RIVER CANOEING IN SOUTH WALES

A guide to the wildlife, geography, river features and river environment

The rivers of South Wales offer great opportunities to experience, not only the thrills and spills of white water rapids and the peace and tranquillity of the open water, but also the wildlife, environment and geography of the river. The rivers Usk and Wye have access agreements which allow canoeing throughout the year on some stretches and at limited times on others.
(see www.wyeuskfoundation.org/navigation/index.php for more details).
Within these agreements there are possibilities for a range of paddle sports such as open canoeing, white water kayaking, Sit on Tops, rafting and even stand up paddleboards (SUP) are now becoming popular.

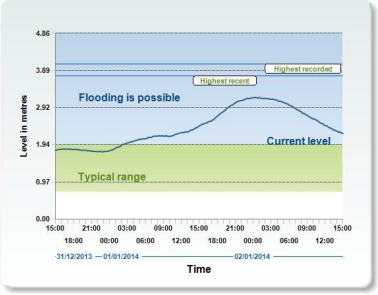


Here are some pictures of the rivers Wye and Usk. Both rivers have a range of rapids, graded between 1 - 3, which allow groups to enjoy quiet days canoeing on the river, or when the river is high, challenging rapids such as Hell Hole for experts.






The catchment area for the Wye and Usk rivers is vast, originating in the Plynlimon mountains for the Wye and Black Mountain for the Usk. To find out how this may affect the water levels for your trip there is further information on www.wyeuskfoundation.org/conditions/index.php. This gives live feeds of water level cameras. The environment agency also has water gauges at various points on the rivers. www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/riverlevels/120503.aspx. This gives a national map which allows you to then focus on the river you want. Below (left) is an example of the information given on the environment agency gauge for the river Wye at Glasbury.



A bit cold for most!

In addition consideration needs to be given to both air and water temperature as well wind conditions on the day of your planned river trip. In addition it is important to understand how precipitation, past and present may effect your trip. There are a range of internet sites where weather information can be found (met office / BBC etc.)

Perfect for novices

BIRDLIFE

GREY HERON

GOOSANDER Female and Male

MALLARDS Female and Male

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER

Nests on gravel banks in the summer

COMMON SANDPIPER

Often seen bobbing its tail

KINGFISHER

GREEN SANDPIPER

Appears black and white in flight

CANADA GOOSE AND MUTE SWAN

FISH

TROUT

Our rivers are getting cleaner, this result in fish stocks increasing. For more information about the fish and fishing in the Wye look at:

www.wyeuskfoundation.org

GRAYLING-

note large dorsal fin

SALMON

www.fishforth.co.uk has some good fish ID posters

MAMMALS

OTTER

WATER VOLE

The mammals are rarely seen as they are shy, but numbers are increasing due to river clean ups and improved awareness. Get up early and canoe quietly and you may see otters even on the Glasbury to Hay section.

INSECTS

EMPORER DRAGONFLY

DEMOISELLE

The main difference between dragonflies (left) and demoiselle (right) is how they hold their wings when at rest.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHARTER
South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group
SIARTER AMGYLCHEDDOL

Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Natural Resources Wales

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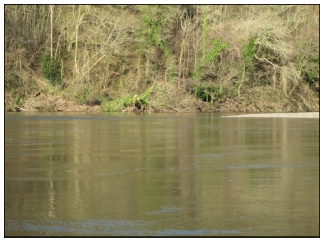
GEOGRAPHY

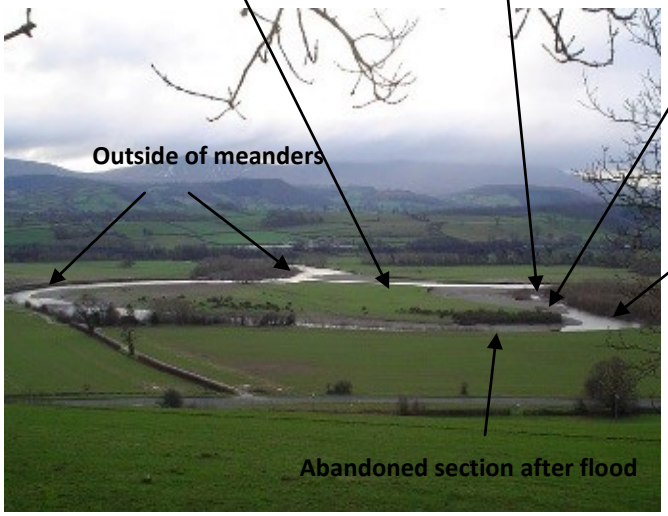



The River Wye between Glasbury and Hay has characteristics of middle and lower sections of a large river. The river is wide, but still has shallow and fast rapids separated by deeper sections. The river has several tributaries such as the Lynfi and Dulas.
At these confluences a change of colour and speed often shows the large bed load of sediment carried down form the Devonian red sandstone of the Black Mountains, especially after heavy rainfall. The river has large meanders, sections where the river is braided and large floodplains.

In a meander the water at the outside of the bend is flowing much faster, therefore much erosion occurs, resulting in river cliffs being formed and the vegetation and trees being undermined, eventually falling into the river to be carried away by the next flood. Because of this, flood defences are constructed in the form of walls or large rocks. On the inside of the meander the water is moving much slower and therefore the bed load is deposited as shingle beaches, which create an important nesting site for some birds.



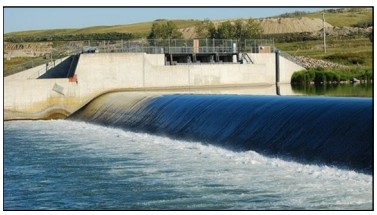
The five pictures show an ox-bow lake. The outside bend of two meanders have broken through and created a straight channel for the river. The meander is then abandoned, occasionally flowing when the river is in flood. The abandoned section fills with silt after floods, this is then taken over by plants and trees. A part of the meander may still have a lake which provides a quieter bit of water for many wading birds.

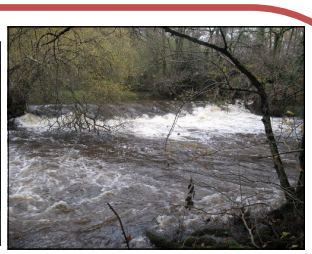
RIVER FEATURES

Rapids are caused by a change in the rock on the riverbed. In all three pictures a shelf of harder rock across the river has formed a drop of some description. The water force, shape of the drop (broken or uniform) or the river bed underneath the drop can change the white water and river feature found at the bottom of the drop from a flushing through wave train (right) to a re-circulating stopper / hydraulic (left).

Other river features and rapids can be formed by a multitude of rocks within the river, causing a series of cushion waves, eddies and V's of water which may aid a canoeists navigation of the river or create the excitement for the group paddling down. Groups should remember that where the water flows there is always the potential for debris to gather, especially after a flood. Strainers, river obstructions and undercut banks/rocks should be treated with extreme caution. In addition, sewerage, farm run off, pollution and contamination from wildlife can cause a range of health problems such as Weils Disease (Leptospirosis).

1. Eddy caused by shape of bank
2. Eddy line / fence
3. Stopper / hydraulic
4. Aerated water / boil
5. Eddy caused by mid river obstruction
6. Cushion waves
7. V of water





Man made structures on a river are not graded like natural rapids. They can form potentially lethal features like the uniform weir (top left), an almost natural drop (top right) or a pleasant training venue like the bridge (bottom left).

All manmade structures should be treated with caution as there is always the risk of construction materials and debris

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For more info visit: www.swoapg.org.uk