

An Introduction to

Paddle Trails



**Clear Access
Clear Waters**

What is a 

Paddle Trail?



Paddle trails

ARE ADVENTURES

ON WATER designed to

INSPIRE



ENCOURAGE

and enable people to get out

paddling

Varying in length and required ability, trails can help people to have a safe and enjoyable experience on our waterways.

Trails can be linear 'A to B' or circular, with easy access to the water at the start and finish. Those with parking and facilities nearby are ideal. They can usually be completed within a day (or less) but multi-day journeys including camping are another great option. On

many navigations and routes, craft may pass both upstream and downstream.

There is a variety of craft to enjoy paddling adventures on, from canoes, kayaks, stand up paddleboards or even rafts. Paddling can be enjoyed by everyone in society, including those with a range of disabilities, impairments or medical conditions. Rivers and waterways connect millions of people across a range of diverse backgrounds.

Health and Social Benefits

Since 2020, the growth in popularity of paddling has rocketed, with more women, families and stand up paddleboarders driving the increase. So there is a good chance that if you live near a river or canal, you will have seen more people using them.

People go paddling to enjoy the outdoors, relax and unwind, for adventure and to spend time with others. There are proven benefits of being physically active on the water, such as increasing people's overall feelings of wellbeing, their quality of life, happiness and life satisfaction.

Paddle trails are a great way to engage and provide a welcoming environment for those people requiring additional support, with the provision of signposted, purpose-built access and other facilities too.

Children in deprived areas are nine times less likely to have access to green and blue space, nature and places to play. Active children are happier, healthier and more resilient. Activities like paddlesports that take place in the outdoors offer opportunities to develop independence, resilience, connection to nature, and while promoting health and wellbeing benefits among young people.

Maximising easily accessible, local and safe access to waterways could provide an opportunity for more people from lower socio-economic and ethnically diverse communities to get more active, more often.



Economic Benefits



Paddling activities make a significant contribution to the UK economy through the expenditure of participants. Economic benefits are generated by a range of businesses which are associated with both the inland and coastal marine tourism industry. Paddle trails are a fantastic means of encouraging paddlers to visit your waterway, town, outdoor centre, club

or region. They act as a great way to showcase local independent businesses including hire operations and connect with local tourism opportunities.

Investing in paddle trails provides local businesses a real opportunity to benefit economically from this growing market.



Environmental Benefits

The natural world is the foundation of our health, wellbeing and prosperity. Personal connection to nature is declining as it becomes a less frequent part of our daily lives. Lack of access to nature is a significant factor in health inequalities.

The more people are connected to nature the more they understand it, engage with it and protect it. This is reflected in the support paddlers have shown through paddle clean ups.

Removing tonnes of plastic pollution from our waterways, managing invasive non-native species and monitoring sewage pollution.

Paddle trails are a great way to enable people to connect with nature and tackle other crises within our society, such as climate change and the degradation of our natural environment.

“ People care for what they love, but they only love what they know ”



The Statistics

1

Around 5.2 million people go paddling each year

(Arkenford (2020), 'Watersports Participation Survey')



2

A 2021 report commissioned by the Canal and Rivers Trust and British Marine estimates the total inland and coastal marine tourism sector contributed

£5.8 billion to the UK economy in 2018/19 and 303,606 FTE employment jobs.

3

Visits to the natural environment increased to 4bn in 2019.

(Natural England's Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) 2019 survey.)



4

In 2019 6% of visits were to rivers, lakes and canals (237m)

68% said this was for health and exercise, 46% to relax and unwind.



What Makes a Great Paddle Trail

People take to the water for a whole range of reasons, therefore what makes a great trail will be different for everyone. There are some key ingredients that can make a trail an enjoyable experience.

Ease of access

The ability to access the water as easily as possible with a craft (kayak, canoe or SUP) is essential, this could be anything from a grassy bank, to a gravel beach, a canal towpath or a bespoke landing stage.

Designated launch and landing sites provide a safe entry and exit for paddlers and prevent damage and erosion to the environment.

Having somewhere safe to park and launch a craft is a vital aspect of a good paddle trail. The closer parking and facilities are to the waters edge the better, ideally with minimal obstacles.

Inclusivity

Paddling can be enjoyed by a wide spectrum of society, including families with young children, women and girls and those with a range of disabilities. Simple adjustments in the design or management of the environment, the equipment or the information about the trail can make a real difference to whether or not people will feel comfortable and safe having a go.

Facilities

Toilets and changing facilities are a real asset to a trail, but it is often the proximity of cafes and pubs en route that can really make the difference.



Length and difficulty

Journeys can range from a leisurely 2-3 km, to full or multi-day trips. A 10-12 km trail will be a steady day out for most people, depending on the nature of the route and flow of water. Longer trails will require places to land to rest and refuel.

Difficulty is subjective and usually down to the paddler to judge based on the distance and route description. Sometimes a short route along a canal with lots of portages (where you have to get out of or off your craft to walk round a lock, for example) can be more of a challenge than something much longer.

Quality route guidance

Knowing where to start, stop, expected time and obstacles likely to be encountered are fundamental pieces of information a paddler needs to know when planning a journey. A trail can be brought to life with a bit of local knowledge and history. Paddlers should also be made aware of any licensing requirements that exist on the waterway. For more information visit gopaddling.info/paddlepoints and look up the waterway you are interested in.

Signage

Signage can add to the experience. People enjoy following a route - especially one of national significance (such as coast to coast). Marker posts are also helpful.



Types of Craft

There is a range of craft available for paddling including, canoes, kayaks and stand up paddleboards (SUPs). The size and weight of craft vary greatly and can be anywhere from 15kg to 40kg in weight, with dimensions from (L x W) 2.5m x 0.60m to 8m x 1.4m.

Canoes



- Usually carried by grab loops or lines attached to their ends
- Paddled with single bladed paddles and commonly have a crew of 2
- Can weigh from 30kg upwards
- Paddlers enter their craft and leave with craft placed on the water
- Paddlers usually kneel or sit down in low slung seats
- Canoes can carry huge amounts of kit.

Kayaks



- Carried over the shoulder with the paddle in the other hand, or by grab loops at each end, 1 person at each end
- Generally the lightest craft at around 15-20kg
- Paddlers enter their craft and leave by the cockpit while on the water
- Paddled sat down with double bladed paddles
- A “seal launch” is when a paddler enters their craft on dry land and slides down the bank. This should only take place where a dedicated facility is provided to avoid environmental damage to the banks.

SUPS



- Often inflated on location
- Usually carried by grab loop in the centre of the board under the arm with the paddle in the other hand
- Paddlers step onto the craft
- Paddlers can sit down, but usually kneel or stand
- It is generally the lightest craft weigh 10-18kg.

What's the Cost of a Paddle Trail?



Creation of paddle trails can be achieved with minimal cost where launching and landing is already good and no additional infrastructure work is required.

A paddle trail can be featured on our Go Paddling website: gopaddling.info. For more information on this and to view a sample paddle trail template refer to the complementary document 'Delivering a Paddle Trail (Design Guidance)' Section 5. Paddling Trails Writing and Publicising your Paddle Trail'.

With some simple adjustments and thoughtful planning in layout and design a modest investment can make a real difference in making people feel comfortable having a go whilst also ensuring the trail is more inclusive and paddler friendly for many years to come.

Typical costs to install a basic landing stage (a decked platform) are in the region of £6,500 plus VAT. A permit from the Environment Agency may be required for which there is a charge. More guidance can be found in the complementary document *Delivering a Paddle Trail - Design Guidance*.

Typical costs to install signage are in the region of £1,500 plus VAT. A permit from the Environment Agency may be required, refer to the complementary document as above.

The health, economic and environmental cost benefits can help offset the costs of any infrastructure in the longer term. The paddle trail will be a great asset to your community.



Funding Opportunities

British Canoeing's charity partner The Canoe Foundation has funded a number of public access improvement projects. Full details and current funding opportunities can be found here: www.canoefoundation.org.uk. Funding may also be available from your local council via tourism and public health teams.



Getting Started

Great, so you've decided a paddle trail will be beneficial to your local area. It is now time to dig a little deeper with a desktop exercise which will take you through the early steps of planning for a fantastic paddle trail

and begin to inform feasibility and funding bids. Refer to Appendix 1 and complete the desktop checklist.

STEP 1: Complete the Essential Paddle Trail Desktop Checklist in Appendix 1

What Next?

Once you've completed Step 1 The Essential Paddle Trail Checklist Desktop Exercise, you will now be in a position to determine the feasibility of the proposed paddle trail.

Guidance on the next steps including on-site audits, permissions, management, maintenance,

environmental considerations, design, case studies and writing your paddle trail can be found in our complementary document 'Delivering a Paddle Trail (Design Guidance)'. We recommend taking the time to read the guidance.





Appendix 1.

Paddle Trail Checklist

The desktop checklist will take you through the early steps of planning a fantastic paddle trail and begin to inform feasibility.



Tip: It is advised to carry out the checklist before applying for funding.

Desktop Checklist:	✓	Notes:
<p>1 Identify your target market and how they may use the trail. (Consider families, ethnically diverse groups and women).</p>		
<p>2 Check for existing canoe trails on our GoPaddling website. (gopaddling.info/find-paddling-trails)</p>		
<p>3 Note why the route is appealing, this will help inform your e-leaflet. Consider wildlife and the history of the built environment.</p>		
<p>4 Consult with local canoe clubs and paddle centres (details can be found here: gopaddling.info/category/local-paddling-services) online groups and the parish council to gain insight and support.</p>		
<p>5 Using Paddlepoints gopaddling.info/paddlepoints (and the Google Earth function), note the following on a map: Existing and potential new start and finish points, note the grid references and what3words.</p>		
<p>6 Using Paddlepoints gopaddling.info/paddlepoints note the length of the route including the time it will take to paddle. (a 10-12km trail will generally be a steady day out)</p> <p>Tip: Downstream paddling is faster and generally easier than paddling against the flow upstream</p>		

<p>7 Using Paddlepoints gopaddling.info/paddlepoints note the presence of existing infrastructure or potential requirements, consider lunch stops, for example.</p> <p>Tip: Avoid installing infrastructure on the bend of a river which will be prone to erosion.</p>		
<p>8 Using Paddlepoints gopaddling.info/paddlepoints note the existence of visible signage, paths and steps, possible pinch points and potential barriers to overcome particularly for disabled users.</p>		
<p>9 Using Paddlepoints gopaddling.info/paddlepoints note the proximity of nearby facilities in the area such as pubs, car parking and toilets.</p>		
<p>10 Consider who will be responsible for the maintenance and ownership of any new infrastructure (local canoe clubs or parish councils may have keen volunteers). Refer to the complementary document 'Delivering a Paddle Trail (Design Guidance)' for more information on liability and risk assessments.</p>		
<p>11 Identify the landowner to seek agreement to any necessary works.</p> <p>Tip: To identify a landowner contact Land Registry; the parish council or erect notices on site.</p>		
<p>12 Seek support from the local authority and parish council.</p>		
<p>13 Establish if the area is prone to flooding. Flood events may destabilise the platform and suffer from increased silting up and debris requiring more maintenance. Check with the Environment Agency here: www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk</p>		
<p>14 Check for any nearby sewage outfalls here: experience.arcgis.com/experience/e834e261b53740eba2fe6736e37bbc7b/</p>		

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