



English Canoe Classics

TWENTY-FIVE GREAT CANOE & KAYAK TRIPS

Vol. 1
NORTH

*Eddie Palmer
& Nigel Wilford*



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Tan y Coed Canol

Ceunant

Caernarfon

Gwynedd

LL55 4RN

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Maps – Bute Cartographic

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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









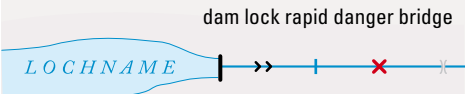


'Portaging', i.e. carrying your boat (taken from the French *portage*, to carry) is necessary when encountering weirs and locks. The portages mentioned in this book are hopefully of about 50 metres at most. They are much easier with a canoe trolley, especially with a heavy canoe full of camping equipment. 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	• Place name	town / buildings
	described route	▲ Peakname	significant peak
	dam lock rapid danger bridge		castle
			Prohibited Zone

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).

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





Northumbria

This large region encompasses the counties of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Teesside, once the kingdom of Northumbria. There are vast tracts of open land and long rivers, especially in Northumberland, which is one of the largest counties in England and still largely unexplored by tourists.

The former industrial heartlands of Tyneside, Durham and Teesside have lost their heavy industry; former coalfields and large steelworks have long since been replaced by new and lighter industry and, in some places, wonderful habitats for wildlife. The transformation is such that otters have been seen and photographed near the Tyne Bridge, and the paddle down the Tees to a new riverbank at Stockton leads to the clean water of the Teesside artificial canoe slalom course within sight of the ICI plant at Billingham. For good reason, the delights of the upper Tyne and Tees have been celebrated by whitewater kayakers, but the main beneficiary of the recent clean-ups have been the placid water canoeists who can now enjoy many miles of good water on the lower Tyne and Tees.

Indeed, there is no apology for including three routes on the Tyne system (well-known to one of the co-authors who used to live there), but one of the great discoveries of recent paddling in the region by us was the lower Tees. The Tees winds through lovely scenery past Darlington (once the railway capital of the world), through pretty commuter villages to part of Durham University at Stockton and finishes at the new tidal limit of the Tees Barrage, which has managed to provide miles of new non-tidal water for the recreational boater. The river deserved to provide the book with two routes.

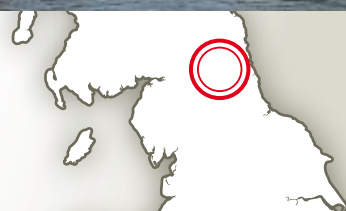
As with the other parts of England, we chose good open canoe and kayak touring rivers but this is not the limit of what regions can offer; Northumberland especially has many other rivers, maybe smaller, and many hidden gems of countryside. The Northumberland National Park is a must for visitors, where the hills rise to the Scottish Border, and Allendale to the south heralds the northern part of the spine of the Pennines. The countryside in between is formed of small river valleys, lovely woodland and a fabulous coast, all remote and lonely.

The tourist has plenty to choose from in this part of England: the major city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the unforgettable views within Durham City of the castle and cathedral, the River Wear and lovely Upper Teesdale. Northumbria is a region that can truly satisfy the traveller and tourist.





01 North Tyne



OS Sheets 80 & 87 | Bellingham to Chollerford | 24km

Shuttle

Chollerford back up to Bellingham via B6320, 15km, about 30 minutes.

Start

△ Bellingham Bridge NY 834 833

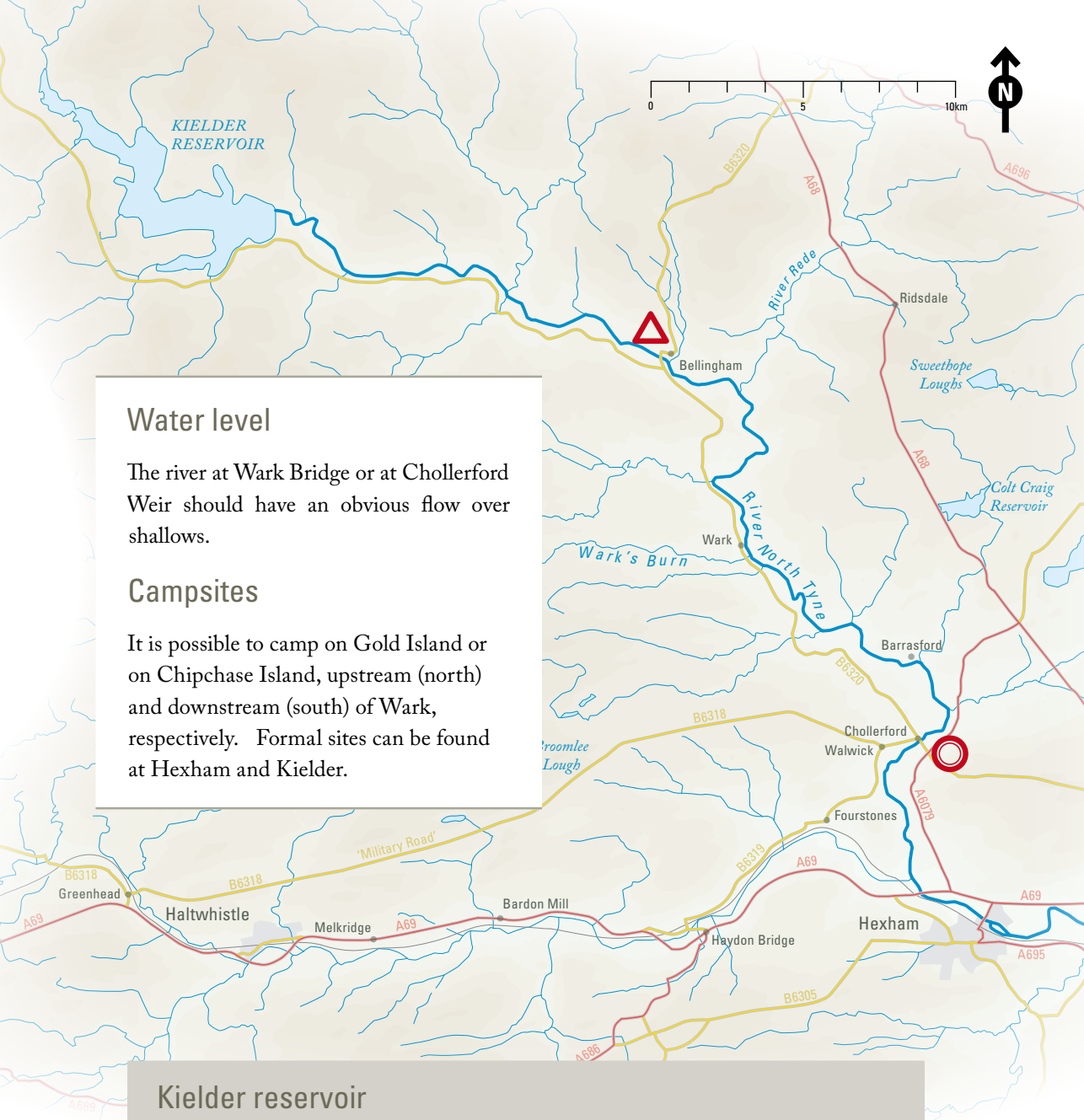
Finish

○ Chollerford Bridge NY 919 705

Introduction

The great thing about the Tyne system is that water is not piped away but flows down the river for extraction at Riding Mill on the Tyne, so the summer residual level is often quite good. Special releases can also be made, as they have for the Tyne Rally held each November since the early 1990s.

The river is fairly flat between the dam near Falstone and Bellingham, but flows down an attractive wooded valley. Rapids occur more frequently after Bellingham, and at Barrasford there are quite meaty rapids (for an open canoe). There is real peace and quiet here, Wark being the only village on this stretch. Below Chollerford is the famous Warden Gorge, a stretch of Grade 3 rapids best avoided by the open boater. The stretch featured here can be done in one day, or split into two at Wark.



Water level

The river at Wark Bridge or at Chollerford Weir should have an obvious flow over shallows.

Campsites

It is possible to camp on Gold Island or on Chipchase Island, upstream (north) and downstream (south) of Wark, respectively. Formal sites can be found at Hexham and Kielder.

Kielder reservoir

This is one of my all-time favourite rivers. I became acquainted with it when I moved up from the English Midlands to the northeast in 1969. It has quite an isolated and lonely feel, and flows down an interesting valley of quite differing landscapes and atmospheres. I arrived in Newcastle-upon-Tyne when the public consultation was being carried out on the building of the giant Kielder reservoir. Originally conceived to provide northeast industry with water, the reservoir instead fulfils the role of playground for Geordies and provider of relief water to Yorkshire.

Eddie



Access & egress

This is a preserved river for salmon angling, especially in September and October (ask locals for advice). There are possible access or egress points at:

Bellingham (left bank, downstream of bridge), NY 834 833

Wark (left side above bridge), NY 862 770

Barrasford (left side on access to football field), NY 920 730

Chollerford (left side below bridge), NY 919 705.

Description

Start at Bellingham at a picnic site and small car park on the downstream side of the bridge. Bellingham is the 'capital' of the North Tyne valley, with a character all of its own. After some time spent here, the visitor will forget that the major town of Hexham is only a short drive down the valley.

The river has an open aspect with small rapids for 3.5km, where the River Rede joins from the left (east). The Rede is impossible in summer, but is a good whitewater paddle in winter.

The valley then enters the beautiful Countess Park Woods with steep sides. After a sharp bend to the right, an obvious drop ahead is signalled by some pine trees on an island. This is Lee Hall Island rapids, Grade 2-3 (7km down), with a farm, several houses and a minor road high up on the right bank. Take an extreme right course, especially after the

island, and follow the river right round on the right bank as it bends to the left. The rapid is rocky but is a set of flat slabs, and the small drops are easily negotiated. When this stream rejoins the rest of the river, several further rocky drops lead down to flatter water.

The next part is lovely broadleaf woodland. The widening valley indicates that you are approaching the small village of Wark (10km). Gold Island, a grassy flat area upstream of Wark on the left bank (and only just an island) has traditionally been used for camping for years. It is a few yards north of Wark on the minor road on the left bank. Located on the right (west) bank, Wark is a village of character where you can hear continuous folk music in the pubs on the first and second of January. The metal road bridge is unmistakeable and the river below here is often very shallow.

The river is unremarkable for some way below here, with the main road visible on the right (west) bank. The river suddenly bends very sharply first to the left, then back to the right. As it bends there is the slight shock of a fall right across the river (Grade 2), usually shot on the extreme-left side.

Enjoy further excitement in the fast water past leafy Chipchase Island, where an old mill on the left (east) bank provides a nice picnic spot. There is also a small island on the right; take the centre route.

Minor Grade 1 and 2 rapids provide some interest for the next 3.5km. The character of the river then changes as you approach the different rocks of the Great Whin Sill; this band of hard whinstone which crosses the north of England provides gorges and rapids across several rivers.

There are several obvious large rocks on the North Tyne where the river narrows. A Grade 2–3 rapid of a new type crosses the stream, framed by what appear to be large cubes of very squared-off rocks. These form several drops very like artificial weirs which can be canoed with no great problem; there will be a scrape in low water and some whitewater in higher water. This is the approach to Barrasford rapids (Grade 2–3) which the wary could prospect by road beforehand if wished, accessed by the minor road through Barrasford village. The foot access is downstream of Barrasford, where there is a road into a sports field and a water treatment plant. The lower and most difficult rapid is right by this track, with a view to the rapid upstream. It is very obvious that the left (east) side should be avoided! Here the river is broken by large rocks and the left-hand stream runs on to a line of rocks below it, which have trapped paddlers in the past.

While canoeing downstream, warning of this rapid is given by the presence of Houghton Castle on the right (west) bank; the actual village of Barrasford is almost hidden on the left (east) side (20km). A straightforward route is then to go centre and follow an obvious main stream of water right, around a long bend.

There is a Grade 2 drop beside the water treatment works below, and then the river slows down after some minor rapids. The B-road can be seen alongside the river on the left (east) bank (22.5km). It is now a paddle on flat water to the elegant Chollerford Bridge, and egress on the left bank just above the weir.



English Canoe Classics

TWENTY-FIVE GREAT CANOE & KAYAK TRIPS



An illustrated guide to some of the finest tours of northern England's waterways, from the North Tyne in Northumbria to the Shropshire Union Canal in the West Midlands. Scenic lakes, placid canals and broad rivers, as they can only be seen from a canoe or kayak.

Eddie and 'Wilf' have chosen the best inland touring routes, which are described in great detail and illustrated with numerous colour photos and maps. The selected routes are suitable for open canoes, sit-on-tops and touring kayaks. Many of them can be tackled as a single voyage or a series of day trips, with campsites en route.

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The journeys are all accessible but highly varied, travelling on lakes, sheltered coastline, rivers and canals. A wonderful book for planning voyages and inspiring dreams, or sharing your experiences with others.

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