaven. A typical trip schedule could look like this;

- 11.00 Set off from Barcombe Mills [HT at Newhaven 09.00]
- 12.15 Arrive Hamsey. Lunch
- 13.15 Continue journey
- 14.00 Arrive at Lewes

Tide timetables available from: <http://www.pol.ac.uk/ntslf/tides/?port=0011>

Start

This can be accessed down some steps. Having come from Lewes on the A26 and up the Barcombe Mills Road, these steps are on your left once you have crossed the bridge. GR431149 There is a few verge parking spaces suitable to offload boats.

The Journey

Having launched from under the bridge there will be little opportunity to see much of the surrounding landscape for the first 2 or 3 miles, or get out of your boat, as the banks are quite high but not overbearing.

There are no roads or buildings near this stretch of the river and only a small section of footpath at the start, making for a very secluded and peaceful paddle.



The get in point is under the road bridge on the Barcombe Mills Road.



***Get in point under the road bridge
Shown here at low tide. The get in /get out for trails that either start or finish at Lewes. It's on the east side of the river close to the Phoenix Bridge [A26] in Lewes.***

After about 3.5 miles and as you approach Hamsey the river banks are lower and it becomes more practical to stop for refreshment and stretch the legs, the area near to the weir is an ideal spot.

On reaching the Hamsey weir which will be on your left, you now have the choice to portage or paddle over this, alternatively keep right and carry straight on down the cut.

The last 2 miles and finish are the same as the Lewes to Hamsey trail. Hamsey weir is where the cut and river loop meet. If the river levels are high then the weir may be *covered* and safe* to pass, otherwise portage on the left bank. This is a good place to have a break / lunch before the return journey back to Lewes.

**The Weir at Hamsey is controlled hydraulically and has sharp ^ shaped projections which are space 4ft apart along its length –if in doubt -keep clear and portage.*

Please note that the get in / get out point is relatively easy for access to the river at high water but can become more difficult as river levels drop and a steeper bank is revealed. So the longer you take to complete this trip the more effort will be required hauling your boats up the bank on your return at Lewes.

TRAIL 3. Piddinghoe to Lewes return – 12 miles

This section of the river is close to the sea with tides running quite fast, so timing is important. It is also more open and exposed and on windy days can be testing, particularly for open canoes and inflatables.

For this trail it is recommended paddlers have experience of moving water, and distance for the longer return journey.

A start can be made from Newhaven harbour which is a further mile down river from Piddinghoe-Launching at Piddinghoe avoids large ships.

Portages - None

OS Map - 198 Brighton and the Downs

Licence - not required.

Time and Tide- You will need to start your journey 1 hour before High Tide at Newhaven.

The get in at Piddinghoe



A typical trip schedule could look like this;

- 09.00 Set off from Piddinghoe (High Tide at Newhaven 10.00)
- 11.00 Arrive Lewes. Lunch, visit the town.
- 13.00 Return journey (on the ebb)
- 15.00 Arrive back at Piddinghoe

Tide timetables available from: <http://www.pol.ac.uk/ntslf/tides/?port=0011>

Start/Finish

There is parking outside St John's Church (Postcode BN9 9AP) Piddinghoe. Access to the river is to the right. Look out for the unusual sea trout weather vane atop the round Norman tower of St John's and the only surviving bottle kiln in Sussex which can be seen from the water on the left bank a few hundred yards upstream.

The Journey

For the first 3 miles the river is embanked and quite wide with views of the South Downs ahead.

After about 1¾ miles you reach the swing bridge at Southease. Take care as some strong eddies can form at certain times around this structure.

A further 1¾ miles and you will see a tributary on the right. This is Glynde Reach with a railway bridge close to its mouth. Lewes with its castle can be seen from here. The exposed white chalk of the downs is on your right.



Southease Swing Bridge at low tide



It's about a mile to where the river passes under the A27.

Houses and moored boats signal your arrival into Lewes. Continue under the Cliffe High Street Bridge and the get out is just past the Harvey's Brewery on your right.

If returning to Piddinghoe the tide needs to turn. Wait an hour or so and the ebb flow will assist your paddle back. There are some interesting shops and old buildings close by in the town at Cliffe High Street, Your return journey is simple; go back the way you came.

Swing Bridges

This trail does have some swing bridges and we would advise that you ensure you have considered, the craft you are in, the river levels and the potential need to portage. If you do go under these bridges please look out for any nuts and bolts protruding below the bridge.

TRAIL 4. Piddinghoe to Lewes

Distance - 6 miles, as a single journey

Car shuttle required

This section of the river is close to the sea with tides running quite fast, so timing is important. It is also more open and exposed and on windy days can be testing, particularly for open canoes and inflatables.

For this Trail it is recommended paddlers have experience of moving water..

A start can be made from Newhaven harbour which is a further mile down river from Piddinghoe. Launching at Piddinghoe avoids large ships.

Portages - None

OS Map - 198 Brighton and the Downs

Licence - not required.

Time and Tide- You will need to start your journey 1 hour before High Tide at Newhaven.

The get in at Piddinghoe



A typical trip schedule could look like this;

- 09.00 Set off from Piddinghoe (High Tide at Newhaven 10.00)
- 11.00 Arrive Lewes. Lunch, visit the town.

Tide timetables available from: <http://www.pol.ac.uk/ntslf/tides/?port=0011>

Start

There is parking outside St John's Church (Postcode BN9 9AP) Piddinghoe. Access to the river is to the right. Look out for the unusual sea trout weather vane atop the round Norman tower of St John's and the only surviving bottle kiln in Sussex which can be seen from the water on the left bank a few hundred yards upstream.

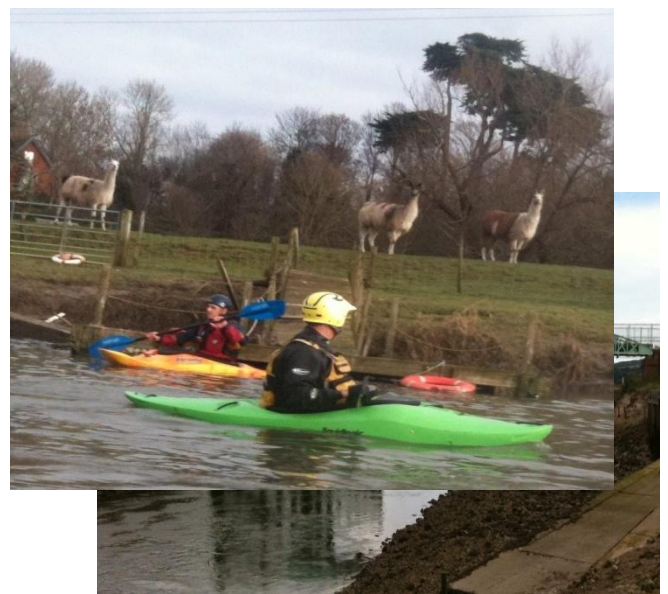
Finish

The get out point is on the east side of the river under, or close to, the Phoenix Bridge [A26] GR 419104. There is a pay and display car park [postcode BN72AR. £3 for the day, free on Sundays] within carrying distance, this is behind the Harvey's Brewery.

The Journey

For the first 3 miles the river is embanked and quite wide with views of the South Downs ahead.

After about 1¾ miles you reach the swing bridge at Southease. Take care as some strong eddies can form at certain times around this structure.



A further 1¼ miles and you will see a tributary on the right. This is Glynde Reach with a railway bridge close to its mouth. Lewes with its castle can be seen from here. The exposed white chalk of the downs is on your right.

Southeast Swing Bridge at low tide

It's about a mile to where the river passes under the A27.

Houses and moored boats signal your arrival into Lewes. Continue under the Cliffe High Street Bridge and the get out is just past the Harvey's Brewery on your right.

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12/09/2012

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