

A Guide to Angling for Canoeists...

...and a Guide to Canoeing for Anglers



Introduction

By the very nature of their chosen pastimes, canoeists and anglers are likely to come into contact with one another when participating in their chosen hobby. When the two groups do meet, a little common courtesy, common sense and tolerance can go a long way to ensuring both parties can continue to enjoy their day out.

This note aims to offer some basic advice on what each party would like the other to do when their two paths cross on a river. If our two parties are to share in enjoying their leisure time, a greater understanding of each others pastime can hopefully do nothing but help.

The following comments represent my own opinions and suggestions and are not related to any governing bodies, official policies or website editor's views. This note is not a discussion on the hotly debated issue of improved access for paddlers, but some basic guidelines and other useful snippets of information.

As an avid angler for over 20 years and a keen paddler for over 10 years I hope the following represents an unbiased and balanced summary of both parties' requirements. It by no means covers every conceivable scenario, so if there is advice that you would like the other party to know then feel free to let them know.

A Basic Guide to Angling

Rod and line fishing in the UK can be broken down into two main categories; game fishing and coarse fishing.

Game fishing:

- Typically takes place on fast flowing, well oxygenated upland rivers.
- Game anglers target salmon, trout and sea trout (some trout, for reasons best known to themselves, go and live in the sea for a few years, returning to their home river to spawn – rather like salmon do. These are called sea trout, or migratory trout). Game anglers also sometimes fish for grayling.
- The game fishing season on rivers generally runs from spring through to late autumn. The exact periods depends on local byelaws, details of which can be found on the [Environment Agency's website](#).
- Game anglers will adopt a range of tactics, including using worms, lures (metal or plastic objects designed to simulate prey fish) or artificial flies as bait.

Coarse fishing:

- Typically takes place on slower flowing lowland rivers, canals and lakes.
- Coarse anglers target a wide range of fish, including roach, chub, bream, pike, carp and barbel (and sometimes grayling, which lie in a slightly grey area between game and coarse fish).
- The coarse fishing season on rivers runs strictly from 16th June to 15th March. Coarse fishing is allowed year round on some lakes and canals.
- Coarse anglers will typically use floats or weights to cast their bait into the water. Typical baits include worms, maggots, bread and sweet corn.
- Coarse anglers will throw samples of their bait into the water (ground baiting) to try to attract fish into the area they are fishing (their 'swim'). This is a surprisingly skilful process and can take hours to implement and get the fish feeding confidently in a chosen spot.

Any angler wishing to fish with a rod and line in England and Wales must purchase a rod license from the Environment Agency. To fish without a license is a criminal offence and Environment Agency bailiffs police this, summoning offenders to court when appropriate:

- An annual adult license costs around £24 for coarse fishing.
- An annual adult license costs around £24 for trout and £64 for salmon and sea trout.
- Weekly and daily licenses can also be purchased.

A license gives the angler the right to fish, but does not give them permission. To fish a certain river (or lake) the angler will purchase either a day ticket, or a season ticket from the land owner, angling club or syndicate that owns the fishing rights to the water. Some venues are also available to fish free of charge. Tickets may cost from a few pounds for a day, up to several hundred, or maybe thousands of pounds for a

season. As a general rule of thumb, game anglers typically pay more for their sport than coarse anglers (although, as with every rule, there are exceptions).

A Basic Guide to Canoeing

A canoe is a boat where the occupant kneels and propels themselves with a single bladed paddle. A kayak refers to a boat where the occupant sits and propels themselves with a two bladed paddle. The terms canoeing, kayaking, paddling and boating are often used interchangeably by paddlers to refer to any form of canoeing or kayaking.

Notwithstanding various competitive disciplines and styles of boats, canoeing can be broken down into two categories for the sake of this note; white water canoeing and placid water canoeing.

White water canoeing:

- Takes place on or steep upland, or mountain rivers that have sections of rapids or waterfalls.
- Generally tends to be a winter-only activity in the UK, as heavy rainfall is usually required to bring white water rivers into condition.
- Paddlers will run a section of river heading downstream only. Paddling back upstream is generally not possible!
- Paddlers may occasionally stop in certain places to practice manoeuvres, provide safety cover for difficult rapids or surf on waves.
- White water rivers are generally run in groups so others can offer assistance if one group member gets into difficulty.

Placid water canoeing:

- Typically takes place on slower flowing lowland rivers.
- Can take place all year round.
- Paddlers may travel in either direction on the river.

In addition to the above, many weirs on lowland rivers produce short sections of white water, or moving water. These sections of water, which may be the only sections of moving water for many miles around, are predictably popular with paddlers; from the hardened white water paddler to the beginner looking to improve their skills.

For canoeing there are two types of river; those with an access agreement and those without. Under current legislation, paddlers have been granted legal access to only a tiny minority of the rivers of England and Wales (somewhere around 2%). Canoeing is prohibited on the vast majority of rivers, whilst some are available for canoeing on only a handful of days every year. Some paddlers, aggrieved with the current restrictive and prohibitive access situation, may take it upon themselves to paddle rivers that do not have access agreements. This is not meant to be a confrontational statement, nor is it a prelude to a discussion on the access issue – it is a statement of fact.

Regardless of whether a river is subject to an access agreement or not, when anglers and paddlers do meet on the river, both parties should still aim to apply the basic rules outlined in this note.

What Canoeists can do to Help

The following pointers give suggestions on how paddlers can behave to cause the minimum of disruption to anglers. A little courtesy and common sense is the prime ingredient; anglers enjoy catching fish – and canoeing has the potential to scare fish if done inconsiderately.

1. A cheerful smile and a “hello” is invariably appreciated and frequently reciprocated. Anglers are generally a nice bunch!
2. Pass any anglers you see at a constant, steady pace with smooth paddle strokes. Try not to splash too much or make excessive noise.
3. Ask the angler where they would like you to pass. If they have been carefully groundbaiting in one part of the river to attract fish they may prefer you to quietly pass by in another.
4. You may think the angler sat on the bank will be awestruck with your display of bow rudders, eskimo rolls and cartwheels, but you could not be further from the truth. This kind of activity will scare fish and does nothing to foster good relations between the two parties. If you want to have a play, please do so well away from any anglers.
5. If an angler is fishing in your preferred launching spot then use another. If this is not possible, a polite word can do the trick – and the angler can then inform if there are areas they would prefer you not to paddle (see point 3 above).
6. If you arrive at a weir where you wish to use the moving water and there are anglers present fishing in the moving water then I would argue tough luck – you should have got out of bed earlier! You wouldn't shunt a car out of a parking place because you want to park there would you? However, it may still be worth asking the angler their plans – they may not be fishing in the moving water, may be packing up shortly, or may be able to accommodate your wishes.

Things Paddlers May Not Know about Angling

- Fish like to live close to trees and bushes that overhang the water; they provide shelter and food. If you see an angler and try to help by giving them a wide berth on the far bank, you may actually paddle over the top of the fish they are trying to catch. Once again, ask the angler where they would like you to pass (point 3 above).
- Anglers will be concerned you may get tangled in their line. Fishing tackle is expensive and no angler wants to leave snapped line and tackle in the river where it could endanger wildlife. You may be able to see their line – but the angler won't know this.
- Many coarse fish on lowland rivers like the fast flowing oxygenated water in weirpools. Anglers fishing weirpools may be casting into more turbulent water than you think; they may not necessarily be fishing in the eddy.

What Anglers can do to Help

The following pointers give suggestions on how anglers can behave to ensure paddlers cause the minimum disruption to their days fishing and the minimum frustration to paddlers. As before, a little courtesy and common sense is the prime ingredient to help you continue to enjoy your day and to allow the paddler to pass on their way.

1. A cheerful smile and a “hello” is invariably appreciated and frequently reciprocated. Paddlers are generally a nice bunch!
2. Politely tell the paddler where you would like them to pass. Generally they will be only too happy to oblige wherever possible.
3. If canoeists are splashing or playing around unnecessarily in your swim ask them politely to move away and explain why. Shouting at, firing bait at or casting at paddlers to try to get them to move on will not endear you to them!
4. If a polite word fails to get the paddlers to move on things can get tricky. If the paddlers are part of an organised group or club, a chat with the group leader or club official would not be out of order under these circumstances.
5. If you arrive at a weir you wish to fish and there are paddlers using the moving water that you wish to cast into then I would argue, as earlier, it is tough luck. However, with a quick word you might find the paddlers are leaving and you’ll soon have the weir pool to yourself.

Things Anglers May Not Know about Paddling

- Navigable lowland rivers are like roads and are subject to rules, with all boats (including canoes) obliged to keep as close to the right hand side as is practical. Whilst it may appear the canoeist is doing the utmost to paddle straight over the top of your nearside, or far bank swim, they are simply following the rules of the road. However, rules are not always unbreakable – if you ask the paddler to pass by in a different place they are likely to be only too happy to oblige where it is safe to do so.
- Contrary to how it looks, it is actually quite hard to stay upright and get a canoe to go in a straight line. Beginners may sometimes struggle with this; please try and be patient (do you remember how frustrating learning to cast accurately was?).
- Sometimes we can’t actually see you. (Good!) anglers have a habit of wearing drab coloured clothing and hiding out of sight of paddlers (and fish). On white water rivers, the steep, twisty nature of the rapids may mean it is not always possible to see downstream. If not seeing the angler results in any unnecessary disturbance to your swim please be assured it is not intentional. Most paddlers will quietly move on once they know you are there.
- On some white water rivers it may not be possible to skirt around anglers, or pass by in a specific location; these rivers may be very narrow, or a specific route has to be taken down rapids. Under these circumstances the paddlers will invariably move on downstream once their group is safely down the rapid.
- Despite what you might hope, fishing line is very easy to spot! You may think a canoeist is about to career into your line when you are legering with your rod tip well up. However, the paddler is quite likely to be well aware of your line

and is perfectly happy to paddle around it to try to inconvenience you as little as possible. If you're getting concerned, it's back to point 2 above.

- If you've lost your favourite float, or a length of line in a bankside tree or bush many paddlers, where feasible, will be only too happy to go and retrieve it for you. Neither party likes to see line littering the bankside foliage.... And you get your float back into the bargain too!

Conclusions

The above guidelines can hopefully help anglers and paddlers to share their time on the river, with minimum disruption to each other. In a nutshell, the above boils down to little more than common sense, common courtesy and, hopefully, a slightly improved understanding of each others hobby.

Finally, please don't judge either group by their 'bad apples'. As with any group, both angling and canoeing have a minority who will show a blatant disregard for other peoples interests. This is all these people are – a minority. Try not to let them taint your view of paddlers or anglers and spoil your day out.

Tight lines and happy paddling.

Mike Redding.

