



# SCOTTISH WHITE WATER

SCA 

3rd Edition



## Icons



A short boat run of a rocky or precarious nature; best to come equipped with full-on gear.



Requires a significant walk-in or walk-out.



Sections of river that hold their water and may be paddlable for some days after rain.



SEPA gauge on the river so you can check the flow online.



Hydro scheme on the river which affects the flow, or one is proposed.



Involves one or more significant waterfalls.



Not a tried and tested milk-run; the authors may have only run it once or twice; the description may not have been updated since the last edition; or the rapids may be subject to periodic change – proceed with due caution.



start



finish



alternative start



alternative finish

**Hell Hole (4)** rapid name (grade)



portage



house / building

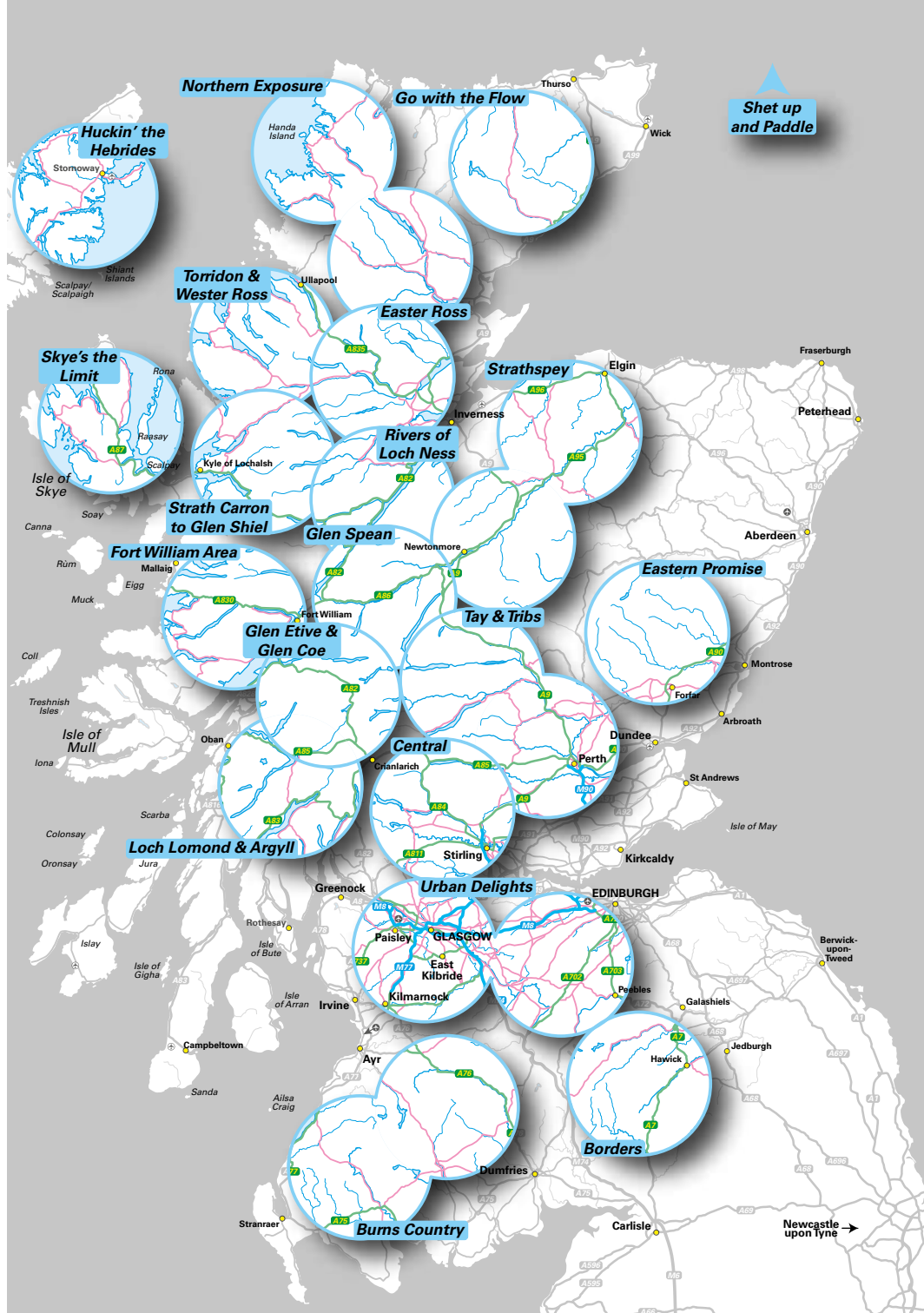


significant peak



parking

dam rapid gorge



# Scottish White Water

The SCA Guide

3rd edition



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Proceeds from this guidebook will go to the

Andy Jackson Fund for Access

For further details about the fund, the projects it has supported,  
and Andy Jackson, who inspired so many to go out and adventure  
with friends, visit <http://www.andyjacksonfund.org.uk/>

Front cover – End of the World, Leven / Paddler: Nick Bennett / Photo: Tim Burne

Back Cover – Allt a' Chaorainn Mhòir / Paddler: Callum Anderson / Photo: Chris Dickinson

– Garbh Ghaoir / Paddler: Fiona Clark / Photo: Jessica Leggatt

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*Falls of Lora / Ed Smith*

📷 *Kacie Culshaw*

## Important Notice

Paddlers should need no reminding that white-water paddling is an adventure sport involving an element of uncertainty and risk taking. Guidebooks give an idea of where to access a river, where to egress, the level of difficulty and the nature of the hazards likely to be encountered.

Conditions vary considerably with changing water levels. Erosion can block a river with fallen trees or change a rapid by moving boulders and even collapsing bedrock.

This guidebook is no substitute for inspection, personal risk assessment and good judgement. You should be wary of paddling above your comfort zone and should seek instruction where necessary from any of the excellent providers we have in the UK. The decision on whether to paddle or not, and any consequences arising from that decision, remains yours and yours alone.





7m drop, Douglas Water (Loch Fyne) / Rob Tuley

📷 Martin Linford

# Foreword

When you've been kayaking for a while you can easily forget what it's like to explore. The challenge of running new rapids, the look and aroma of wild river gorges where nobody else ever goes, the intoxicating mix of concern, focus and giggles that you share with your friends as you eddy-hop downwards upon unknown torrents, and the stories of glory or carnage in the pub afterwards. Scotland may not look vast on a global map, but it turns out there's a lifetime's worth of exploring to do right on our doorstep. If you weren't already excited, the time is now.

When the first edition of this guidebook came out in 2001 it made a profound impact on the level of popularity of our sport in Scotland and throughout the UK. At the time the scene was still very much an underground movement of hardcore adventurers and severe 'mentalists'. On rainy days, there would be only a small number of drooling enthusiasts chasing the water and making sure that they were getting 'dangerous when wet'. Keen to spread the word and perhaps make a few more 'normal' friends, some of the more prolific warriors of this era got together to begin to document the treasure within our glens. Suddenly every paddler in the country had the ability to locate the river of their dreams.

To me the guidebook commemorates the contributions of the paddlers who were pushing the frontiers of the sport at the most crucial point of its evolution. This edition builds on what was already special and provides us with a sweet new testament with which to orchestrate our wildest white water worship sessions. Time to bring out your best rain dance and start scheming over your next big journey to the burns.

As with previous editions, all proceeds from this book will go to the Andy Jackson Fund for Access which, along with the SCA Access Committee, has been instrumental in the fight to allow us the best possible ways to enter into our rivers.

May your strokes be true, your rolls bomb proof and your adventures epic. Kaboom!

Dave Biggin, March 2018



*Dead Sheep, Nevis / Dave Biggin*    📷 *Thomas Findlay*

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Abhainn Ghuilbinn / Davie Maltby

📷 Ben McKeown

# Introduction to the 3rd Edition

This 3rd edition builds on the outstanding work done on the 2001 and 2004 editions by a wide range of contributors. Perhaps the main change that has led to a fourteen-year hiatus is the availability of online kayaking and river information, from excellent resources like rainchasers, Where's the Water, and ukriversguidebook, mapping software such as Google Earth, and latterly the convenience of social media such as regional Facebook groups. Many of these have become indispensable to today's boater, and can be the difference between turning up to a river with water in it and one of the painful drives of yesteryear, second-guessing the rain.

For sheer volume of information however, and to overcome inevitable patchy internet reception in the hills and the glens, sometimes you just can't beat the printed word. So here it is, with many new river guides and other treats. We hope to bring you a taste of Scottish goodness and leave you wanting to seek out something different.

New to this edition by popular demand are river maps to some of the most popular runs; improved location maps, full lat/long coordinates for your satnav as well as grid references; three brand new sections (Shetland, Harris/Lewis, and Strath Carron to Glen Shiel), notes on other island rivers, and descriptions of over 90 new runs.

As before, this edition has only been possible through the efforts of the paddling community who have sent us new or updated descriptions, photos, maps and articles. Many thanks to all who have contributed and helped with putting it all together. If your local run or favourite photo isn't in ... hold onto it for edition 4!

To send us updates and new runs for any future editions of this book use the contact details at <http://www.andyjacksonfund.org.uk/scottish-white-water-guidebook/>

*The selective memory of the guidebook writer...*



Paddling Bester © Connall Brown 18

# Scottish Boating 2003–2018 – What's New?

It would be impossible to cover every development in the world of Scottish boating, but we have selected just a few.

The last fourteen years have seen a steady flow of boaters into the glens from the British Isles and beyond, and an evolution in rivers and boats being paddled. The Topos that featured so heavily in previous editions are largely gathering cobwebs in garages, but most are still fully watertight – a testament to the indestructible nature of these boats. In the early 2000s, when everything was being run in playboats (some still do), came a rise in safer, longer 'modern' river runners and creek boats, from the Salto and Nomad, through H3s, Jefes and Burns, to today's weapons of choice, Tunas, 9Rs and the like. Even the great Andy Jackson was latterly known to switch to the Salto – his words, when faced with the grotty rapid under the bridge at the Moriston: "Yeah, it just tracks better and makes it easier, I don't enjoy this rapid."

New rivers are being paddled all the time, many of them quietly and without fanfare. We have tried to extract information where possible but paddlers are notoriously vague about recording runs, unlike their climbing compatriots. Some of the 'new' runs included here may be first descents, but we can't be sure! There are undoubtedly many great runs that haven't made it into this book, and many more just waiting to be discovered by those with a sense for adventure.

Better equipment and knowledge plus regular media exposure has led to bigger waterfalls being paddled. Notable descents include the Hermitage on the Braan and the Falls of Clyde. The upper falls on the Bruar are run regularly as are those at Inchree. Scotland does not have the ideal topography for big, paddleable falls, but there are plenty that are high enough to get your heart rate going. See how many Go-Pros you can attach to yourself/your boat and get hucking. Organised events such as the Paddlefest and river races have become regular features of the paddling calendar. Meanwhile, in the strange world of artificial white water, three Scottish paddlers have won Olympic slalom medals, and Glasgow now has its own pumped white water course at Pinkston. This has become a saviour for restless paddlers in those rare dry summer months and evenings after work.



*Hermitage Falls, Braan Gorge / Dave Martin*  
📷 Mark Mulrain



*Bonnington Linn, Falls of Clyde / Leslie Simpson*  
📷 Christina Fraser



# The Wet West Paddlefest

By Rachel Dance, WWPF organiser

The Wet West Paddlefest (WWPF) is a two-day white water kayaking festival, held on the Moriston and Garry in mid-September each year. Water is released on both rivers for the festival, so it's guaranteed classic Scottish white water at grades 3, 4 and 5: something for everyone.

The event was founded as a celebration of the Scottish kayaking legend Andy Jackson and the white water about which he was so passionate. Andy's heroic work on river access, putting in first descents of a large chunk of the rivers in this guidebook and then sharing that with the community, inspired the Wet West Paddlefest to celebrate the fantastic rivers we have here in Scotland for everyone to come along and enjoy. The weekend attracts paddlers from all over the British Isles and further afield, and in a multitude of crafts including creekers, river runners, playboats and OC1. There are also stalls from manufacturers and paddling shops so that folk can try out the latest boats and equipment.

The event is widely attended, and the weekend centres around an evening party on the Saturday for everyone to meet, chat and share the day's events. WWPF is run by a small team of volunteers, who are always grateful for a helping hand from anyone wanting to get involved.



Rory Woods, Moriston River Race 2013 📷 Kacie Culshaw



Moriston Wet West Paddlefest

📷 Tim Burne

# River and Creek Racing

**By James Fleming**

The first timed race on the Etive was probably the one held in 1991, organised by Chris Dickinson from Cowal Kayak Club, and featuring a very young Andy Jackson. The race report paints a picture of good-natured competition and carnage, with talk of fear, excitement, pinnings and 'recircs'!

More events followed including a particularly epic race on the mad-mile section of the Nevis in flood, moved on the morning of the race from the Etive due to extreme water levels, and the Liquid Life Boater Cross events which ran on the Tummel from 2004 onwards. Won the first year by Cam Allan in the mens and Bridget Thomas in the ladies, these races were perhaps remembered as much for the partying as for the events themselves.

The year 2008 saw racing return to the Etive for the 'One River, One Race' event. It all started when James Fleming and Ian Letton kayaked from Triple Falls to Twist and Shout in a leisurely 24 minutes, and decided to organise a race. Over the next eight months, there was frequent communication with the National Park Rangers and the National Trust for Scotland. Richard Bannister joined the team and played a key part in articulating the event's goals to some of the stakeholders. Dave Rossetter managed the safety team at the event, and at subsequent races including the Moriston River Race.

Race day saw massive water levels on the Middle Etive, making the race section out of order. The course was moved upstream, and ran from the Coupall to the top of Triple Falls. Simon Grant and Calum Hogg won their category.

In 2010 the middle section of the river was at a more manageable level. The winners in the sponsored category were Colin Aitken and Colin McMorris; however the fastest person down the course was Tom Wakeling with a time of 12:58. The Etive would prove a fantastic setting and course for the race, but the stumbling block was the water levels. The first year was too high and following years were at a mixed level. It was never the 'Goldilocks' level – just right.

To have some sort of consistency in water levels the race switched to the dam-controlled River Moriston, where water releases to allow salmon to migrate and spawn are scheduled throughout the summer by SEPA (The Scottish Environment Protection Agency), SSE (Scottish and Southern Energy) and other stakeholders. Bob Olivant, who worked for SSE, was a key contact; he even had an access gate cut in the barrier, which is now used routinely by paddlers.

Pete Scutt won the Big Dog Moriston River Race in 2012. The next year, Giles Chater played a key part in coordinating the event which was filmed by the Scottish Adventure Show. Rory Woods won, taking 16 seconds off Pete's time; Sal Montgomery was the fastest woman. 2014 saw Callum Strong win the event and take the course record, in a time of 2:48, with Sandra Hyslop coming in at 2:56.

In later years, the Garry Boater Cross emerged, with Kevin Barclay and Daryn Hubbucks driving the event. The North Esk and the Uni Creek Race was also launched, and all these events have been incorporated into a Scottish Creek Race Series, fronted by Gavin Millar.

# New Hydro Schemes in Scotland – Do We Really Need Them?

By Gavin Millar, Tony Hocking and Bridget Thomas

*This is an opinion piece collated from several contributors and does not necessarily represent the views of the SCA (Scottish Canoe Association), whose policy can be found on their website, on the Protecting the Environment page.*

Whether we like it or not, hydro-electricity schemes are a feature of the rivers and glens of Scotland. They range in scale from vast monolithic concrete dams and reservoirs that stretch for miles, down to micro schemes to power a single dwelling. The 20th century saw the 'dam builders' create vast schemes that have permanently altered our river and loch systems. Few suitable catchments remain for new developments on this scale, although the Glendoe and Pattack schemes show there remains an appetite for such development. At the outset of the 21st century we see a trend for 'run of the river' schemes where water is extracted, bypassing waterfalls and steep sections to generate power, before being returned to the river below.

The large-scale schemes, with their vast stores of water, have the potential to provide water releases throughout the summer months. While originally instituted to allow salmon to travel upstream to spawn, these releases have become a staple for the paddling community in the drier summer months. To imagine a summer of paddling without the Garry, Moriston and Tummel makes for a very depressing daydream; however the convenience of these summer runs has to be considered against the loss of 'natural' flows. With such large catchments, it's likely that these rivers would have run often, and frequently at higher levels, before the dams were built ... and for every dam release river that we enjoy, how many have been lost? There are many great white-water runs in Scotland that do not have scheduled releases; think Treig/Ericht (Rannoch)/Conon. Huge spates or maintenance works are the only chance to catch these ones.

Run of the river schemes are a different kettle of fish. These do not store water in large reservoirs; instead they begin to operate as soon as the river rises above a certain flow, and scale their level of generation relative to the water available. As such these rivers, or more accurately, the white water sections of the rivers, are deprived of a volume of water that would otherwise bring it into condition. There is no store of water to provide a release to offset the loss of white water amenity. The only saving grace is that the run may still be paddleable, just not as frequently or at such high a flow. This is because these schemes tend to have a maximum capacity of flow that they will take from the river. If the scheme is too 'greedy', then the size of turbine required to handle the larger flows is uneconomical, both in terms of initial construction and in efficiency at lower flow rates. Developers therefore undertake significant research of the rivers in question in order to maximise the efficiency of the scheme. Once the maximum capacity of a scheme is reached, then the water overflows the intake weir and flows down the riverbed. Such a scheme effectively reduces the number of days in which a white water run will be paddleable.

## New Hydro Schemes in Scotland – Do We Really Need Them?

Paddlers are by nature very environmentally aware and pro 'green energy'. There is an argument that the loss of one river is a small and inevitable price to pay in the drive towards renewable energy, although the increasing number of schemes being built (and with yet more proposals being put forward) means that whole areas of Scotland are being affected rather than isolated rivers. Most of us understand the need for renewable 'clean' energy, and most probably support some level of hydro-scheme development, but when does it become too much? Current Scottish Government policy is to harness as much energy from Scotland's natural resources as possible, with a target of 100% of electricity from renewable sources by 2020. How much power are we really getting from these new developments and could this energy be obtained in other ways? What is the carbon footprint of construction and operation: are these projects really green? When does an acceptable level of impact to generate sustainable energy become an unacceptable impact upon the environment, not to mention the recreational paddlesport enthusiast? What political and financial incentives are actually driving these projects?

The great frustration is that despite all of the new hydro schemes in recent years, the net total of power being generated has changed little. Since the second edition of the guide was published, nearly every river that was threatened with a new hydro scheme has been dammed, with dozens more added to that list. So, how can we have so many more hydro schemes, but not be producing more energy?

This is down to the way in which the government has structured payments and subsidies for the generation of renewable energy, known as Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs). Energy suppliers can only qualify for ROCs if the capacity of their hydro-generating power stations are below 20 megawatts (MW). This led to programs of 'renovation' at the large hydro schemes where capacity was reduced to below the 20MW threshold. As can be seen from the extract taken from the Ofgem report on 'The Renewables Obligation', the actual implications in terms of power generated are hugely significant;

Hydro generating station	Original Capacity (MW)	Capacity at 31/3/03	ROC Accreditation date
Kinlochleven	30	19.5	April 2002
St Fillans	21	16.83	September 2002
Mossford	24	18.6	February 2003
Shin	24	18.62	June 2003
Quoich	22	18.05	July 2003
Finlarig	30	16.05	December 2003
Grudie Bridge	24	18.66	
Culligran	24	17.1	
Total	199	143.41	

## New Hydro Schemes in Scotland – Do We Really Need Them?

This report shows that in Scotland some 55.6MW of potential generating capacity has been 'lost'. In the meantime, numerous run of the river hydro schemes have been built, but these schemes have the potential to produce just 2 or 3MW at most. This means that some 20–30 rivers have been or will be degraded, just to replace the capacity that formally existed. Potential energy is going unused, and schemes that are potentially damaging and detrimental to the environment, not to mention white water paddlesports, are being consented when they need not be. Add to this, questions arise regarding the efficiency of these smaller, upland schemes and whether they are truly 'green'. Scottish mountain burns have a spate/drought hydrology. When it rains there will frequently be far more water than the turbine can possibly use, and when it is dry there is frequently not enough water to run the turbine efficiently or at all. Then there is the carbon cost of construction, access roads, maintenance and finally decommissioning. By way of comparison, Snowdonia has a similar topography to the Scottish Highlands and has suffered a similar massive influx of small-scale hydro. Yet recent figures (2016) show that the total installed microgeneration of these schemes, of which there are around a hundred, comes to 3.98MW – less than that of a single offshore wind turbine at 5MW. One can only speculate which has a greater environmental impact overall.

The unfortunate result of all this, is that the whole renewable argument is no longer about the generation of 'green' energy, but about government policy, market trading, and profit. A change in current policy and a shift away from the artificial suppression of generating capacity through the ROC scheme, and the expansion of 'run of river' hydro schemes on the basis of their artificially inflated financial return is needed. Until this happens, more rivers will be dammed, and the natural environment changed forever.



*Warning: hydro schemes may invalidate your plastic warranty. Phil Higgins about to find out. River Lael* 📷 Tom Crow



# Access

**By Robin Cole – SCA Access Coordinator**

Paddlers in Scotland have traditionally enjoyed a freedom of access to Scotland's rivers and lochs. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 enshrined this in law, giving Scotland a framework for responsible access which is among the best in Europe.

Your access rights do not extend to private gardens or industrial sites (such as the grounds of hydro-electric power stations), and do not include vehicular access or parking.

**It is important that kayakers: respect other people's privacy, help landowners (for example by not climbing over fences) and respect the needs of anglers.**

You can find more information on the Land Reform Act and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com). Further advice on protecting the environment and up-to-date access information is also available from the SCA website <http://canoescotland.org/where-go/access>

Many of the more frequently paddled runs in this guidebook are covered by a network of volunteer river advisers, who can be contacted for information about access or current hazards. Details can be found at <http://canoescotland.org/where-go/access>, along with a contact number and form for reporting any new hazards or incidents that you encounter. Please follow the advice in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and remember the key points of respecting the interests of other people, caring for the environment and taking responsibility for your own actions and those of others in your group.



*Feith Talagain walk-in*

📷 *Chris Dickinson*

# The Scottish Canoe Association

Life is better when we work together, and the SCA helps paddlers in a number of areas. Its volunteer committees organise events such as the Wet West Paddlefest and the monthly freestyle evenings at Pinkston, as well as handling access, environment and safety issues, and advice for us all. Its staff and volunteers in the Coaching and Development Committee help and advise clubs on a number of important areas including protecting children and applying for grants and funding.

Importantly, individual membership of the SCA provides us with civil liability insurance. This covers damage caused to others by anybody who is an individual SCA member undertaking a paddling activity (or as a member of an SCA affiliated club during an official club paddling activity).

While we accept a level of risk as paddlers, it is not hard to imagine scenarios where our actions, no matter how well intended, could lead to damage to kit belonging to others or even life-changing circumstances for others – including those with whom we paddle.

Individual SCA membership, and the civil liability insurance that it provides, could make a huge difference to you and others should the worst happen.



Aray / Tim Burne

 Rob Tuley

# Grading

Rivers and rapids in this guide are graded under the international grading system. This rates white water on a scale of 1 to 6, taking into account both technical difficulty and seriousness. Although a far from perfect system we feel it does give the paddler enough of a 'steer' to help them decide if the run in question is for them. A river runner's perception of the difficulty of a river will depend on their level of experience, the water level they find and their personal fear factor!

The river grades in this book have been arrived at by a consensus of the paddlers who know these rivers well. Taken together they give a good picture of the rivers available in their varying moods. If you are new to the runs in this book, it would be wise to start off on a trip which you feel confident is well within your abilities. If you know a few of the runs well, check how the given grades match what you have previously experienced. That way you can establish for yourself a comfortable level within the grading system and avoid any nasty surprises. Whenever you paddle in a new area you should spend time becoming familiar with the local interpretation of the grading system.

The 1 to 6 system does tend to lead to large variations in the difficulty of runs even within a given grade. As the standard of paddling has gone up, rapids have tended to become squeezed into the upper grades. We have tried to address this by applying the grading system across the whole range of runs. As a result some trips have found themselves down-graded to give a better feel for how they relate to harder runs. As well as the plus or minus sub division paddlers should read the grade in the context of what is described in the rest of the text. Words such as 'continuous', 'steep' and 'committing' can help the reader see what they are getting themselves into.

By its very nature, grading rivers is a far from precise business. We hope that as well as many happy days on the river, this guide will bring many happy hours arguing over the grades in the pub afterwards.

Some of the runs in this book have been written as a result of perhaps only one or two descents and contributors have had to hypothesise to some extent as to what effect more or less water would have on the difficulty of the run. The best advice is to go to a river with open eyes and an open mind, proceed with caution, take nothing for granted and make up your own mind.



'Old' Head Banger rapid, Roy Gorge 📷 Paul McLaughlin



'New' Head Banger rapid, Roy Gorge 📷 Amie Burne

# How to Check Water Levels and Pollution Levels

Scotland's national environment agency does a good job of keeping an eye on our rivers.

You can find all their water level gauges at <http://apps.sepa.org.uk/waterlevels/>. Many of the most popular runs are covered by the SCA online water levels service, which was developed in partnership with SEPA and Visit Scotland <http://canoescotland.org/where-go/wheres-water>. Designed to help paddlers choose the best river to paddle at the right water level, this service provides a fantastic 'at a glance' view of water levels across the country along with other useful information on access issues or known hazards.

Levels are shown on a scale of 'Empty' to 'Huge' along with an actual reading in metres. A link back to the SEPA site also provides a graph showing the water level over the last few days. Remember that on many rivers levels can change quickly, and to make best use of the information you need to check the time given for the last reading, and factor in whether the river is currently rising or falling. This service, used in conjunction with a weather forecast and with a little trial and error, will help you get the best out of your paddling.

Don't forget to use the feedback form on the site to help us fine tune the water level categories. Take a minute after your trip to compare the level shown on the site with your experiences of the river and let us know how the system is working.

There are also an increasing number of mobile phone apps that provide SEPA's water level data with some history or calibration.

Since the industrial revolution, our rivers have never been so clean, but there are still plenty of runs where you should be wary of the water quality. At <https://www.sepa.org.uk/data-visualisation/water-classification-hub/> the overall status for rivers is displayed. Those marked Poor or Bad suggest high faecal origin matter in the water which could lead to gastroenteritis by cryptosporidium or viruses.

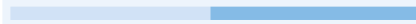
While it is worth being aware of the symptoms of Weil's disease, bear in mind there are, on average, fewer than two cases a year in Scotland. It is also worth looking out for ticks, which can carry Lyme disease, particularly if you have been tramping through bracken. Early indications of Lyme disease include flu-like symptoms, or a circular skin rash around the bite, which can appear up to 30 days after being bitten. Take a look at <http://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/> for more information about the symptoms and safe removal of ticks.

# How to Use This Guidebook

We have kept many of the original river guides from previous editions, although coordinates have been added for all. Rivers are grouped as before by region. There are three new regions plus certain rivers have been re-ordered for clarity. Maps are included for twenty of the better-known runs. Many of the more remote runs do not get paddled often and it would be impossible for our small team of editors to visit and paddle each one. We make no apologies for this as we all have full-time jobs and families! Wherever possible we have tried to find up-to-date information and have studied OS maps and aerial views for signs of hydro or other alterations. By the nature of any printed guidebook, some of the information within may already be out-of-date by the time you receive this copy. If in doubt, seek local knowledge before you go.

## 028 Carron

### Abhainn Carrunn (Upper)

<b>Contributors</b>	Ron Cameron and Tom Crow
<b>Grade</b>	3+
<b>Length</b>	4km
<b>Start</b>	NH 464 891 (57.8653, -4.5904)
<b>Finish</b>	NH 487 915 (57.8875, -4.5547)
	

Number, Name and Icons (see next page)

Alternative name or section of river if in brackets

Quick Reference information

Water level visual guide (see next page)

### Grade

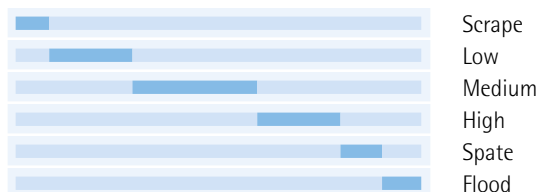
- Ranging from 1 to 6, allowing for +/- grades
- 4/5 indicates that the run has rapids of both grades shown. For example, the Lower Braan has been graded 4/5.
- 4 + or – indicates that the author feels the run is at the harder or easier end of the grade.
- If a river contains one or two rapids which are harder than the rest of the run, but the trip could feasibly be tackled by someone intending to portage the harder sections, this is shown by using brackets. For example the Middle Orchy becomes 3/4(5).










## How to Use This Guidebook

### Water Level Visual Guide

The dark blue areas of the 'gauge' give a rough idea of the water levels needed. The top of the scale denotes flood levels and the bottom low water 'scrape' conditions, where most rivers are too low to paddle. The majority of Scottish rivers will vary greatly in their severity at differing water levels; many are only runnable after heavy rainfall. Attention must be paid to actual and forecast weather affecting the watershed.



### Thumb Icons

-  A short boat run of a rocky or precarious nature; best to come equipped with full-on gear.
-  Requires a significant walk-in or walk-out.
-  Sections of river that hold their water and may be paddable for some days after rain.
-  SEPA gauge on the river so you can check the flow online.
-  Hydro scheme on the river which affects the flow, or one is proposed.
-  Involves one or more significant waterfalls.
-  Not a tried and tested milk-run; the authors may have only run it once or twice; the description may not have been updated since the last edition; or the rapids may be subject to periodic change – proceed with due caution.

The guide breaks down into 4 geographical areas North, South, East and West with each of these chapters being further divided into sections grouping rivers of the same locality. Generally, these sections are based around the river basins of the larger rivers but we have made exceptions to this in an effort to ensure that the rivers appear in the book in the most useful order to the reader 'on the ground'. The river names in the guide are generally written as they appear on the map, often in Gaelic. Sometimes a familiar name is used in addition e.g. the Braveheart Burn.

A lot of attention has been paid to giving useful and accurate descriptions of the best places to access a given run. Put-ins and take-outs are given for each trip along with the relevant directions for finding them by road and by foot. You may choose to put in or take out above or below this, according to conditions on the day or changes to the river, or if we have clearly made a mis-

take. Please don't put on above an unrunnable fall just because our coordinates were a bit out!

The given access point may be the location of the white water section, or a suggested place to park. This should be obvious from the description. In some cases an access point may be described which avoids conflict with landowners or local people, even though not necessarily the shortest or easiest way to or from the river.

To make life simple, distances are generally given in miles when travelling by car and in kilometres when on foot or afloat. Most of the time a road atlas will suffice for finding your way to the river but having the relevant OS map to hand will often make the task much easier, and in this edition GPS information has been added.

Directions on the river are always given from the paddler's point of view. So, river left is always that seen when on the river and looking downstream. Sizes of drops and falls are given in metres and you should be aware that these are also very much from the paddler's point of view. Generally speaking the more often a drop has been run the smaller it gets and those which get portaged tend to somehow grow!

Suitable indicators of paddling levels, such as an online SEPA gauge at the river or a description of how the river might look at the put-in, or how quickly the river may rise after rain, are all included in the gauge section.

The description covers features you are likely to encounter on the river. In some cases, this entails a simple rapid-by-rapid run down. Descriptions of the more out-there or creek runs, however, will have less detail and leave more to your own river-reading skills. You may need to scout the entire river before putting on; even well-known runs can sprout new trees or rocks in awkward places. If in doubt, scout. Take-out details from the paddlers point of view while on the river, where relevant, are included here too. The final section on other important points covers anything else we think might be useful, funny, or thought-provoking.

### How to use coordinates and grid references

The latitude/longitude coordinates in the guide can be entered into any web-based mapping programme such as Google or Bing Maps, or your car satnav (enable decimal degrees) or GPS system. The six-figure Ordnance Survey national grid references are accurate to about 100m. The two letters refer to the wider 100km grid square.

OS maps can be found online for free at <http://maps.bing.co.uk>, if you select Ordnance Survey, with more detail at <https://osmaps.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/> or on various commercial smartphone apps. They include many useful features such as weirs, waterfalls and contour lines. Many paddlers will prefer paper copies.

Other commercial online maps, such as Google Maps, are easily available at home or with a smartphone. They focus on roads and often show little detail about rivers, but are great for





# How to Use This Guidebook

getting you there. You may not have a mobile signal everywhere, so remember to download any maps you need before you go.

A digital white water mapping sub-project at [http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/WikiProject\\_Whitewater\\_Maps](http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/WikiProject_Whitewater_Maps) allows anyone to add data for their favourite runs. The project is on-going and collaborative; contributions are welcome.

We've selected 20 of the most popular river runs and created maps showing the features paddlers will care about. The put-ins, take-outs, rapid grades and rapid names are there, along with any significant dangers along the way.




## Map symbols in this book

- 

start

finish





alternative start

alternative finish
- 

dam

rapid

gorge
- Hell Hole (4)**



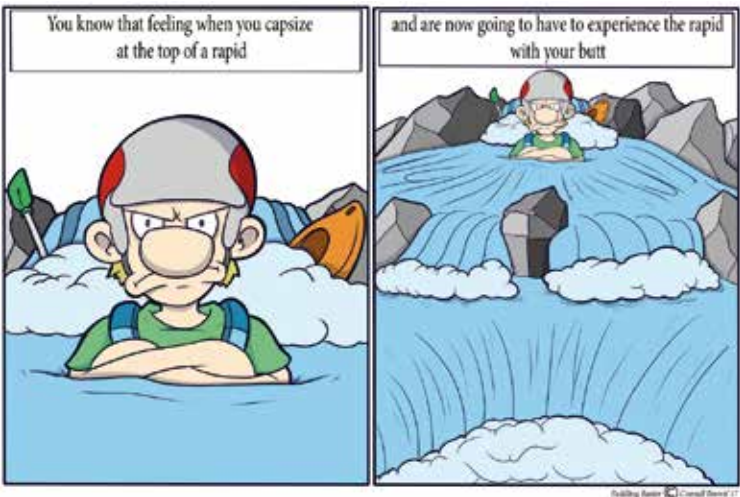
rapid name (grade)

portage

house / building

significant peak

parking





*Etive / Niamh Stack*

📷 *Dave Burne*





Corriemulzie / Jon Harwell

📷 Kirsten Rendle



# The North

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## Shet Up and Paddle

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# Shet Up and Paddle

Shetland may not instantly come to mind as a haven for white-water paddling, although it does hide a few runnable burns for those willing to attempt them, given the right weather conditions. An area far better known for its wonderful sea-kayaking opportunities, the white-water runs in Shetland only really come into play in very wet conditions. Fortunately, as the locals will inform you, this is not hugely uncommon. All the runs here are short boat territory, with shallow rock slides, small pools and low volume the defining features. However, they do form some enjoyable sections for the eager kayaker, and, at 60 degrees north latitude, you could be paddling around Voss in Norway!



*Falls of Lunklet*

📷 Chris Curry

## 001 Burn of Lunklet

<b>Contributor</b>	Chris Curry
<b>Grade</b>	3(4-)
<b>Length</b>	1km
<b>Start</b>	HU 373 573 (60.2984, -1.3271)
<b>Finish</b>	HU 367 576 (60.3005, -1.3385)

### Access

Drive north from Lerwick up the A970 (the main road in Shetland running north-south). Just before reaching the village of Voe, there's a left turn sign-posted for Aith. Turn here and follow this road (B9071) for a few miles. Drive down around the head of two voes (the local word for sea loch), the second of which is the outlet for the Burn of Lunklet, and which is handily sign-posted for walkers. Park in the lay-by on the right-hand side of the road, just after the bridge. It's now boats on shoulders time, as

you follow the well-maintained footpath up to the main drop on the burn. From here the path narrows, but is walkable for another kilometre or so, to where a fence crosses (and blocks) the river. Get on here and paddle back to your car!

### Gauge

At the take-out bridge, if it looks scrapeable, it is runnable higher up as the river is much narrower there. If the water is deep at the bridge, it should be a great run. If it doesn't look as if you'd want to paddle at the bridge, it would be sensible to go elsewhere. The river holds its water reasonably well, however, so a couple of days after a torrential downpour it may still be going.

### Description

This run should be scouted on the walk up as there are two sections to be aware of. The

character is set from the put-in, a narrow burn but with some interesting drops. The run begins with small grade 2 drops and chutes, the challenge to slalom down the deepest line and not get beached in lower water. In higher water, it remains grade 2 but it's easier to keep the boat floating. The first technical rapid comes after around 500m, and is best inspected on the walk up. A small chute river right is followed sharply by a 1m drop river left. The bottom of this hides some submerged rocks, even in high flows, so a good boof is needed to make sure you don't get pinned at the bottom. After this you soon come to the main event, the Falls of Lunklet. A 2.5m drop that you cannot miss on the hike up. Inspection is possible from the large rocks in the centre if you wish to pick your line. It's essentially a long rock-slide river right in low water, or a boof on the left at higher flows. The pool below is deep here, so no worries about pinning. The left-hand channel of the falls is not advised as there are numerous ledges underneath here. From the falls, it's easy water down to the get-out.

### Other important points

The river above the fence may be runnable in extremely high water. Just above the fence it splits into three tributaries, the centre burn being loch fed. There is a gorge section up this run which may be doable, but would require a lot of water. There is also a significant tributary, the Burra-firth Burn, which meets the Burn of Lunklet just before the take-out. This hasn't been run but looks like a good area for beginners.

## 002 Burn of Crookadale

<b>Contributor</b>	Chris Curry
<b>Grade</b>	3/4
<b>Length</b>	200m
<b>Start</b>	HU 437 538 (60.2664, -1.2119)
<b>Finish</b>	HU 437 538 (60.2664, -1.2119)
	

### Access

From the A970 driving north, take the right-hand turn signposted for Nesting, just after the Loch of Girlsta. The burn runs under the road soon after the junction, before a turning on the left. Park in a lay-by just after the bridge. This is essentially a one rapid wonder, but walk as far up as you like.

### Description

This is one rapid, Triple Step, and a small chute, which can be seen by crossing the fence at the bridge. The first part of Triple Step is nothing worrying. However, the second and third step come immediately after each other with very little time to manoeuvre. In all water levels, the pools are shallow so a good boof is required to see you through this without pinning. A sharp undercut on the river right at the bottom of the third step could also cause difficulty. After this, you can either get out, or paddle the last smaller drop and paddle out into the voe.

### Other important points

Not one to be attempted unless a confident boof is assured. Pins can happen and with the tightness of the drops it would be difficult to get anyone out in high water when the water is running quite powerfully.

## 003 Stromfirth Burn

<b>Contributor</b>	Chris Curry
<b>Grade</b>	2/3
<b>Length</b>	1.5km
<b>Start</b>	HU 411 520 (60.2501, -1.2611)
<b>Finish</b>	HU 408 512 (60.2428, -1.2654)

### Introduction

This gentle run requires less water and is worth doing if you're in the area. There are no significant dangers or problems, and it's easily accessible in Shetland terms. It's slightly more interesting at higher water levels, but can go even when there hasn't been much rain when it is rather scrapey.

### Access

From the A970 driving north, turn left in the village of Girsta, signposted for Stromfirth. Pass the equestrian centre and you will cross a bridge over this burn. This is the take-out bridge, though the run continues for another 500m after the bridge. To reach the put-in, take the junction right after the bridge, and

drive up until the road forks. Take the right-hand fork and you will reach the river where you can drop your boats. Please get changed at the take-out, as the put-in is beside someone's property.

### Description

From the put-in, the burn gently winds its way down, with small waves and chutes allowing some interest for new paddlers, and in higher water some (very) small play waves. The main interest of this run comes in the last 500m, after you pass under the bridge. Some quick water, with chutes and small wave trains, slaloms around some large rocks. This is very much read and run territory as there is nothing scary around the corner. The only place to look out for is when the burn turns sharply right, then immediately back left, where a narrow chute is guarded by a rocky undercut on the right. You can get out once the burn flattens out after the grade 3 section, or paddle the remaining river down to the voe, which will necessitate carrying your boats back to the car afterwards.



*A bad day on the river ...*

📷 Martin Linford



*A worse one ...*

📷 Andy Jackson collection



## Go with the Flow

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*Blackwater (tributary of the Brora)*

📷 Kirsten Rendle





## Go with the Flow

*Blackwater (tributary of the Brora)* 📷 Kirsten Rendle

This area provides good entertainment for both white-water fans and those looking for touring trips in a remote area. The addition of some of these rivers on the SEPA gauge system means it should be possible to visit when they are at a reasonable level.

It is worth noting that most of the rivers in the area are very popular salmon fishing rivers. There has been little conflict over access in the past, so please follow the access code and good relationships should remain.

### 004 Brora (Upper)

<b>Contributors</b>	John Ross and Gary Smith
<b>Grade</b>	2
<b>Length</b>	9km
<b>Start</b>	NC 718 098 (58.059432, -4.173933)
<b>Finish</b>	NC 989 105 (58.067604, -4.054357)
	or your choice

#### Introduction

The Brora flows from its headwaters in central Sutherland to the east coast at Brora. The 5km-long Loch Brora splits the upper and lower rivers.

#### Access

The upper river requires considerable rainfall. It can be accessed via Craggie, taking care to close the gate at Braegrudie near the end of the road in Strath Brora.

#### Description

The upper put-in is reached by walking up 500m from the end of the road to above a short grade 2 gorge. This leads through a tree-lined valley to the road bridge at Dalreavoch, where a stopper forms at a stone weir. The river then continues at a steady grade 1/2 for 5km before coming back close to the road where it is possible to get out.

#### Other important points

The **Blackwater** is the main feeder river to the

Brora, which has a good grade 4+ gorge section. A highly-rated run, that just missed the deadline for this edition.

## 004 Brora

(Lower)

<b>Contributors</b>	John Ross and Gary Smith
<b>Grade</b>	2
<b>Length</b>	5km
<b>Start</b>	NC 859 055 (58.024632, -3.932887)
<b>Finish</b>	NC 907 039 (58.011394, -3.850552)

### Gauge

The lower river can be run at a range of levels as it is regulated by the outflow from the loch. It's passable at a range of levels from 0.9 on the SEPA gauge up to 2.2, when the main rapids become washed out.

### Access

The lower river is accessed by paddling 500m of flat water to the end of the loch. Take out at the harbour slipway in Brora.

### Description

The river starts with a couple of playwaves. Grade 2 water leads to a ford and footbridge where there is another playwave. Shortly after, the river splits around an island before another stone weir leads to a fast continuous wavetrain. A couple more islands lead to the Rock Pool where a playwave and a large eddy form. The river then gradually narrows and deepens until the take-out is reached after the railway bridge.

## 005 Allt a' Mhuilinn

(Glen Brora)

<b>Contributors</b>	Richard Bannister, Dave Russell and Vincent Baker
<b>Grade</b>	4+
<b>Length</b>	1km
<b>Start</b>	NC 826 117 (58.0789, -3.9920)
<b>Finish</b>	NC 824 108 (58.0708, -3.9950)

### Introduction

A worthwhile diversion if you are passing and there's water about, this run is made up of a photogenic set of 'teacup' falls and some pleasant easy creeking. A short hike gives access to two more falls nearby.

### Gauge

The main fall will probably go as a stunt at any level. The rest certainly requires some rainfall, although the bogs round these parts store water like a sponge. There should be a decent flow at the road bridge. There is a SEPA gauge on the Brora, which should be up.

### Access

If you are lucky the wind-farm gate will be unlocked and you can drop boats off at the top, putting on at the ford. You may need permission to do this.

### Description

This small creek meanders out of the moors below the wind farm, and with little warning decides to carve itself three perfect teacup drops: two are small, then the last falls 9m sheer into a small but deep pool. There is nothing else worthwhile on the Allt a' Mhuilinn before the confluence with the adjacent



*Allt a' Mhuilinn (Glen Brora) / Dave Russell*

Vincent Baker

burn, the **Allt Ach a' Bhathaich**, so get out river right and carry due west across to it. There are two waterfalls here of about 6m and 4m. At the confluence is an old dam, then narrow rapids with one or two portages lead you back to the car.

### Other important points

The south-facing 'teacups' would be a nice swim spot on a hot summer's day. The **Allt Smeorail**, just to the east, has some similar narrow drops in a rhododendron-filled gorge, and might be worth a scout, though the final gorge looked barely wider than a boat.

## 006 Craggie Water

**Contributors** John Ross and Gary Smith

**Grade** 3/4(5)

**Length** 2km

**Start** NC 910 193 (58.1491, -3.8535)

**Finish** NC 926 196 (58.1522, -3.8265)

### Introduction

The Craggie Water is a small rocky tributary of the Helmsdale and provides some entertaining kayaking at medium flows.

### Gauge

The burn is only runnable after considerable rain. As a guide, if the Helmsdale is reading at least 1.2 on the SEPA gauge, the Craggie Water should be worth checking out.

### Access

The burn can be inspected where the Glen Loth road crosses it a couple of miles from Kildonan Station. Carry up from this bridge about 500m to the start of the gorge.

### Description

At the put-in, there are two consecutive grade 3 drops into deep pools. This is followed by a very tight, rock-filled, sheer-sided gorge section, which then runs straight and fast to the road bridge. The 'S' bend rapid (Gd 5) immediately



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