

River Access in England for Non Powered Craft.

Further to my letter of 10 May 2005 when letters from the Rt Hon Alun Michael and Rt Hon Richard Cahbon were included showing that the issue of access to waterways should be considered within the Local Access Forums. The purpose of this letter is to further update you as to the rivers access issue.

One of the biggest issues that face British Canoeists is the lack of access to the rivers of England and Wales. Canoeing, for the fifth year running, has been recognised as the fastest growing watersport (RYA Survey 2005) Canoeing is a socially inclusive healthy activity which is attractive to people of all ages and abilities.

The debate concerning access to inland rivers in England and Wales has increased in volume and profile. As the debate develops we have become aware of misconceptions about what we are trying to achieve. The type of legislation that we are seeking is a version of the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003. This Act is applicable to manually powered craft. The Act codifies responsible access to land and water it protects the environment and activities of all canoeists, anglers, other users, and landowners who are all required to adhere to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The Act has been successfully implemented.

Canoeing is not seeking a conflict with anglers and other river users. It wants to successfully co-exist to the wider benefit of the whole community, as canoeists do in Scotland, all over Europe and the rest of the world. Clearly enshrined with any legislation will be the need to reach local agreement concerning environmental issues and times when some users may need exclusive use. However, this would be set against a background of right to pursue a pursuit rather than the current privileged and exclusive arrangement.

The EA has research to prove that Canoeing is not harmful to Fish Stocks. DEFRA have recently recognised this and now quote "*Whilst all water-based activities can have a direct impact on the environment, research undertaken on behalf of the Environment Agency found that over all canoeing is not harmful to fish populations....*" "*The BCU's Access strategy makes very clear that paddlers should undertake their sport in ways which do not have an adverse environmental impact*" It is also worthy of note that English Nature states "*there is unlikely to be any significant impact on or lasting disturbance to wildlife and the water environment from the passage of canoes*".

The Government have also recently stated that it "*is a firm believer in the benefits of outdoor recreation on land or water. The visitors are good for the local economy and people who exercise regularly are healthier than those who do not. So we are keen to promote recreational opportunities as widely as we can and this includes canoeing*".

It is a fact that lack of access to the inland waterways prevents us all.(swimmers, boaters, gorge walkers, waders etc) enjoying the waterways and participating in healthy outdoor activities. We are **all** restricted to using the rivers that have either an ancient right of navigation still existing or have statutory rights of navigation created in more recent times. This restriction also affects anglers.

The offer to come and present to your LAF is still available and we would be happy to update you as to the issue and how we are working with other organisations in order to change the access to water situation.

Yours sincerely

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