



RIVER  
AVON  
USERS  
HAND-  
BOOK



NRA

*National Rivers Authority*

Guardians of  
the Water Environment



Awarded for excellence

## INTRODUCTION



The purpose of this handbook is to help you enjoy the river and the goodwill of other river users whilst avoiding conflicts and disturbance and damage to wildlife. Guidelines are included for most river based activities and, if these are followed, most conflicts can be avoided.

Don't just read your own section. By reading the the whole handbook, you will have a greater understanding of other users requirements and problems.

Water can be a dangerous environment and some notes on safety and accident avoidance have been included.

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The River Avon, often known as the "Warwickshire Avon", starts its life as a spring in the village of Naseby in Northamptonshire and flows for 186km (115 miles) before it joins the River Severn at Tewkesbury. Its course takes it through many areas of great beauty and historic interest. These include the towns of Rugby, Warwick, Stratford, Evesham and Tewkesbury. It is navigable as far upstream as Alveston, just upstream of Stratford and much of the river and many of its larger tributaries support good coarse fishing. Other recreational activities on the river include Canoeing, Rafting, Rowing and Sailing.

## THE RIVER AVON



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY



055553

## RIVER SAFETY

Rivers are always a great attraction and will draw large numbers of people, especially on hot sunny days. There is no doubt that they can be great fun but can also be very dangerous and should be treated with the greatest respect. Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents statistics show that there are hundreds of drownings in the UK each year and approximately one third of these occur in rivers and streams. Especially dangerous places are in the vicinity of weirs, locks and sluices.

The reasons that rivers are so dangerous are: currents are often below the surface and not obvious; river water is cold in all but the hottest of weather and this will reduce your ability to swim; invisible hazards such as submerged trees, roots, weeds, stones, glass, etc.

The ability to swim will obviously serve you well in the event of a mishap but rivers are not the place to swim from choice. In addition to the hazards detailed above, you should bear in mind that, even the cleanest rivers are never totally pure and you could end up with a stomach upset or something more serious.

If you do wish to swim, go to your local swimming pool where the water is clean, free from hazards and you are supervised by a lifeguard.



In any activity where you run the risk of falling into the river such as canoeing, rafting and sailing you should wear a good quality lifejacket or buoyancy aid. Rough water canoeists are also advised to wear a helmet.

Take note of warning signs and follow their instructions. A network of Navigation Hazard Warning Signs operates on the River Avon which advise against navigation when the river rises above a safe level. Always follow this advice. The majority of these are manually operated flap board type where the message is changed at times when navigation is considered hazardous. A few are of an automatic, self-reading design. Examples of both designs are illustrated in the back of this handbook. Information on river levels can be obtained at all times by phoning the appropriate "Riverline" number (see page 8).

The governing body of each sport will have compiled a set of rules and safety recommendations. Follow these at all times. In addition a Natural Water Sports code has been published by the Central Council of Physical Recreation jointly with the Sports Council.

Even if all the rules are followed, the occasional accident can happen and it is important that you learn the basic skills in rescue, resuscitation and first aid. There are many courses and publications available to teach you these skills.

Children should always be accompanied by an adult when on or near water and they should be taught the dangers and safe practices.



## RIPARIAN AND NAVIGATION RIGHTS

In general, ownership of land adjoining a river includes the bed of that river up to the mid point. Similarly, possession of fishing rights extends to the mid point of the river.

This means that a riparian owner can only give permission to navigate or fish over his half of the river bed.

Obviously, if he owns both banks, this extends over the full width of the river.

The exception to this rule is where there is public right of navigation when vessels are free to navigate the river providing that they comply with the regulations of the Navigation Authority. Fishing rights where they exist are still restricted to half of the river even within a public navigation.

There is no automatic right to moor a vessel, even though there may be a public right of navigation. Permission to moor must be sought from the riparian owner except where there is a recognised public mooring facility.

The Navigation Authorities on the River Avon are as follows:

- Lower Avon Navigation Trust - from the confluence with the river Severn upstream to Evesham Weir.
- Upper Avon Navigation Trust - from Evesham Weir up to the limit of Navigation at Alveston Weir.

Both Navigation Trusts operate licencing schemes and additionally have a joint scheme.



There are one or two serious illnesses associated with water and its immediate surroundings. These are thankfully rare but it is nevertheless sensible to take a few simple precautions. One of these is known as leptospirosis which can, in some cases, develop into the even more serious Weil's disease. This is carried by rats, and the bacteria are excreted in their urine to contaminate water and muddy banks. The bacteria can enter the human body via grazes and cuts and through the mouth and the mucus membranes of the nose and eyes.

## HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Simple precautions can reduce your chances of contracting this or any other water borne disease:

- do not swallow river water.
- cover open wounds with waterproof plasters or gloves.
- wash or shower after water sports especially if you have been immersed in the water.
- wash your hands before eating.

The symptoms of leptospirosis are similar to those of influenza. If you feel ill after coming into contact with water, consult your doctor immediately. The earlier that leptospirosis is diagnosed and treated, the better.



## BLUE GREEN ALGAE

Contact with and swallowing of algal scum can cause severe illness including skin rashes, eye irritation, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and pains in muscles and joints.

Algal scum is not always harmful but it is a sensible precaution to avoid contact with it.

## GENERAL CONDUCT

There are certain codes of conduct and behaviour which all people who enjoy the river environment should follow. Try to understand other people's interests and avoid conflict.

There is room for a wide variety of activities on the river and, with a little consideration, they need not clash.

- Try to be understanding and courteous to other river users at all times.
- Avoid unnecessary damage to banks and bankside vegetation.
- Do not pick or dig up wild flowers.
- Do not unnecessarily disturb birds and other wildlife.
- Take your rubbish home. Do not throw it in the river or on the bank.
- Be as quiet as possible - this especially applies to, radio-cassettes. Respect other people's wish for peace and quiet.
- Do not disturb anglers engaged in organised competitions and comply with the instructions of officials.
- Observe the County Code.





# TIGHT LINES

Call Riverline to check the day's water levels and temperature before you go fishing.

## RIVERLINE

Trent Area

**0891 122611**

Avon & Lower Severn Area

**0891 122622**

Middle & Upper Severn Area

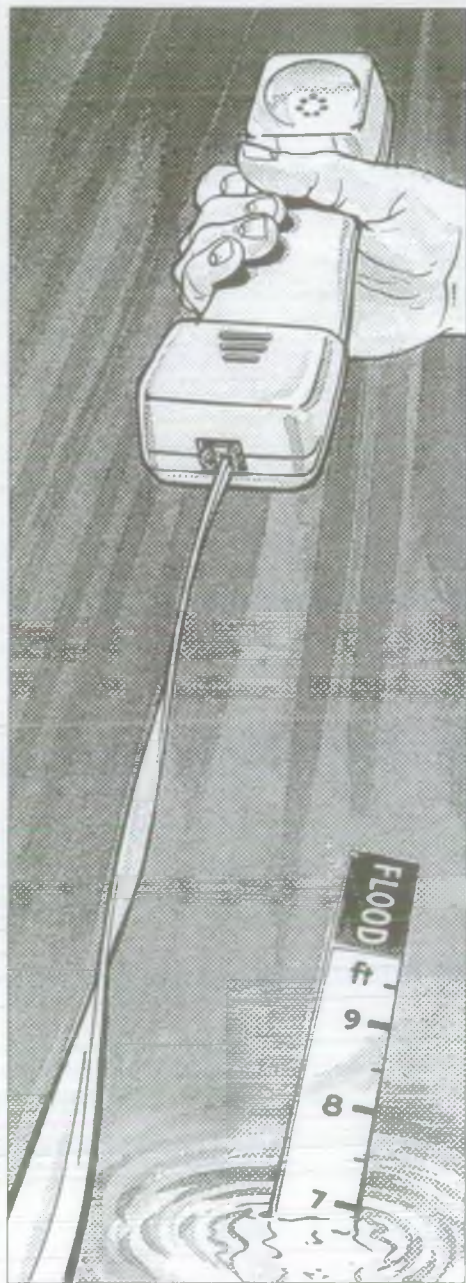
**0891 122633**

Calls are charged at  
39p per minute cheap  
rate, 49p per minute at  
all other times as at  
31st March 1994.



**NRA**

*National Rivers Authority  
Severn-Trent Region*



# GUIDANCE FOR SPECIFIC WATER SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

## ANGLING



Obtain a copy of the official rules for your sport. Read and understand it before taking part.

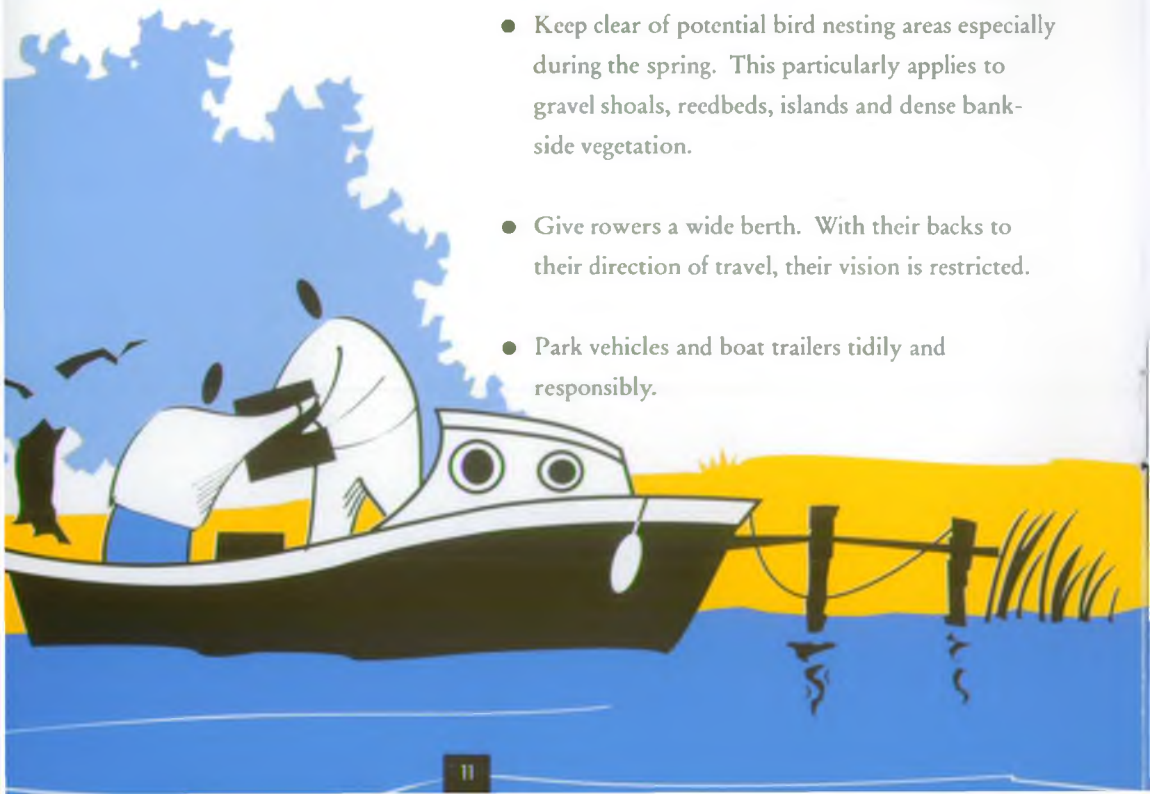
- Anyone over the age of 12 years needs to be in possession of a valid NRA rod licence before starting to fish. These are available at all Post Offices.
- The NRA rod licence entitles you to fish with rod and line but, in addition, you will need permission to fish in particular water. This may be your Club's water or a day ticket water. In some areas the NRA has water where the fishing is free to any holder of a valid rod licence.
- Obtain a copy of the NRA Fisheries Byelaws for this Region. Read these and observe the rules; they are intended for the good of the sport. Pay particular attention to those byelaws referring to close seasons, prohibited baits and tackle and size limits.
- Fisheries owners may in some cases, impose even stricter rules. These must also be observed.
- Discarded fishing tackle is dangerous to wildlife, especially nylon line, hooks and the now illegal lead shot. Bottles, cans and ring pulls can be hazardous to animals. For the good name of your sport, take all your litter home and dispose of it safely. Unwanted nylon line should preferably be burnt.

- If you do snag on trees or weed, make every attempt to clear both line and hooks where possible.
- Take care before casting to ensure that the area in front of and behind you is clear of people, animals and boats.
- Beware of fishing near overhead electricity cables, especially with very long poles. A number of very serious injuries and fatalities have occurred as a result of arcing between cables and fishing rods.
- Boats and canoes have a right to use the full width of the river on a public navigation but will usually give you a wide berth if they know you are there. Don't hide in the bushes; make your presence known, politely.
- Boats and canoes will cause little disturbance to your fishing if they pass quickly and quietly. They are not deliberately trying to spoil your sport.
- Acknowledge considerate behaviour by others with a wave and a word of thanks.
- Take care not to block riverside footpaths with your fishing tackle.
- Don't leave food or bait when you leave. This encourages vermin and increases health risks.

## GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR ALL BOAT USERS

The following notes apply equally to motor boating, canoeing, rafting, rowing and sailing, and should be considered alongside the specific notes for each of those sections.

- All vessels should be registered/licenced with the appropriate Navigation Authority.
- Look out for anglers and give them as wide a berth as possible. Avoid their lines and pass them quickly and quietly.
- Keep well clear of fly-fishermen whether they are wading or fishing from a boat, and leave room both in front and behind for their casting.
- Launch and land at recognised places except in an emergency. Do not trespass on private banks.
- Keep clear of potential bird nesting areas especially during the spring. This particularly applies to gravel shoals, reedbeds, islands and dense bank-side vegetation.
- Give rowers a wide berth. With their backs to their direction of travel, their vision is restricted.
- Park vehicles and boat trailers tidily and responsibly.



- Canoes should be registered with the relevant Navigation Authority.
- Obey the rules of the Navigation Authority. These apply just as much to canoes as to all other vessels.
- Always keep to the right when meeting other vessels.
- Wear a buoyancy aid at all times and safety helmet when in shallow, rough water.
- Canoeists should preferably have received a course of instruction and be able to swim.
- Young and inexperienced canoeists should be accompanied by an experienced person, preferably a qualified canoe instructor.
- Watch out for anglers and keep a good distance from them. Avoid their tackle and cause as little disturbance as possible. Do not remain stationary in fast flowing water when there are anglers nearby.
- Avoid disturbance of gravels in shallow water. These may be spawning beds of chub, dace, barbel and trout and it is an offence to wilfully or knowingly cause disturbance to these.
- Keep clear of sailing, rowing or motorised craft, all of which will find it more difficult to take avoiding action.

## CANOEING



## MOTORISED CRAFT

- All motorised craft must be registered with the appropriate Navigation Authority. Abide by their regulations.
- All boat skippers should endeavour to have training in basic boat handling skills, including the use of basic ancillary equipment.
- All boats should carry a range of emergency, safety and first aid equipment. The Navigation Authority will advise you on the choice of this.
- If river levels are up, look out for Navigation warning signs and heed any advice they give. They will advise against navigation when the river is considered to be above a safe level.
- It is an offence to discharge boat lavatories to the river. Chemical and holding tank toilets must only be discharged at appropriate tip out/pump out sanitary stations which are situated at regularly spaced locations along the river.
- Avoid other forms of pollution and do not leave litter on the banks or in the river. Oil contaminated bilges should not be pumped into the river.
- Keep strictly to the speed limits imposed by the Navigation Authority. Excessive speed will create a wash which can damage banks and bankside vegetation, be dangerous to smaller craft and interfere with fishing.
- Avoid shallow water where you may disturb the bed of the river, plants and other river life.
- Keep a lookout for other river users and be ready to take avoiding action as necessary. Slow down when approaching others and make your intentions clear.
- Respect the needs of anglers, keep your distance and avoid their lines. Their sport is easily spoilt by the thoughtless behaviour of boaters.



The NRA strongly advises against swimming in rivers. Strong currents, deep water and underwater obstructions are hazards which are not found in swimming pools. Diving and jumping into rivers is particularly dangerous. The quality of the water can never be guaranteed.

If you insist on swimming in rivers, please bear the following in mind.

- Never swim near moving or moored boats.
- Make sure that you can be seen when swimming in navigable water.
- Keep well away from strong currents, locks and weirs.
- Do not attempt to swim across a river.
- Do not use inflatables such as air beds, “toy boats” or rubber tyres on a river. They can quickly carry you into a dangerous situation.
- Carefully supervise paddling children. They can easily walk into deep water or be overwhelmed by boat wash.
- Swimmers and paddling children should always wear something on their feet to guard against the danger of broken glass or other sharp objects.
- Never jump or dive into a river from any bridge, bank or vessel. You cannot be sure what is beneath the surface and you may even dive into the path of a moving vessel.
- Sub-aqua swimming should only be carried out in organised groups and warning signs should be exhibited during dives.

## SWIMMING



## RAFT-RACING

This is becoming an increasingly popular pastime and means of fund-raising for charity. Race organisers however, need to take great care to ensure high safety standards.

- Seek the permission of the appropriate Navigation Authority. Due to the comparatively uncontrollable nature of rafts, some Authorities will not permit rafting on part or all of their navigation due to the risk of damage to boats.
- Above the limit of navigation and on tributaries it would be necessary to obtain agreement of all riparian owners along the race route. In the event of a mishap, a crew may need to land and may find themselves trespassing on private land.
- Have regard to the speed of flow of the river before allowing the race to start. As a general guide 2mph is a safe maximum river flow. River conditions (levels) may be obtained by telephoning the appropriate "Riverline" number (see page 8). Consider cancelling if the river is more than 15cm (6") above normal level.
- All crew members should wear approved lifejackets or buoyancy aids and be competent swimmers.
- All rafts should carry 3rd party insurance cover for up to £500,000 per claim, any number of claims.
- Rafts should be made of non-toxic materials and any buoyancy drums should be clean and free from toxic materials or oils.



- Rafts should be inspected prior to the race for stability, structural soundness, buoyancy, absence of sharp edges and ease of escape in the event of a mishap.
- Marshals and safety support boats should be in attendance and a team of divers is advisable.
- First aid points should be established at regular intervals along the route.
- No litter should be left on the banks or in the river and any wrecked craft should be cleared completely and immediately. Wreckage left to float downstream could cause serious damage to boats and installations on the river.
- Care must be taken to avoid problems caused by spectators, for example; trespassing, damaging crops, littering etc.
- Consider the needs of other river users, particularly anglers. It is courtesy to contact the Secretaries of all angling clubs along the route to ensure that they have not arranged an important contest on the day of your race. Where possible raft races should be arranged in the annual angling closed season which for coarse fish is 15 March to 15 June inclusive.



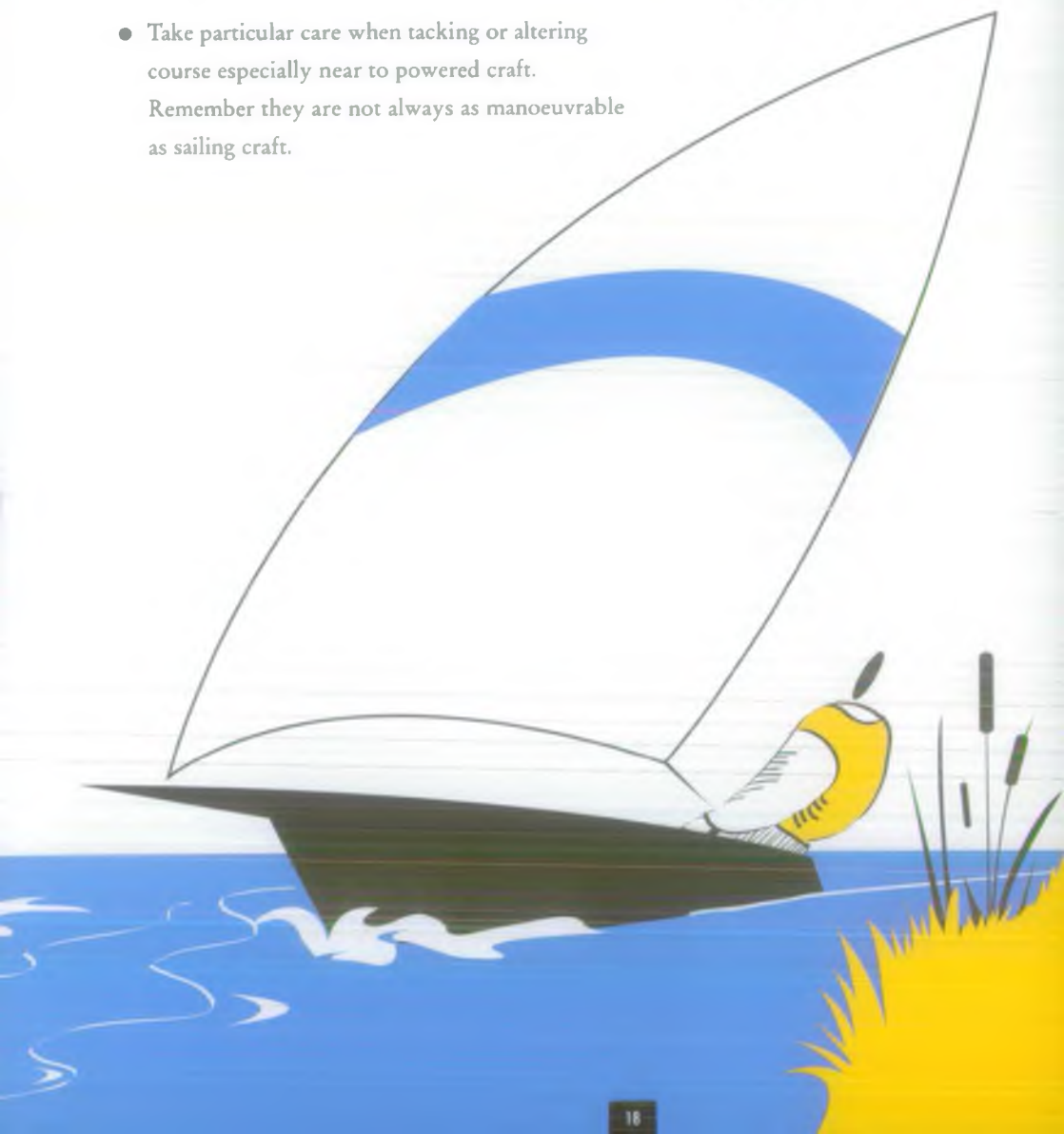
## ROWING

- Except when competing in a regatta situation, obey the rules of the Navigation Authority.
- Keep a lookout for anglers fishing from the bank and keep a good distance from them. Avoid snagging their lines and create the minimum of disturbance.
- Look out for others on the water and be prepared to take evasive action if necessary.
- The steersman or cox is considered to be “master” of the craft.
- Remember that it may be difficult for other river users to see rowing boats which lie low in the water.
- Comply with your club’s Code of Practice and that of any club which you are visiting.
- In strong stream flow conditions, keep clear of obstructions and hazards especially when manoeuvring.



- Sailing vessels must be registered with the appropriate Navigation Authority.
- Keep a lookout for anglers fishing from the bank and keep a good distance from them. Avoid snagging their lines and create the minimum of disturbance.
- Take particular care when tacking or altering course especially near to powered craft. Remember they are not always as manoeuvrable as sailing craft.

## SAILING



## WALKING

There are many sections of footpath which follow the banks of the River Avon although these are by no means continuous. A good guide to the existence of a footpath can be obtained from the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 scale Pathfinder series maps. Whilst this is a fairly good guide, the final ruling on the presence or route of a footpath lies with the County Council's Footpath Officer.

- Do not walk too close to the bank edge which could be undercut and unstable.
- Do not allow children to wander close to the river's edge.
- Do not stray off the official footpath.
- Do not leave gates open.
- Do not damage crops.
- Do not allow your dog to wander and annoy animals or wildlife.
- Do not leave litter.
- Follow the Country Code



British Waterways  
Llanthony Warehouse  
Gloucester Docks  
Gloucester  
GL1 2EJ

Telephone: 01452 318000

Amateur Rowing Association  
6 Lower Mall  
Hammersmith  
London  
W6 9DJ

Telephone: 0181 748 3632

The Lower Avon Navigation Trust Ltd  
Mill Wharf  
Mill Lane  
Wyre Piddle  
Persore  
Worcs  
WR10 2JF

Telephone: 01386 552517

British Canoe Union  
Adbolton Lane  
West Bridgford  
Nottingham  
NG2 5AS

Telephone: 01602 821100

The Upper Avon Navigation Trust Ltd  
Bridge 63  
Harvington  
Worcs  
WR11 5NR

Telephone: 01386 870526

National Federation of Anglers  
Halliday House  
Eggington Junction  
Derbyshire  
DE65 6GU

Telephone: 01283 734735

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

You can help The National Rivers Authority to prevent pollution and protect the water environment.

Telephone the **EMERGENCY HOTLINE** to report all environmental incidents, such as pollution, poaching and flooding, or any signs of damage or danger to our rivers, lakes and coastal waters. Your prompt action will help the NRA to protect water wildlife, people and property.

## EMERGENCY FREEPHONE HOTLINE

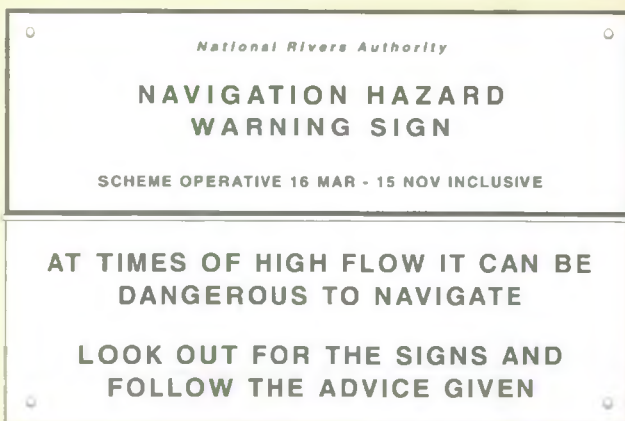
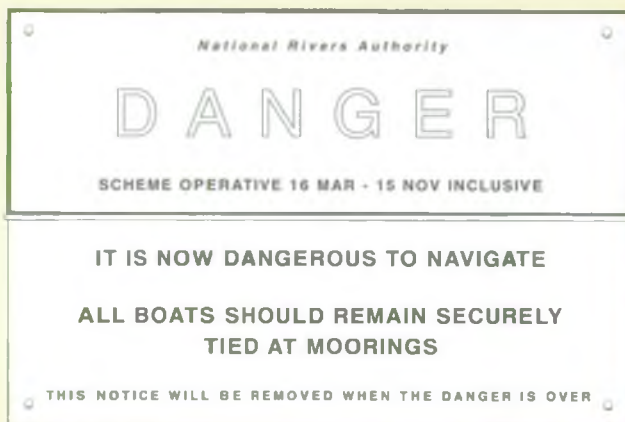
# 0800 80 70 60

24 hours free emergency telephone line

All calls are recorded

MANUAL  
WARNING SIGN

Danger position - Flap up



Normal position - Flap down

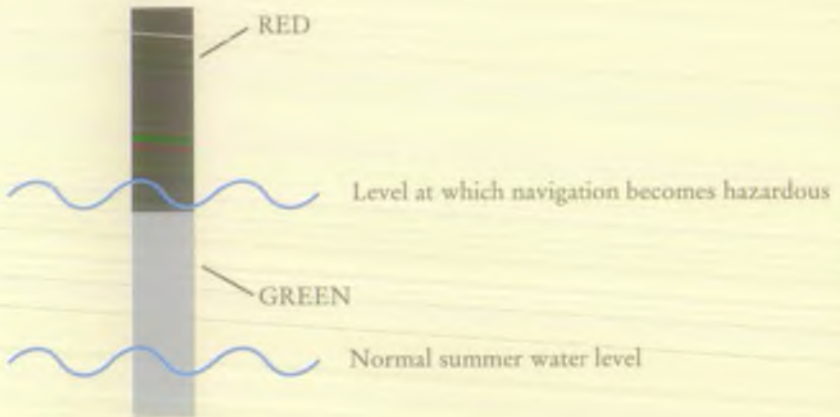
*National Rivers Authority*

**NAVIGATION WARNING SIGN**

**IF THE RIVER LEVEL IS IN THE RED  
SECTION OF ON THE DEPTH GAUGE BELOW  
IT IS DANGEROUS TO NAVIGATE**

**STAY AT MOORINGS UNTIL THE  
RIVER FALLS TO THE GREEN SECTION**

**AUTOMATIC  
WARNING SIGN**



**NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY**

Lower Severn Area  
Riversmeet House  
Newtown Industrial Estate  
Northway Lane  
Tewkesbury  
GL20 8JG

Telephone: (01684) 850951

**NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY**

Upper Severn Area  
Hafren House  
Welshpool Road  
Shelton  
Shrewsbury  
SY3 8BB

Telephone (01734) 272828

**NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY**

Upper Trent Area  
Sentinel House  
Wellington Crescent  
Fradley Park  
Lichfield  
WS13 8RR

Telephone: (01543) 444141

**NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY**

Lower Trent Area  
Trentside Offices  
Scarrington Road  
West Bridgford  
Nottingham  
NG2 5FA

Telephone: (0115) 945 5722

**NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY**

Headquarters:  
Sapphire East  
550 Streetsbrook Road  
Solihull  
West Midlands  
B91 1QT

Telephone: (0121) 711 2324



**NRA**

