

Putney Bridge Canoe Club – Thames guidelines 2026



Cost for kayak and equipment

See website for current subscription rates

Thames paddling sessions

All sessions need to be booked using the online booking facility:

<https://www.putneybridgecc.co.uk/events/>

Facilities are somewhat basic... so be prepared to change in the open.

Open to all paddlers who have completed the safety drills at the pool for exiting a capsized kayak and being rescued. The information that you have completed this will be passed to the Thames paddling leaders

The paddle will be subject to the forecast weather and river conditions, along with necessary safety cover from experienced paddlers. The Trip Leader's decision is final.

Newcomers

Newcomers are allowed 1 trip on the Thames to try out kayaking and the Club. After this our British Canoeing insurance requires you to become a full paid up Member. You also need to be a paid up member to join any organised club events.

Preparation

Please read the PLA Tideway Code. Our website and the booking form has links to it and other current Thames information. Dress correctly. See our advice on what to wear. A cotton T-shirt and running shorts are not acceptable in cold conditions and you will be denied a paddle trip. Please see our website for more information FAQ & Thames pages.

Lights for night-time paddling

The River Thames area is covered by the International Sea Collision Regulations. (ColRegs) and is enforced by the Port of London Authority (PLA). We must be clearly visible with 2 white lights; front and back for 300m plus. **No lights, no paddle.**

Thames Trip procedures

A Club Trip Leader will organise Thames trips

They will ensure the mix of trip members have enough experience to complete the journey safely. A ratio of trip leader to club members of 1:6 must be maintained. ie if there are more than 6 paddlers a deputy leader needs to be present. Deputy leaders will lead or cover from the back of the group.

- Check the tides before arriving; direction, time and strength. For weekend paddles check for any river closures on the PLA website. Take the wind direction into account when deciding how far and long the evening paddle should be. Strong winds are always more difficult for newcomers than the river current. Trips above F4 need to be reviewed well before getting on the water.
- Leaders to take waterproofed mobile phones, towlines, a whistle to attract attention, and a powerful torch in winter. For longer trips bring a spare paddle, VHF radio and first aid kit
- Members prior to paddling - should cover any cuts, sores or scratches with waterproof plasters
- Inexperienced paddlers, newcomers and race boats are only allowed on the river with an accessible shore. The combination of High Water and Spring tides at Barns Elms increases the potential hazards; with more difficult launching, overhanging branches and strong currents.
- You will need to inform London VTS - 0203 2607711 or VHF Channel 14. if you intend to paddle beyond:
 - Wandsworth Bridge at night,
 - Any trips beyond Chelsea Bridge through to Westminster and beyond.

Trip Briefing

The trip route is explained; upriver or down, mentioning any areas of concern. Upriver has easier conditions but more river activity. Downriver is quieter but with more sea like conditions and requires greater attention and skill from the group. Look out for FastCat (Uber) wash.

Everyone is responsible for their own safety and has a duty of care towards other paddlers and users. Be aware of rowers and Thames clippers. Any paddler at the front of the group must check behind them regularly and stop if necessary to allow paddlers to regroup.

Newcomers

- Try your kayak while at the lockup; adjusting footrests and spray deck as necessary.
- Nominate an experienced paddler to 'buddy up' with a newcomer

Thames safety points

- Double-up to carry kayaks whenever possible
- Beware of fixed obstructions; overhanging trees, buoys & moored boats, especially after floods
- The pontoon 'black spots' at Dove Pier, Chiswick Pier and Battersea railway bridge areas
- Rowers and other users such as river taxis and their wash, particularly in shallow water
- Fast currents and swirling eddies around moored barges, bridges, pontoons, buoys
- If there is a risk of collision with rowers then their verbal conventions are useful:
- **'Ahead rower'** - risk of collision, **'Hold it up'** – Precautionary stop. **'Hold it hard'** – emergency stop
- Decide what group control is needed e.g. newcomers in the group, busy Thames
- In strong currents allow much more space between other paddlers and fixed objects

On the water

- Navigate in a correct manner to avoid collisions or causing a collision.
- Review progress from time to time of other paddlers, stop and regularly regroup. Maintain a pace to suit slower paddlers. Turn around in good time, especially with new paddlers
- Pay particular attention to 'black spots' mentioned above. Experienced paddlers must act as 'traffic islands' to warn & guide paddlers away from dangers
- For emergencies on the Thames **dial 999**, and ask for the **Coastguard**

Solo paddling

Paddling alone inherently carries more risk than when paddling in a group, which can rely on safety in numbers both in terms of being seen by other vessels and by having assistance on hand to cope with a problem.

Solo paddling is only permitted by paddlers experienced in Tideway navigation and conditions.

The Club does not condone solo paddling, and accepts no responsibility for any incidents which may occur while doing so. NB. Solo paddlers must leave trip details with a shore based contact, route, return time etc

After the water...

Please drain kayaks as much as possible before storing them to reduce condensation in the lockup.

Hang up all wet gear to dry. Carefully return all boats to the racks as appropriate, taking special care of fibreglass boats. Switch the lights. Ensure the lockup is locked.

Health

Do wash your hands after paddling, especially before eating food. Clean and disinfect any wounds that may have occurred.

Weil's Disease

While the risk of contracting Weil's disease (Leptospirosis) from recreational water is small, the serious nature of the disease means we must be aware of the dangers and should take simple precautions to reduce the risk of infection. Weils disease is not thought to survive in salt water on the tidal

Thames, and the Club has not had an incident in 25 years. If you develop persistent flu like symptoms tell you doctor that you may have been exposed to Weil's (Leptospirosis) so that they can consider it in their diagnosis.