

Medway CanoeTrail

TAKE A TRIP ALONG 29KM OF BEAUTIFUL MEANDERING WATERWAY FROM THE HEART OF HISTORIC TONBRIDGE, THROUGH THE COUNTY TOWN OF MAIDSTONE, TO YOUR JOURNEY'S END AT ALLINGTON.



Environment
Agency





Medway Canoe Trail

Rising in the Ashdown Forest, the River Medway flows through West and East Sussex and into Kent before reaching the Thames estuary some 120 kilometres downstream. Many tributaries flow into the Medway as it passes through the High Weald and Vale of Kent with its characteristic orchards and meadows.

You can enjoy 29 kilometres of this majestic river starting from Tonbridge and finishing at Allington Lock, its tidal point just north of Maidstone. Graded easy, it can be canoed in a couple of days, or longer for a more relaxed trip. There are a number of campsites and launch points along the route.



Kingfisher

Paddling along the river you will see a wide variety of riverside plants, from the colourful purple loosestrife to the blue of the water forget-me-not. The orange and blue flash of the kingfisher and - if you are very lucky - a glimpse

of an otter are just some of the wonders awaiting you along the River Medway. The trail meanders past woods, meadows, villages and towns with a wealth of interest.

Heritage

People have lived in the Medway Valley since the Neolithic times on the fertile soils alongside the river. The Medway has been a hive of activity as a transport route taking ragstone up to London, and iron and timber from the Weald to the docks. This industry was made possible in the 1740's with the extension of the navigation up to Tonbridge. In Tonbridge the river provided power to run the Leigh gunpowder works in the 1800's.

Agriculture was a prime industry in the early 20th Century with two thirds of England's hops produced in Kent. Hop gardens can still be seen alongside the river at Golden Green, although they are far fewer in number today.

Also keep an eye out for pill boxes along the length of the river, built to defend the county in World War Two.

Today you can enjoy the river's wildlife, tranquillity and excitement from the water or from its banks.



Section 1 START - Tonbridge Castle to Town Lock, Tonbridge (0.5km)



Tonbridge Castle

Welcome to the start of the trail at Tonbridge. Access to the slipway is via the Lower Castle Field car park (off The Slade). Please note a height barrier is present (If the barrier is down please visit the neighbouring Tonbridge Swimming Pool for access).

Prior to getting on the water, why not take a stroll around the town of Tonbridge and visit the Castle which boasts Kent's best example of a Motte-and-Bailey Gatehouse. The original 11th Century wooden structure has been replaced by stone.

Tonbridge is the upper limit of the Medway's navigation, enabling you to explore the river valley down through to the tidal section at Allington.

Following the river downstream you will pass Tonbridge Town Bridge to reach Tonbridge Lock.

Section 2 - Tonbridge Town Lock to Eldridges Lock (2.4 km)

Paddling downstream under Cannon Lane Bridge you now head into the countryside of the Medway Valley. Alongside the river you'll see wet meadows dotted with anthills. You might even see green woodpeckers feeding on the ants if you are lucky.

Passing under a girder bridge you then reach Eldridges Lock.

Keep your eyes and ears open for barn owls feeding over grassland areas at dusk. Feeding on field voles and mice, their almost silent flight helps them to approach their prey undetected. Barn owls make a variety of noises from hisses to shrieks but don't hoot (that is the Tawny Owl).



Barn Owl

Did you know that it's been estimated that over a year, a breeding pair of barn owls need roughly 4,000 prey items?



Section 3 - Eldridges Lock to Porters Lock(1.6km)

Continuing downstream you will reach Porters Lock where you can either use the fish-friendly canoe pass or the portage platforms which are near to the lock.



Porters Lock Canoe Pass

The pass helps fish move up the river so they can take advantage of the best spawning and feeding grounds.

The Medway boasts more than 21 species of freshwater fish, popular with anglers who catch, amongst other species, Roach, Dace, Pike, Eels and Sea Trout.

When travelling along the River Medway during the summer months you will see fish swimming near the surface. These fish are likely to be Bleak or Chub, enjoying the warmer waters and feeding on flies.

The biggest fish you are likely to find in the river is the Pike. Pike are opportunistic feeders and can grow more than a metre in length. They are a key component in maintaining a healthy population of fish within the river.

Section 4 - Porters Lock to East Lock (2km)

The trail continues under Hartlake Bridge where there is a separate access point to the river (suits open, Canadian type canoes only). Along this section you will see the characteristic riverside trees such as alder and willow lining the banks. The telltale characteristics of the yellow male catkins and red flowers of the alder can be seen around March time before the leaves have come out.



Grey Heron

You may see the majestic grey heron, often seen standing silently along the river. It's one of the first birds to start nesting in spring and does so high in the trees.



Section 5 - East Lock to Oak Weir Lock (1.2km)

Soon you will be at Oak Weir Lock with the lower portage platform off to the left via a small path through the lock island itself. Feel free to camp here.

If you are very lucky you may spot an otter whilst on the water. These secretive mammals feed on fish and amphibians and live a discreet life in holts along the river. Often only their tracks and spraints containing fish scales show their presence.



Secretive otter

Section 6 - Oak Weir Lock to Sluice Weir Lock (2km)

Passing under Stilstead Bridge, the river winds its way onwards under the metal Wagon Bridge. Look out for the wooden footbridge on your right and go underneath this to find the Hop Farm Campsite.

Continuing on to Sluice Weir Lock you have the opportunity to use the canoe pass or the portage platform.

G.Hitchcock



Damselfly

In spring and summer the river is alive with dragonflies and damselflies in the marginal vegetation along the river and dykes.

Section 7 - Sluice Weir Lock to Hampstead Lock (3.6km)

Passing through the village of East Peckham you'll reach Stoneham Old Lock (now disused) where you can camp (no facilities). The river meanders its way to Yalding with an abundance of wildlife.

G.Hitchcock



Blue Tit

Birds such as the song thrush, tree sparrow and blue tit can be seen in the hedgerows and traditional orchards that run down to the river's edge.



Apple orchard

Did you know that Yalding was known for its cherry orchards, and in the Roman period evidence suggests vineyards were present?

Paddling into Yalding you have two route choices.

Option 1 - Upstream of the booms (on the right hand side) is one exit point where you need to climb up the bank and then drop down the other side to a small stream (The River Teise). From the stream you enter the weir pool and can then go under the stone bridge with the Marlin Canoe Club's campsite nearby (booking needed). **Option 2** - The other option for you is to continue past the Anchor Inn on your left and proceed down the canal passing under the low green bridge. Just after this point are toilets and showers, and there is a platform on your right if you want to get out. This is Yalding access point. After this continue down the canal until you reach Hampstead lock where the canoe portage platform is on your right.

Either way, why not visit Tea Pot Island and café alongside the sluice which has more than 6,000 teapots.

Section 8 - Hampstead Lock to Teston Lock (4.8km)

Carrying along the river past the moored boats you re-join the main river (if you chose the canal route option).

Passing boats at Wateringbury marina, you then paddle downstream to Teston with Wargraves Wood on your right. The wood boasts a mix of ash, coppice and oak standards and is a riot of bluebells and wood anemones in the spring.

Soon you will reach Teston Lock which runs alongside Teston Bridge Country Park. The park is a great place for a picnic and walk, with grassland and wet meadows.



Teston Bridge

An unusual fact! Did you know that Teston is the home of cricket balls? The company now known as Readers was established in 1808 further up the hill in the village centre.



From cricket balls to bats - if you are paddling at dusk or dawn in the summer, Daubenton's bats (often nicknamed the water bat) can be seen feeding on insects by skimming over the surface of the water and plucking them off with their feet!

Section 9 - Teston Lock to East Farleigh Lock (3.2km)

Beyond Teston, the river becomes wider with a mosaic of orchards, gardens and woodlands running alongside. Just before Barming footbridge you will see a campsite on the right hand bank.

Did you know that before the installation of the locks, the river was fordable here at Barming? The wooden bridge was replaced in 1996 by the current metal footbridge.



Paddling along Teston



Kettle Bridge Clogs on the old wooden bridge

Traditionally, local Morris-dancers, known as the "Kettle Bridge Clogs", dance over the footbridge each year on 1st May.

Downstream of Barming the village of East Farleigh is reached, with the church spire visible on the hill. Reaching East Farleigh Bridge you can paddle through the arches to reach the platform. The bridge has its own claim to fame with the 'Battle of East Farleigh Bridge' taking place in 1648, during the 'Second' English Civil War.

Section 10 - East Farleigh Lock to Allington Lock (7.2km)



Under East Farleigh Bridge

The trail flows from a village setting into the town centre of Maidstone where old mixes with new. The 14th Century Archbishop's Palace is distinctive, used originally as an overnight stop when the archbishop was

travelling between London and Canterbury. This is in contrast to the modern developments further downstream.



Section 10 - East Farleigh Lock to Allington Lock (7.2km) cont...



Archbishop's Palace

Travelling beyond Maidstone, you may glimpse the double helix art sculpture in the Whatman Millennium Park on your left. Here you can enjoy a mix of landscaped park, woodland, amenity areas and natural open spaces alongside the river.

Heading towards Allington Lock the stately Allington Castle, now a private residence, is visible on the left through the trees.

Very soon on your right is the Malta Inn, one of four public houses situated by the River Medway which were built in the 18th Century and all named after British Naval bases. Two of the four are near Chatham, but another one, the Gibraltar Inn (now a private residence), is a few yards up the river from the Malta pub.



Section 11 - Finish – Allington Lock



The end of the trail - Allington Slipway and canoe launch point

Congratulations you have reached the end of the trail! Allington Lock Slipway is on the left by the timber-clad boater's facility. Here you can take a well-earned shower and rest.

Why not take a wander across the sluice to the Museum of Kent Life or enjoy refreshment at the Malta Inn? You can continue to enjoy your trip by camping at Allington Lock and meeting the Lock Keepers who look after the river at this tidal point.

Contacts

Environment Agency
(emergency hotline) – 0800 807060
www.visitrivermedway.co.uk

Allington Lock (EA) – 01622 752864
www.allingtonlock.co.uk

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
www.medwayvalley.org

Tonbridge Tourist Information
via www.tmhc.gov.uk

Maidstone Tourist Information
www.tour-maidstone.com

Explore Kent
www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent

Canoe England
www.canoe-england.org.uk

British Canoe Union - 0115 982 1100
www.bcu.org.uk

Tonbridge Canoe Club
www.tonbridgecanoeclub.org.uk

Maidstone Canoe Club
www.maidstonecanoeclub.net

Whitewater Action Medway
www.whitewateraction.co.uk



Licences

You are required to be licenced to use a vessel on the river Medway (Allington to Tonbridge). This can either be through BCU membership (please display your sticker/licence) or by purchasing a licence from the following places: short term (weekly, monthly) licences can be obtained from Allington Lock (01622 752864), Bow Bridge Marina (01622 812802), Medway Wharf Marina (01622 813927), Allington Marina (01622 752057), Tonbridge Tourist Information Centre (01732 770929) and the Environment Agency Kent and East Sussex Area Office (01732 223222). Annual licences (April 1st to March 31st) can only be obtained from the EA Kent and East Sussex Area Office (contact above).



Camping Facilities

Camping is available along the trail at the following sites (varying degrees of facilities)

Hop Farm Campsite

www.thehopfarm.co.uk/touring-camping/

Stoneham Lock (no facilities)

TQ681 489- contact EA - 01622 752864

Marlin Canoe Club Campsite (Yalding)

TQ 691 499 booking required 02086500197

Barming Bridge Campsite

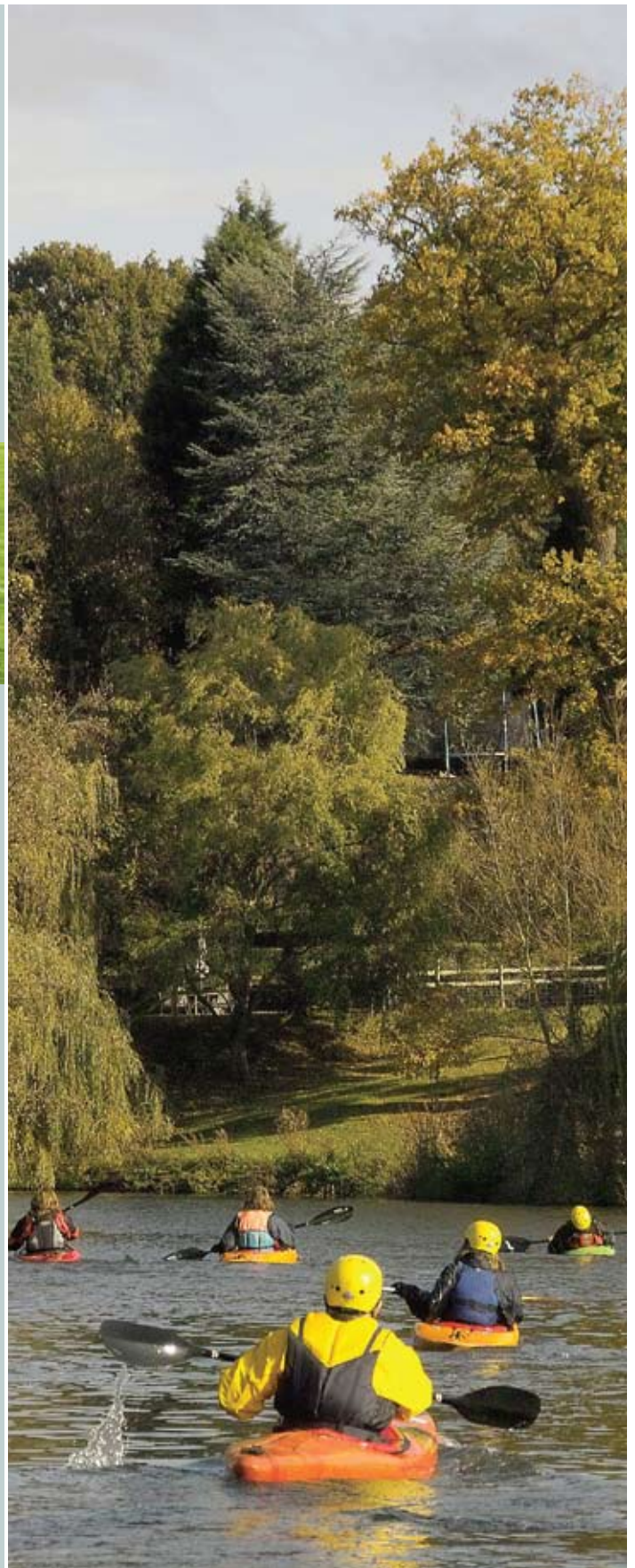
TQ720 538 01622 720263

Allington Lock

TQ746 582 contact EA 01622 752864

Oak Weir (no facilities)

TQ472 654 contact EA 01622 752864



Accessibility

Allington Lock has toilets, showers and parking alongside the slipway and is accessible for wheelchair users. However, other places are more remote. There are landing stages at each lock with some locks having canoe passes.

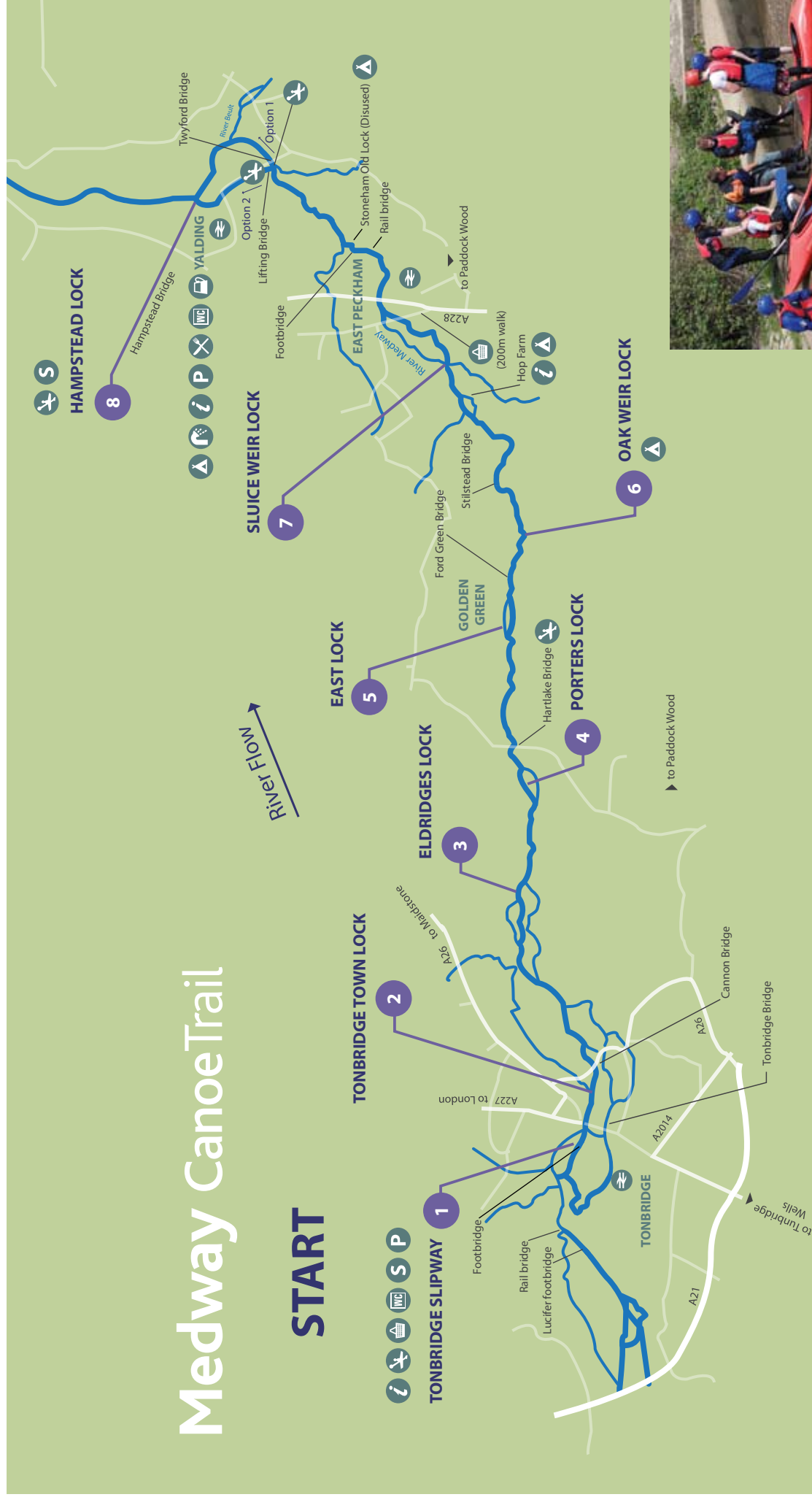
Be Safe and Look After Our River

1. Respect the river and other users by leaving no trace of your visit and minimising disturbance to wildlife by exiting the river at designated areas only.
2. Keep a lookout for anglers, maintain a good distance from them to avoid their tackle and create as little disturbance as possible.
3. Keep a safe distance from motor cruisers and rowing craft, particularly when racing or coaching is taking place. Remember it is difficult for rowing craft to see canoes. For the same reason do not follow close astern of larger vessels.
4. Buoyancy aids or life jackets should be worn at all times and we recommend that those on the water are able to swim.
5. We recommend that canoeists have some prior formal instruction and do not canoe alone.
6. If on the water after sunset, an all-round white light should be displayed and you should wear light coloured tops so you can be seen.
7. Be prepared and wear suitable clothing for the weather. Remember, prolonged immersion in cold water can cause hypothermia.
8. Do not canoe just above weirs or try to shoot weirs; the orange booms are there for your safety; please do not go under them.
9. In case of an emergency, phone the Environment Agency hotline number and contact the Emergency Services.



Medway Canoe Trail

START



OS Maps Explorer 148 and 136 (1:25 000)

