

Exploring the River Cam



General Information

The river Cam rises at Ashwell in Hertfordshire and meanders to Cambridge, flows along the 'Backs' past the colleges and then on to join the Ely Ouse and thus on to Denver Sluice. It is canoeable in winter from Barrington and all year from Byron's Pool.

These notes describe a couple of day's exploration based in Cambridge, starting from Chesterton and finishing in Chesterton or Ely.

Licences.

If you are a member of Canoe England your membership covers River Cam (Byrons Pool to Bottisham Lock) Licence otherwise a licence is required from the Cam Conservators (<http://www.camconservators.co.uk/>)

OS Map - Landranger 154

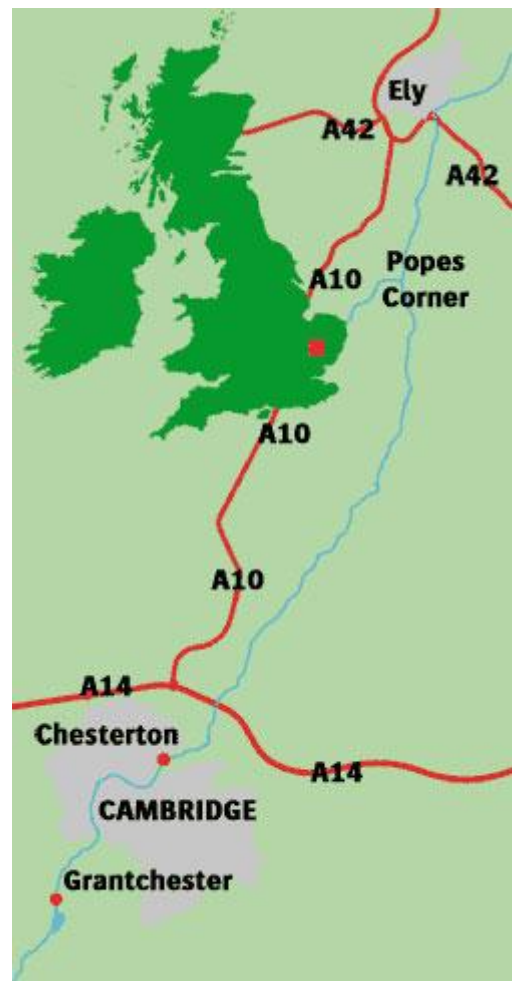
Day 1: Start at the small car park beside the river in Water Lane, Chesterton, Cambridge, just beside the 'Penny Ferry Pub' 470670 Paddle upstream (right). Keep to the right hand bank and look out for rowing eights!

400m: Just before the footbridge there is a small slipway which leads to the 'Green Dragon' -the oldest pub in Cambridge. If 400m is too soon to stop, then remember it for the way back! Continue along Riverside (past the Technology museum. an old pumping station with a tall chimney) to Elizabeth Way Bridge and Midsummer Common.

2.2km: Under Victoria bridge (Originally built to allow the residents of Chesterton, then a separate village, to have easy access to the city) and past the last of the boathouses and on up to Jesus Lock.

<http://www.camconservators.co.uk/jesuslock.html>

Land on the left and carry round the lock, but stop for an ice cream before you get back on the water! Now you are on 'the Backs' Enjoy a leisurely paddle on past the colleges; unfortunately you can't land at any. (There is a public landing place on the left below Magdalene Bridge at Quayside, but it is monopolised by punt hire). Be amused by the antics of those who have hired punts; your good deed of the day may be to return a lost pole to an inept punter. The colleges are: right (before the bridge) Magdalene (pronounced Maudlin'), left and right St Johns, left Trinity, Trinity Hall, Clare, Kings (and the chapel and the Wren Library), St Catharines, Queens (both sides) and the Mathematical Bridge.



5km: Under Silver St Bridge into the pool. You can stop here – provided that someone stays and guards the canoes – paddle across to the right of the pool and alight at ‘The Anchor’ which has a landing stage. Then, suitably refreshed, paddle round to the sluice and land on the right bank and portage up the punt rollers onto the upper river which winds leisurely towards Grantchester. <http://www.grantchester.info/main.php>

8km: a small landing on the right leads to ‘The Orchard’, a tea shop and garden made famous by Rupert Brooke. <http://www.rupertbrooke.com/> Walk across the field and enjoy a pot of tea and cake whilst precariously seated on ancient green canvas deckchairs – very period and very Cambridge!

A short right hand branch leads up to the Mill at Grantchester; Byrons Pool http://lnr.cambridge.gov.uk/reserves/byrons_pool/ is a further kilometre ahead on the left hand branch – again famous for ‘skinny dipping’. Now you can turn around, and do the whole thing again back to Chesterton; a very pleasant days outing.

Day 2: Start again at Fen Road – next to the Penny Ferry, but this time set off left – downstream! You can either paddle as far as you feel able and turn round, or you could go right through to Ely in the day. If you do, then park your shuttle car by the river at the bottom of Willow Walk. There is a small free car park there and no time restrictions. (CB7 4AT) Alternatively there is a cycle path all the way from Ely to Chesterton if you have a folding cycle to make the shuttle. Do keep to the proper side of the river (right) to avoid collision with rowing boats.

1.8km: This is Long Reac’, the location of The Bumps, a curious rowing tradition where a pursuing ‘eight’ has to ‘bump’ the boat in front to move up a place on the race ladder. <http://www.cucbc.org/bumps> At the ‘Plough’ you need to change sides on the river and paddle on the left side; all about visibility round the bend!

2.5km: Baits Bite Lock – an easy portage on the left bank.

4km: ‘The Bridge’, Clayhithe offers very good food - the best on the river and is totally non-smoking, even in the garden. Past the ‘Bridge’, look out for sailing dinghies at weekends; this is the Cam sailing club’s reach.

5.2km: Bottisham Lock. Portage right. This is a horrible lockside made of giant cheese (or canoe) grater and a small wall makes the portage even trickier. It is good to help one another here!

5.3km: Bottisham Lode goes off on the right; if you want to explore the Lodes, they are all canoeable, but you will need the OS maps 154/143 to find your way.

7km: Swaffham Lode (right).

10km: (right bank) Reach Lode and the ‘Five Miles from Anywhere – No Hurry’ public house. Good landing and worth a visit.

14km: Popes Corner. Here the Cam joins the River Great Ouse. On the corner is the ‘Fish and Duck’, which used to be an ideal lunch stop on the way to Ely and a good place to watch cruisers failing to make the tight turn from the Ouse into the Cam, but is now closed and being rebuilt. Turn left here onto the Old West River and you’ll wend your way towards

Huntingdon – another day! Carry straight on towards Ely along a fairly featureless and exposed section of fenland river. Ely Cathedral is on the horizon for a long time and eventually gets closer. As you enter the town.

21km: 'The Maltings' restaurant. Pleasant, but our pub destination is just on the left, 'The Cutter'.

Ely Waterside is busy with cruisers and rowing clubs; there is a slipway on Waterside (river left) but it is always foul with swan droppings and parking is limited, hence the suggestion to carry on through the city to Willow Walk, where you left the car!

Additional Information

If you fancy a weekend canoeing in Cambridge, then there is a canoeist friendly bed and breakfast right next to the launch area in Chesterton; details at www.2-a.co.uk

Cambridge - <http://www.visitcambridge.org/VisitCambridge/Home.aspx>

Great Ouse River - <http://www.visitgreatouse.co.uk/>

River Cam - <http://www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/river-cam>

Ely - <http://www.ely.org.uk/>