



# English Canoe Classics

TWENTY-FIVE GREAT CANOE & KAYAK TRIPS



Vol. 1  
NORTH

*Eddie Palmer  
& Nigel Wilford*



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First published in Great Britain 2012 by Pesda Press

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Caernarfon

Gwynedd

LL55 4RN

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ISBN: 978-1-906095-32-1

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Printed and bound in Poland. [www.hussarbooks.com](http://www.hussarbooks.com)

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## Important notice – disclaimer

Canoeing and kayaking are healthy outdoor activities that carry some degree of risk. They involve adventurous travel, often away from close habitation. Guidebooks give an idea of where to access a river, where to egress, the level of difficulty and both the general and specific, in some cases, nature of the hazards to be encountered.

However, Nature being what it is, river valleys are changed by time and erosion, water levels vary considerably with rain and man-made features are again changed by man – weirs, walls and landings can be different to what is expected. Coastal sections, large lakes and estuaries are subject to wind and weather. This guidebook is no substitute for personal inspection at the time of paddling and your own risk assessment and judgement. Your decision to paddle or not, and any consequences arising from that decision, is your responsibility.

# Introduction

Welcome to English Canoe Classics – North, a collection of what the authors, both experienced canoeists, think are the best of rivers, navigations and coastal trips in the North (the North of England roughly defined as being north of Birmingham). This is not a guide to all canoeing rivers but the ones we have enjoyed, whether for the water, the scenery, the interesting surroundings or nearby attractions to visit. Rivers have been paddled for longer sections, and higher up, than described here. This guide is deliberately selective, choosing sections that enable both beginner and experienced paddlers to have enjoyable trips. All of the routes can be paddled with loaded open canoes and therefore with kayaks.

The regional divisions are ours, and they seemed to make sense.

## Acknowledgements

From Eddie – Thanks to all paddling friends over the years, from those colleagues who first took me on moving waters in the Midlands and then on whitewater in North Wales as a gawky teenager. They are too many to mention. Thanks also to people recently met on the recent expeditions in England. Most were very friendly and helpful. Thanks to Malcolm Cox of the Open Canoe Sailing Group for some of the detail on Morecambe Bay. Thanks to Ellie for her patience.

From Wilf – There are so many people to thank, not just for their assistance with the production of this book but for their help in general. To my wife Ruth and our children Emily and Dominic, thank you for sharing my passion for boating and adventures – your enthusiasm and tolerance is so important. For the endless encouragement and support from the rest of my family and to all of you who have paddled with me, helped explore new routes, had your photograph taken, driven to places to pick me up or looked after my family while I've been elsewhere: a most sincere thank you.

The photographs were all taken by the two of us, unless otherwise acknowledged in the captions.



📷 *Nigel Wilford and Eddie Palmer*

## The Authors

### *Eddie Palmer*

Eddie bought his first kayak over 50 years ago. It was a wood and canvas one in which he set out to paddle rivers in his part of middle England and Wales. Since then, he has kayaked and canoed extensively in the UK, Ireland, western and eastern Europe, the USA and Canada and southern Africa. He is also a sailor of various types of boat, and his passion over the past few years has been for long-distance canoe-camping. After a competitive career in slalom and whitewater racing, he still paddles whitewater.

Eddie is a Board Director of the SCA and is the co-author of *Scottish Canoe Touring*, author of *Scottish Canoe Classics* and co-author of *Irish Canoe Classics* (all published by Pesda Press).

### *Nigel Wilford*

Nigel has been involved with canoeing for most of his adult life, paddling throughout the UK, mainland Europe, Canada, USA and New Zealand. Born in northwest Leicestershire, his first canoe experience was on the gentle River Soar. Not long after, he moved to Yorkshire to attend university. The enjoyment he found while paddling the rivers of the northeast firmly established canoeing as his activity of choice. In 1991 he joined the British Canoe Union's coaching service, helping others to improve their canoeing or to become better coaches. Nigel has held various roles within the BCU including Local Coaching Organiser and English Whitewater Safety Coordinator. He is a BCU Level 5 Coach and member of Team Pyranha.



# Using the Guide

To use the guide, you will need an up-to-date and appropriate Ordnance Survey map of the relevant area and the ability to use it. In addition, for any tidal area you will need up-to-date tide tables.

Each route begins with some quick reference information, relevant Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, length of the route in kilometres, vehicle shuttle distances, portages and start and finish points. This is followed by an overall description of the area, details of access points and water levels and finally a route description with distances between the main features.

## TYPES OF WATER



Canals, slow-moving rivers and small inland lakes which are placid water, and easy to cope with.



Inland lakes, still with no current or tide, but which in high winds can produce large waves.



Rivers where flood conditions can make paddling difficult, and requiring a higher level of skill. The grade of any rapids is denoted from 1 to 3 within the icon.



Estuaries and sea loughs, where the direction of the tide is all-important, and usually cannot be paddled against.



Open sea, safer coastal routes suitable for placid water touring kayaks and canoes (in calm, stable weather).

The text points out the obvious difficulties. Beginners are urged to inspect waters before they paddle, especially rapids or weirs. Sea trips should be undertaken with the greatest respect and up-to-date weather information is essential. Ireland can be a rainy place, causing rivers to swell rapidly and flood. There are also many large loughs in which the waves can increase quickly with a sudden wind. These loughs can have similar conditions to the open sea, so the keyword is respect.

## PORTAGES











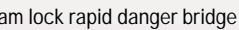



'Portaging', i.e. carrying your boat (taken from the French *portage*, to carry) is necessary when encountering weirs and locks. The portages mentioned in this book are hopefully of about 50 metres at most. They are much easier with a canoe trolley, especially with a heavy canoe full of camping equipment. Paying £70–100 for a good sturdy and long-lasting trolley is a very good investment, and thoroughly recommended.

## RIVER GRADES

This book does not include whitewater paddling of Grade 3 or above. Rivers are graded by the international river grading system from Grade 1 to Grade 6:

- GRADE 1** Easy. Occasional small rapids or riffles, waves regular and low. Most appropriate course, with deepest water, easy to see from canoe or kayak and to steer down. Obstacles e.g. pebble banks, very easy to see. Presents no problems to paddlers able to steer canoes and kayaks. Steering is needed, especially on narrow rivers.
- GRADE 2** Medium. Fairly frequent rapids, usually with regular waves, easy eddies, and small whirlpools and boils. Course generally easy to recognise, but may meander around gravel banks and trees etc. Paddlers in kayaks may get wet, those in open canoes much less so.
- GRADE 3** Difficult. Rapids numerous, and can be continuous. Course more difficult to see, landing to inspect may be wise. Drops may be high enough not to see water below, with high and irregular waves, broken water, eddies and whirlpools/boils. There is no water with rapids of above Grade 3 advised in this guide. Where there are Grade 3 rapids, avoiding or portaging is possible.
- GRADE 4** Very difficult. Long and extended stretches of rapids with high, irregular waves, difficult broken water, strong eddies and whirlpools. Course often difficult to recognise. High falls, inspection from bank nearly always necessary.
- GRADE 5** Exceedingly difficult. Long and unbroken stretches of whitewater with individual features, and routes very difficult to see. Many submerged rocks, high waterfalls, falls in steps, very difficult whirlpools and very fast eddies. Previous inspection absolutely necessary, risk of injury, swims always serious.
- GRADE 6** Absolute limit of difficulty. Definite risk to life.

## Map symbols in this book

	start & alternative start		ferry, passenger & car
	finish & alternative finish		campsite / bivi site
	waypoint		bunkhouse
	portage		town / buildings
	described route		significant peak
	dam lock rapid danger bridge		castle
			Prohibited Zone prohibited area

## USING THE INTERNET

Maps and satellite images found on the internet are useful resources for people unfamiliar with areas they intend to paddle in. There are various mapping programmes derived from the British OS system, and taking either a paper OS map with you or a printed page off the internet (maybe waterproofed!) is a good idea. The access and egress points for the trips included in this book have been chosen for their proximity to easy parking for vehicles. Also, the use of Google Earth means that the whole course of a river may be followed to view weirs and other dangers.

Improved facilities may develop over time, offering new opportunities for canoeists; the use of satellite images, along with other internet-based resources, can be helpful in identifying them. Up-to-date information when planning shuttles and identifying rendezvous points is most useful and, provided the information online remains current, it is well worth reviewing parking locations and shuttle routes before embarking on a long journey.

### Finding instruction

Paddling either a canoe or a kayak can be a huge pleasure, and does not require great financial resources. However, merely buying a craft of some type and heading for the nearest water can quickly turn an afternoon out into an epic. Most canoeists who get into trouble have the right gear but no idea how to use it or are unaware of their surrounding environment.

It is essential that you learn not only how to paddle efficiently, but also how to organise a trip while taking into account water height and flow, tide, wind and weather. Experienced paddlers may cover 30 miles a day on some rivers, but novices will not be able to. Paddling in company (rather than by yourself) is safer.

Please seek out instruction from either a canoe club or a centre with approved coaches, or approach your National Governing body for advice on getting started (see next page for details).

## Access in England

This is our personal understanding of the opinions and situation at the time of writing in 2011, and these notes are written without prejudice.

Unlike Scotland, canoeists in England and Wales do not enjoy unequivocal access arrangements to all inland waters. This means that on occasions landowners may not wish to have people journeying through their land. This book endeavours to provide information about sensible access points to rivers from public highways and includes journeys which have been free of significant access impediments for many years. However, the situation

on legal access to rivers is changeable and canoeists are strongly advised to check the access situation before embarking upon a trip. The latest legal opinion (of the Rev. Douglas Caffyn PhD) is that there has never been an Act of Parliament which rescinded the original rights of access and navigation on all rivers. To date, no legal adverse opinion or court judgement is being sought to challenge this opinion.

No canoeist has ever been taken to court for 'trespassing' on a river in England or Wales, and 'trespass' is a breach of the civil rights of the owner and not a police matter. One day we hope to secure a fair and unambiguous arrangement for access to all of our waterways. Until then, canoeists must anticipate that they may be challenged about the legitimacy of their presence on our beautiful rivers.

Our best advice is for you to use the services of the volunteer Local River Advisers for Canoe England, who should be able to provide you with up-to-date information (visit <http://www.canoe-england.org.uk>). Canoe England is the Sports Governing Body for England for all types of kayaking and canoeing.

## Environmental concerns

A large responsibility now rests with paddlers to do their best to keep our total environment clean and tidy. This not only includes not dropping litter but also, in a community-spirited way, cleaning up after other people. Be aware of the many issues associated with camping in the wild and in the prevention of the transfer of Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS) from one river system to another.

Camping in England is only allowed with the consent of the landowner, and paddlers should always seek to use formal campsites. 'Wild camping' is probably better experienced in the wilder areas of Scotland and Ireland.

## Further information

For more details on the above issues, visit the Canoe England website ([www.canoe-england.org.uk](http://www.canoe-england.org.uk)).

The other home country websites: Wales ([www.canoewales.com](http://www.canoewales.com)), Scotland ([www.canoescotland.org](http://www.canoescotland.org)) and Northern Ireland ([www.canoeni.com](http://www.canoeni.com)) also contain useful advice.

