# The River Nene

# A guide for river users

Northampton to The Wash including the Grand Union Canal (Northampton Arm to Gayton Junction)

**ROGER GREEN** 

## **The River Nene**

## Summary of distances, locks and estimated times

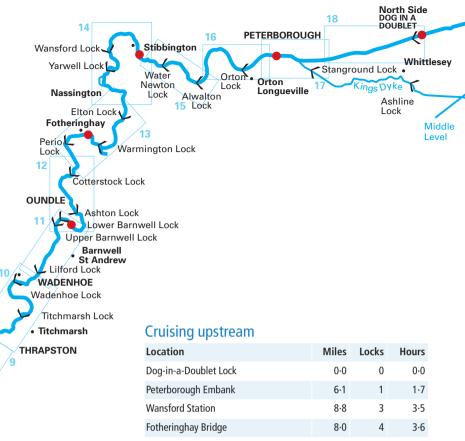
## **Cruising downstream**

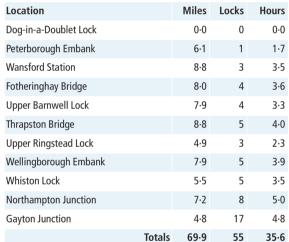
Gayton Junction Northampton Junction Whiston Lock Wellingborough Embank Upper Ringstead Lock	0·0 4·8	0 17	0.0
Whiston Lock Wellingborough Embank	4.8	17	
Wellingborough Embank		17	4.8
3 3	7.2	8	5.0
Upper Ringstead Lock	5.5	5	3.5
	7.9	5	3.9
Thrapston Bridge	4.9	3	2.3
Upper Barnwell Lock	8-8	5	4.0
Fotheringhay Bridge	7.9	4	3.3
Wansford Station	8-0	4	3.6
Peterborough Embank	8.8	3	3.5
Dog-in-a-Doublet Lock	6∙1	1	1.7
Totals	69.9	55	35.6

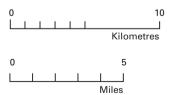




(Main Line)







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#### **CAUTION**

Every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this book. It contains selected information and thus is not definitive and does not include all known information on the subject in hand; this is particularly relevant to the plans which should not be used for navigation. The author and publisher believe that its selection is a useful aid to prudent navigation but the safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgement of the navigator who should assess all information, published or unpublished, available to him.

This work has been corrected to April 2020

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## **Preface**

The River Nene has many outstanding qualities as those who walk and boat along the river will youch. It can exhibit tranquil beauty as you navigate its meanders, water meadows, lock structures and neighbouring villages and towns. It can also be quite ferocious and always needs to be respected.

I hope that this edition will appeal to all users of the river, not just boaters, but also provide a useful reference for those who enjoy walking, canoeing and cycling around the Nene valley.

This latest edition of the *The River Nene* guide has involved a considerable amount of fieldwork, local knowledge and discussions with many river users. Just like the river, some of the information will change over time, and whilst every effort has been made to check details river users are advised to make their own real-time checks before relying too much on local services.

I am really pleased that the Inland Waterways Association have agreed to support this project and continue to campaign for access to our waterways. The adoption of the Northampton Arm by the IWA Northampton Branch and involvement with plans for a more modest version of the Fens Waterways Link are examples that will benefit all waterway users.

I would also like to thank Iain Smith (previous author) for allowing me to use his wealth of historical text, Sue Cant (Environment Agency) for checking details and updating sections of text, Dick Whitehouse (Friends of the River Nene) for providing the information about canoeing access and advice and Chris Howes for allowing me to use some of his photos to supplement my collection.





Autumn at Ringstead

## **River Nene navigation**

The River Nene is the tenth longest river in the United Kingdom and is navigable for 91 miles (147 km), from Northampton to the Wash, Linking the navigable rivers of East Anglia with the Grand Union canal and the national canal network, this important river rises at sources near Badby, Naseby and Yelvertoft.

Navigation starts at Northampton and extends to the sea, entering The Wash between two towers, at Guy's Head, known as 'the lighthouses'. The river is tidal downstream of the Dog-in-a-Doublet Lock near Peterborough.

Originally a commercial navigation it is now used almost entirely for recreation. Boat traffic is increasing on this attractive waterway, but it is still quiet compared with other navigations such as the canals and Great Ouse.

Take your time to explore this very beautiful waterway ... don't rush it. With views throughout, it passes through Northamptonshire, the county of 'squires and spires', Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, flowing through industrial towns such as Northampton and Wellingborough, the cathedral city of Peterborough, and the Dutch style waterfront architecture of Wisbech. Farmland, fenland, wetland areas of special scientific interest, castle mounds, and quintessential English villages (like Wadenhoe and Fotheringhay) built from local limestone are just some of the delights that await you.

Human history in the Nene Valley dates back at least 5,000 years. Bronze age settlements, Roman remains, birthplace of the last Plantagenet king and the site where Mary Queen of Scots was executed at Fotheringhay, quiet country churches, and mills that once produced paper, leather or flour - all this, and more, can be seen as you navigate the river.

Neen or Nen? Well, you may or may not get it right as pronunciation of the river's name varies by locality. Generally, it is pronounced 'Nen' from Northampton to Thrapston and 'Neen' from Thrapston to Peterborough. Either way, you will be quickly corrected by locals and boaters.

### **Navigation Authority**

The Environment Agency (EA) is the navigation authority for the River Nene from the confluence with the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal in Northampton to Bevis Hall, just upstream of Wisbech.

## Boat licensing and registration

All vessels kept, used, or let for hire on the River Nene must be registered for use with the Environment Agency. This includes vessels in marinas and on privately owned moorings.

Depending on the type of craft, to obtain a boat registration you may need:

- insurance
- a Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) certificate

You must renew your registration each year for the waterway you want to keep or use your boat on. Annual registrations expire on 31 March regardless of when they start on EA waterways and 31 December for Gold licences.

Visitor registrations are available for shorter periods; 1 day, 7 days, and 31 days. The Environment Agency advises that you should allow two weeks for your application to be processed. Registration costs for powered boats are based on boat length. A registration charges sheet can be found at www.gov.uk/register-a-boat

To renew your boat registration, contact the boat registration team:

Environment Agency boat registration team PO Box 544, Rotherham, S60 1BY *Email* boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk © 03708 506 506 Minicom (for the hard of hearing) © 03702 422 549

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Visitor registrations may also be purchased from Northampton Marina or from one of several outlets along the river. You should contact the Boat Registration Team for the most up to date details of these outlets.

## Reciprocal arrangements with other navigation authorities

A River Nene registration also covers use of your boat on the River Great Ouse. Reciprocal arrangements with other Navigation Authorities include:

- A Gold Licence, available from either the Agency or the Canal and River Trust (CRT) permits craft licensed by either Authority to navigate the other's waters. (CRT is the navigation authority for the Northampton Arm.)
- Cambs Conservators

You must purchase a reciprocal licence before venturing onto these waterways, from:



#### Canal and River Trust

Boat licencing team PO Box 162, Leeds, LS9 1AX © 0303 040 4040



#### **Cam Conservancy**

Clayhithe Office, Clayhithe Road, Waterbeach, Cambridge, CB25 9JB © 01223 863785

At present you do not need to register or have a licence to boat on the Middle Level network. This will change shortly as the Middle Level Bill takes effect when boat registration will be required.

## Legislation

Boat owners navigating Recreational Waterways within the Environment Agency's Anglian waterways should acquaint themselves with the following legislation, particularly local byelaws and registration requirements (The Order 2010).

The Anglian Water Authority Act 1977 The Recreational Waterways (General) Byelaws 1980

The Environment Act 1995 The Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010

Copies can be obtained from the Environment Agency at WaterwaysAnglian@environmentagency.gov.uk

## Speed limits

A speed limit of 7mph (11kph) applies throughout the navigation except for one mile downstream of Peterborough. This derestricted stretch is clearly signposted. Elsewhere, the Agency seek to enforce this limit, to prevent unsocial behaviour. Even within this limit, boaters should travel at an appropriate speed in the interests of safety and to protect wildlife. Powered vessels should also slow down and maintain a steady course when approaching manual or sailing craft or swimmers. Care must especially be taken when overtaking other vessels or turning as well as near bridges and sharp bends, where vessels travelling upstream must give way to those going downstream.

### Navigation keys

Vessels navigating the River Nene need a navigation key, often called an *Abloy* key to operate the locks and to access sanitary facilities and water points. Navigation keys can be purchased from the Boat Registration Team, Northampton Marina or one of several outlets along the river. Proof of registration is required when purchasing a navigation key.

#### Windlass

As well as a navigation key you will need a windlass to fit a  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch square when operating the locks on the River Nene.

## **Environment Agency marina**

Northampton Marina, immediately upstream of Northampton Town Lock (Becket's Park Lock), is operated by the Environment Agency. This popular marina provides a warm welcome and ideal first stopover for visiting boats travelling to and from the national canal network. Its facilities include:

- All berths are on rise and fall, non-slip pontoons and walkways within a secure site
- Residential, permanent and visitor moorings. Winter moorings are popular but subject to availability.
- Electricity and drinking water to all mooring berths, security lighting, toilets, washrooms, showers, pump-out and chemical toilet disposal, rubbish collection, laundry, BBQ area with picnic tables and wild flower meadow
- · Fully manned site

- Short stay vehicular access and parking for off-loading by boat users
- Long term parking by arrangement with Northampton Borough Council in close by town centre car parks
- Easy access to town centre facilities and attractions

The marina is well signposted from the river. For full details and current fees: www.northamptonmarina.co.uk © 01604 604344 or © 07867 580129

#### Private marinas

There is a growing number of developing private marinas, in addition to those that have been established for many years. Marina details can be found on the maps/text pages.

### Visitor/short stay moorings

The Environment Agency provides visitor moorings at 10 locations on the river. These are shown on the map pages. There is no charge for the use of these moorings, but the maximum period of stay is limited to 48 hours within any period of three consecutive days.

In an emergency or periods of high flows (Strong Stream restrictions) please let the Environment Agency know that you are there, permission to stay longer than would normally be allowed is unlikely to be refused in such circumstances.

Visitor moorings provided by the Environment Agency are a mixture of fixed level and floating pontoons. All provide a safe haven for boats and boaters in times of high flows.

Funding has been obtained though the Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership Scheme, to deliver access from and to the River Nene as part of the Nenescape project (see page 37). The Environment Agency is a key partner, Boaters should start seeing new moorings and improvements, funded by the scheme, from summer 2019 onwards for the next five years.

Overnight mooring at lock landing stages is generally prohibited, except in an emergency, during times of high flows, and with the permission of the Environment Agency.

For safety reasons, boats must not be moored within 36m of any locks, sluices, weirs or water intakes except when navigating through a lock. In some cases, such as the Dog-in-a-Doublet Tidal Lock & Sluices, Bedford Road Sluice (Northampton) and Weston Favell (Northampton), mooring is prohibited for 100m on both sides of the structure.

### Other visitor and short stay moorings

Local councils, businesses and boat clubs all provide short term moorings for boaters.

Friends of the River Nene (FOTRN - see p.36) membership allows access to 10 mooring sites. With annual membership in the region of £12, it is well worth joining FOTRN before embarking on your journey.

The location of these moorings are shown on the map/text pages.

There also several permissive moorings on the river, these are noted on the map/text pages.

## Water points and sewage disposal

The Environment Agency provides water and sanitary facilities along the River Nene.

The EA toilet pump-out facilities at Northampton Marina and Wellingborough Embankment are token operated, tokens can be purchased from Northampton Marina.

Peterborough City Council provides drinking water, pump-out and chemical toilet disposal at Peterborough Embankment.

Elsewhere along the waterways, these facilities are available at most marinas and some boat clubs.

These are marked on the map/text pages.

## **Public slipway**

There is a public slipway at Potters Way, Peterborough, provided by Peterborough City Council. A key is required to access the slipway, which is available from the Visitor Information Centre at Peterborough City Council and with whom you should also check the details of the height restriction along Potters Way.

Visitor Information Centre 41 Bridge Street Peterborough PE1 1HA ① 01733 452336

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 0900–1700 Tuesday 1000-1700 Saturday 1000–1600 Sunday and Bank Holidays closed

The Environment Agency slipway at Wellingborough is currently closed and awaiting improvements to the public highway access before it can be reopened.



EA water point

### River Nene locks

There are 38 locks on the River Nene from Northampton Town Lock 1 (also known as Becket's Park Lock) to the Dog-in-a-Doublet tidal lock 38 downstream of Peterborough.

All the River Nene locks have steel pointing/mitre gates at the upstream end and 6 of the locks have steel pointing/mitre gates at the downstream end as well. 31 locks have vertical gates at the downstream end and 1 lock has a radial gate at the downstream end. This type of lock is almost unique to the navigable rivers of East Anglia and an important heritage feature. They are known as 'Guillotine Gate Locks' and the majority are electrically operated. Except for the Dog-in-a-Doublet, the Nene locks are unmanned.

Ditchford Lock is unique in that it has a radial gate at its downstream end. There were once many more radial lock gates on the River Nene but today the only one remaining is at Ditchford.

Each Nene lock is 83ft 6ins (26m) long and 15ft wide (4.6m) with a minimum depth of 4ft (1·2m). To make allowances for adverse conditions, the maximum dimensions for craft should be regarded as:

Length 78ft (23m)

Beam 13ft (3.9m)

Draught 4ft (1.2m)

Headroom 7ft (2·1m)

Craft approaching these maximum dimensions may have difficulties.

All Nene locks have plentiful bollards for use and ladders placed on the left-hand side near the guillotine when proceeding downstream and another near the mitre gates on the left-hand side when proceeding upstream.

Ditchford Lock radial gate



#### Using guillotine or radial gate locks

Guillotine gate locks and Ditchford radial gate lock should be left with the pointing/mitre gates closed and the vertical lift/radial gate raised and locked. This is because the height of the upstream pointing gates is set to maintain water levels for navigation in the upstream reaches. In times of higher than normal flows, water weirs over these pointing gates and is a sign that river conditions are changing.

Yellow zones in the lock pen mark the location of underwater cills. Never moor within these zones as these are where sinking is possible if water overtops the upstream gates.

Where a lock has a manually operated winding wheel, a lockable bolt retains the handle for the lock operation. This is released by inserting the EA Ablov navigation key. The bolt should be securely pushed into the operating wheel after use and the spring-loaded lock fully pushed home.

The vertical gates and paddle mechanisms should always be operated with care. Children should not be allowed to operate them.

Manually operated winding wheel Chris Howes



Always check with the person responsible for the boat in the lock that they are secured and prepared before opening any paddle or vertical gate. This is particularly important when locking upstream as top-gate paddles can create a strong current. Boat owners are advised to use side fenders when inside the lock pen and to open the upstream paddle slowly, to avoid creating turbulent water within the lock pen and possible damage to your boat.

#### Caution

If the pointing doors are found chained back (open) and the vertical gate partially lifted, ie the lock is 'reversed', no attempt to navigate should be made. Warnings are sited upstream and downstream of locks to indicate when a lock is reversed.

Should there have been heavy rain in the area it is probable there will be a rapid change in water condition eg rise in level, increase in current, change in colour. With any such change in conditions the Agency will almost certainly be operating sluices to regulate water levels and extreme care should be taken when approaching locks or other structures.

At several locks the river may overtop the mitre gates (*see photo opposite*) even when flows are normal. Boaters should take care and be aware that this may make manoeuvring into locks interesting.

All locks with guillotine gates should be left empty with the guillotine gate raised. At locks with mitre gates at both ends both sets of gates must left closed.

Irthlingborough Lock Chris Howes

### Lock procedures

### Entering the lock from a higher level

- · Lower the vertical gate
- Open paddles slowly in the pointing doors to fill the lock pen
- Open the pointing doors when water levels are equal, and enter the lock
- Lower the paddles and close the pointing doors
- On manually operated locks raise the vertical door a few inches only. This is stiff at first, to prevent rapid opening of the door; vessels can be difficult to control if water surges forward. The vertical gate should be fully raised once the water level in the lock pen has fallen. Powered locks automatically allow two minutes for water to level.

### Entering the lock from a lower level

- After entering the lock, lower the vertical gate
- Open paddles slowly in the pointing doors to fill the lock pen
- When levels permit, open the pointing doors
- After leaving the lock, lower the paddles and close the pointing door
- Finally, raise the vertical gate fully.



## Low headroom bridges

There are 70 fixed bridges along the River Nene between Northampton and Wisbech, several of which have low headroom. Low headroom bridges are those that offer less than 2.7 metres air draught in normal river conditions. These are listed on the bridge headroom table on page 31 and shown on the map/text pages. Inverted gauge boards adjacent to these low headroom bridges give quidance on available headroom. When travelling with the flow. care should be taken when approaching bridges and proceed only when you are sure that there is enough air draft for your boat to pass through safely. Headroom at bridges on the tidal section of the river will always vary. Please seek advice from the Dog-in-a-Doublet lock keeper before attempting to pass underneath any bridges on the tidal reaches.

## Passage to and from the tidal River Nene

Passage into the tidal river downstream of the Dog-in-a-Doublet lock must be made by prior arrangement with the lockkeeper. Registered craft may pass through this lock every day from 0730 hours until official sunset time. Boat owners should telephone the Navigation Duty Officer to make arrangements for passage in advance of their arrival.

Navigation Duty Officer ① 07384 249151

The river is tidal for 25 miles downstream of the Dog-in-a-Doublet Lock, which is five miles below Peterborough. This stretch can be treacherous, especially during spring tides. Passage should only be attempted if you are sure of your own capabilities as well as that of your boat.

For information regarding the passage of craft or moorings in the port of Wisbech and down to the sea apply to

The Port Manager Port Office Wishech ① 01945 588059 / 01406 351530

Craft should proceed through Wisbech with care. The banks are lined with steel and concrete piling, there is stone in the bed, and there is a strong run on the flood and ebb tide, particularly at the lower stages.

## Navigation closures and restrictions

The Environment Agency posts advance information on closures and restrictions to the navigation of the river on the information boards at each lock. This information is also published on Northampton Marina's website www.northamptonmarina.co.uk, on Twitter @PaulSeparovicEA, and held by the marinas and boat clubs along the river.

#### Water levels

Water levels naturally fluctuate and cannot be guaranteed. Care should be taken when:

- Approaching any of the river controls, weirs, sluices, locks etc, should there be any significant flow on the river
- When stopping overnight or leaving a boat for a considerable length of time, i.e. over winter (where boats are permitted to remain in the water)
- In a flood situation, do not moor in shallow water or with a tight rope or chain as water levels may fluctuate. If the level drops and a craft is moored aground or in shallow water, it may be damaged. If the level rises and mooring ropes or chains are tight, the boat may take on water, be pulled under or even broken free.

The Environment Agency disclaims liability for any damage caused to craft moored on the river, as a result of fluctuating water levels.

#### Reversed locks

The Nene is susceptible to a rapid rise after heavy rain, due to its nature and catchment area and river users are advised to pay close attention to weather forecasts. If you observe any of the following changes - a rapid change in water condition, rising water levels, an increase in flow and current, water cascading over lock pointing doors, as well as a change in water colour - the Environment Agency will almost certainly be operating sluices to regulate water levels

Boaters should take extreme care and seek suitable mooring at the earliest opportunity.

If the pointing doors of a lock are found chained back (open) and the vertical gate partially lifted, no attempt to navigate should be made.

These locks are 'reversed' and being used to discharge flood water from the system. You should not approach a reversed lock but moor up safely a distance away, contact the Environment Agency to let them know where you are, tune into the local weather forecast and wait for conditions to return to normal.

Warning signs are displayed upstream and downstream of locks and red warning lights (visible from a distance) deployed on the top of the guillotine gate frames to indicate when a lock is reversed.

There are eight locks that are 'reversed' on the River Nene in times of high flows: Doddington, Titchmarsh, Wadenhoe, Lower Barnwell, Cotterstock, Warmington, Elton and Yarwell.

The Environment Agency is working on mitigation measures that will allow them to cease this practise and divert excess water via alternative routes.

## **Changing river conditions**

# River Advice for Boaters (Strong Stream Advice)

Boaters are encouraged to sign up to receive Environment Agency River Advice for Boaters (also known as Strong Stream Advice). This free service advises boat users that conditions are such that it is strongly recommended against attempting to navigate and that locks are 'reversed'.

To receive SSA notifications, email or write to ask to be added to the service: Anglian Waterways
Environment Agency, Ceres House, Searby Road, Lincoln,
LN2 4DW

waterwaysssaanglian@environment-agency.gov.uk

You can request to receive SSA by many different methods including automatic voice message, text, pager or email.

Please note that automated warnings can be generated any time of the day or night.

When River Advice for Boaters (RAB) is issued/Strong Stream Advice (SSA) is in force, signs and/or red flags are deployed to inform users on the River Nene of changing river conditions. These are located at the top and bottom locks of the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal, Stanground Lock Peterborough, the Dog-in-a-Doublet tidal lock, all reversed locks, visitor moorings and Northampton Marina.

Several marinas and boat clubs (in association with the Agency) raise red flags when RAB is issued/SSA is in force.

These flags not only inform club members and marina users against attempting to navigate but are of value to other river users as well.

#### Floodline service

River users can also telephone the Agency's Floodline Information Service to hear the recorded message informing users whether River Advice for Boaters has been issued.

To do this complete the following steps:

- 1. Call Floodline © 0845 988 1188. You will be welcomed to Floodline and offered different touch tone options.
- Choose option '1' to listen to prerecorded information for flood warnings currently in force.
- 3. Simply enter the River Nene quick dial SSA number 032112 when prompted.



Strong Stream Advice signage at Wadenhoe Lock

# The Inland Waterways Association



The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) was born from necessity back in 1945, when two forward-thinking canal enthusiasts, Tom Rolt and Robert Aickman, realised there was a need to protect the waterways of Britain, which were being abandoned and filled in at an alarming rate in favour of new road and railway networks. At a meeting in August 1945, at Tardebigge, near Bromsgrove on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, plans for IWA were agreed between the two men and the Association was officially set up in February 1946. In November of that year, the first ever Bulletin was issued informing members that the Stratford Canal, Kennet & Avon and Suffolk Stour were the targets of the first IWA campaigns.

On the Stratford Canal, Rolt successfully challenged Great Western Railway (GWR), the then owners of the Stratford Canal, at Tunnel Lane, Lifford Bridge at Kings Norton. GWR had replaced a former drawbridge with a new bridge that was too low to allow boat passage along the canal, despite a statutory right of navigation existing. A question in Parliament and a notice of intention to navigate, forced GWR to lift the bridge to allow Rolt, in his narrowboat Cressy to pass.

The successes of these early actions gave IWA the confidence needed to start campaigning far and wide, further buoyed by the rise of leisure boating, which swelled membership numbers during the 1950s, 60s and beyond.

Today, IWA speaks for all users of the inland waterways network, which includes 6,500 miles of rivers and canals across England and Wales as well as the Scottish Canals. IWA works tirelessly to help protect and restore these waterways through its lobbying and campaigning activity, whether on a government level, with changes to legislation or the introduction of new transport initiatives, or on a more local level with council-led planning issues or decisions from navigation authorities. Local campaigning is undertaken by IWA's network of branches across the country.

Through its Waterway Recovery Group, IWA works with canal restoration trusts around the country, providing a volunteer workforce, expert engineering and planning advice and information on how to raise the necessary funds. Over 500 miles of canal have been restored and put back to water in the course of IWA's history, with many more currently undergoing restoration.

In this region the IWA is represented by the Northampton and Peterborough branches. Both meet regularly, and welcome new members. To learn more about the IWA's illustrious history, current campaigns, or to find out some of the many benefits of membership, please visit www.waterways.org.uk. The site will also give you up to date contact details for your local branches.

# **Using the River Nene Guide**

## Map pages

18 detailed maps of the canal and river, showing the main features of the navigation, local facilities, services and features of interest. The maps are marked with 'mile markers'.

Map symbols					
Symbol		Symbol			
4	Navigation Authority (EA/CRT)		Footpath		
4	Friends of the River Nene (FOTRN)		Long distance footpath		
4	Town and Borough Council	4	Drinking water		
4	Marina berths	<u>\</u>	Chemical disposal point		
4	Boat clubs	ヹ	Toilet pumpout		
4	Private or permissive	-	Shower		
<b>•</b>	Mile marker	Ť	Refuse bin		
	Slipwaybank		Fuel		
K	Direction of stream	<b></b>	Shop		
$\forall$	Lock		Public house		
/	Weir	×	Café/restaurant		
(~	Winding hole	<b>*</b>	Railway station		
	Power cable	4	Church		
$\blacktriangle \blacktriangledown$	Canoe portage point	i	Information		
7	Canoe access for launching	$\bowtie$	Post Office		
$\asymp$	Footbridge	,	Telephone		