



CANOES AND KAYAKS 2009



GENERAL & NIGHT NAVIGATION ADVICE FOR THE TIDAL THAMES

USEFUL LINKS

The Port of London Authority -
Canoe England -
Rivers Information Service -
The Royal Yachting Association -

<http://www.pla.co.uk/>
<http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/>
<http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/riverinformationservice.aspx>
<http://www.rya.org.uk/>

Harbour Master Upper (Teddington to Barking) 0207 7437912
Coastguard and other emergency services 999

Harbour Master Lower (Barking Reach to the Sea) 01474 562212
Environment Agency 24 hour incident reporting 0800 80 70 60

WEATHER CONDITIONS on the Tideway can have a significant effect on the safety of navigation for kayaks and especially the handling of open canoes. The river is exposed; strong winds in opposition to the stream can create steep standing waves and confused waters when combined with washes from motor vessels. Conditions can become awkward and physically demanding in a matter of minutes. Wind speeds can vary and noticeably increase around and through bridge arches. Rain and snow can seriously reduce visibility.

The most significant danger to canoeists is fog and reduced visibility. It usually affects the Tideway on days when the conditions are otherwise good, with no wind or rain. To navigate in reduced visibility, motor vessels often rely on radar, but radar does not show kayaks/canoes so the risk of collision increases.

BEING HIGHLY VISIBLE When on the Tidal Thames at night or in conditions of low visibility (rain, snow or fog) it is just as important to be seen as it is to keep a good lookout. Below are some easy to follow tips on how to be "highly visible"

- Retro-reflective strips placed on clothing/buoyancy aids and also on the shaft of the paddle near the blade
- White LED lights worn either on a helmet or about the shoulder can be very effective, but care must be taken to avoid impairing night vision
- Neon coloured clothing is very effective in low visibility conditions but is not as effective at night as retro-reflective strips

As a minimum all paddle powered vessels shall ***"have ready at hand an electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision."***

REGULATIONS THAT AFFECT YOU

- *A vessel of less than 20m in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel of fairway.*
- *A vessel shall not cross a narrow channel or fairway if such a crossing impedes the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within such channel or fairway*

Simply put canoes and kayaks must keep well clear of vessels such as tugs and tows, passenger vessels and commuter craft.

- *Where a vessel has (a) sunk; (b) has been damaged; (c) has caused damage to anything (including a vessel) or is on fire*
- *The master shall (i) forthwith give notice and particulars of the occurrence to a harbourmaster*

Loss of a canoe or kayak when on the river should be treated as a vessel sunk and reported to London VTS. In addition to the above all incidents involving personal injury should be reported. Incident reporting forms can be obtained from the office of the harbour master contactable on 020 7743 7912 or hmuenquiry@pla.co.uk.

- *Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight as well as by hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision*

Keep a good look out in front and behind at all times – large passenger vessels can appear from behind unexpectedly especially where the line of sight is restricted by bridges and by bends in the river.

INTRODUCTION

Navigating a canoe or kayak on the Tidal Thames or Thames Tideway as it is also known requires knowledge of the river and how it operates. The Port of London Authority (PLA) and Canoe England have produced this advice for both existing users and those planning to use the water. It applies to navigation at all times between Teddington and the Sea, with special attention given to using the river below Putney and at night and in low visibility conditions.

In addition users should refer to the PLA web site information - "The Tidal Thames-Recreational Users Guide" for navigation rules, signage, sound signals and Restricted Zones details; Notices to Mariners for the latest information on navigation, river and Thames Barrier scheduled closures, in river works, events etc; and tide times. Below Putney the river should be treated as a waterway for the more competent user with experience of tidal waters and windy conditions.

CROSSING THE RIVER can be the most hazardous part of any journey and must be undertaken keeping a constant good look out. When clear to do so canoes and kayaks should cross the main channel as a closely formed group and avoid a single file formation.

THE TIDEWAY between Richmond Lock and Weir and Crossness has a tidal range of over 7m and can flow up to 4 knots in the channel and 6 knots around the bridges. The river is busy with commercial traffic particularly between Putney and Greenwich. High speed multi-hulled commuter passenger vessels, tourist launches and freight movements (tugs and barge tows) operate both to set timetables and tides and can be encountered at any time. Passenger vessel traffic and movements about piers is frequent, especially in summer months.

Between Teddington and Putney the **"Code of Practice for rowing on the Tidal Thames above Putney"** details local navigation rules for vessels under oars, which include canoes and kayaks.

Canoes and kayaks should keep clear of bridge abutments, security (exclusion) zones at Vauxhall Bridge and Westminster, moorings, vessels manoeuvring and maintain a good look out at all times.

KEEPING IN TOUCH - As well as informing a contact ashore it is recommended that paddlers about to go on the river should contact **London VTS (Vessel Traffic Service) on 020 8855 0315**. VTS can give you details of anything happening on the river that might affect your trip. You must always remember to tell them when you have finished your trip.

A personal VHF handset can be very useful on the river for making other river users aware of your intent especially when intending to cross. It can also be used to check with passenger vessels whether they are about to leave a pier. All users of VHF must have the proper training and certification, information on which can be found here www.rya.org.uk. VTS can be contacted directly on **CHANNEL 14** on which they broadcast a half-hourly traffic update.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Water is a great place for sport and recreation, but it is also an environment which needs to be treated with respect.

- Take account of Notices to Mariners issued by the PLA, tides, water and weather conditions.
- Be aware of any hazards on your chosen journey and ensure you and any persons with you are confident in their abilities.
- Use suitable equipment in good condition.
- Leave details of your trip with a responsible person (also see Keeping in Touch).
- Report incidents to a harbourmaster (also see Regulations that Affect You)

In the context of PLA regulations anyone navigating a kayak or canoe on the Tidal Thames is a Vessel Master. Club and Centre coaches and those in loco parentis should use this fact in a risk assessment in assessing whether someone should be allowed to go out on the river, most especially at night.

A master who navigates his vessel on the Thames-

(a) without due care and attention; or

(b) in a manner liable to injure or endanger persons, other vessels, the banks of the Thames (whether above or below mean high water level) or any structure or installation in or beside the Thames:

Shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding [the statutory maximum and on conviction on indictment to a fine]

(The statutory maximum fine is currently £5,000)