

ISSUED JANUARY 2021

# GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE USE OF UNPOWERED CRAFT ON INLAND NAVIGATIONS



**WATERWAYS IRELAND**

"MANAGING AND PROMOTING THE INLAND  
WATERWAYS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL..."

  
Uiscebhealaí Éireann Watterweys Airlann

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# INTRODUCTION

Waterways Ireland manages the recreational use of the following navigations on the island of Ireland:

- **Lower Bann**
- **Erne System**
- **Shannon Erne Waterway**
- **Shannon Navigation**
- **Royal Canal**
- **Grand Canal**
- **Barrow Line and Navigation**

Waterways Ireland is encouraging the increased use of defined Blueways trails along its navigations by unpowered craft such as canoes, kayaks, paddle boards. Our waterways are witnessing increasing co-existence of unpowered craft operating alongside powered vessels such as hire boats / barges / cruisers. This increased use of the waterways by unpowered craft has led to a need for guidelines to ensure the safe use of the shared water space by all waterways activity users.

## UNPOWERED CRAFT

Unpowered craft are those craft that do not have a mechanical means of propulsion or sails. The following craft are considered to be unpowered craft in these guidelines:

- Any open cockpit kayak
- Any fragile competition craft
- Any open canoe
- Any sit-on-top kayak or canoe
- Any inflatable kayak or canoe
- Any stand up paddle board
- Any closed cockpit kayak
- Any open rowing boat





# PREPARATION FOR A SAFE, FUN PADDLE TRIP

**Be Prepared** – ensure your craft is safe and appropriate for the waterway you plan to visit. You and your party members should have suitable paddling experience and safety skills. Beginners should be accompanied by a more experienced paddler. It is advisable to undertake a course with a recognised training organisations such as Canoeing Ireland, Rowing Ireland, Canoeing Association of Northern Ireland. Remember to take a map, mobile phone or VHF and first aid kit, and it may be useful to take a change of clothes, towel, dry bag to keep items dry and group shelter.

**Wear A Personal Flotation Device - Buoyancy Aid or Lifejacket** – always wear a suitable Personal Flotation Device when on or near the water. The Personal Flotation Device should be fitted with a whistle to attract attention, be in a Hi-Visibility colour and fitted with retro-reflective strips. It is important that the Personal Flotation Device is fitted correctly and straps adjusted to fit the individual wearer.

**Wear appropriate clothing**, e.g. a wetsuit. Be aware of the dangers of hypothermia when wet and exposed to the elements. If paddling where the risk of head injury exists a suitable helmet should always be worn.

**Check weather forecast** – Be aware of the forecasted weather conditions. The open waters of Upper and Lower Lough Erne, Lough Allen, Lough Ree and Lough Derg can be very challenging and paddlers should get training or choose a guided trip if they are not experienced open water paddlers. Be aware of flow conditions for river sections.

**Check route of trip** – Use a Waterways Ireland navigation guide to prepare the route of the trip, ensure suitable access and egress points are available. Ensure that the selected waterway is safe for use.

**Prohibited areas** - Unpowered craft are prohibited from the Headrace and Tailrace at the Ardnacrusha Power Station on the Shannon Navigation due to the high water velocity in the area. Unpowered craft are prohibited from the river area upstream of the Cutts Lock on the Lower Bann when the river is in flood.

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# SAFETY WHEN ON THE WATER



- 1. Keep in Contact** – it's always advisable to paddle with a group so you have assistance if needed. Don't forget to tell someone where you are going and how long you'll be away, this is essential where you are on an unaccompanied trip. Report any general observations which could assist in the management and maintenance of the canals to the local waterway office. If you encounter, or are involved in an emergency, call 999 / 112.
- 2. Launching and recovering** – Always ensure that the craft is launched and recovered in a safe and controlled manner. Slipways can become covered in moss and mud which makes the task more challenging. Care should be taken if reversing a vehicle down a slipway to launch / recover a craft.
- 3. Canal Waters** – be aware that canal depth can vary from water you can stand up in to very deep water. Changes in weather, boat movements and lock operations can also cause the water depth to change and create strong currents below the surface.
- 4. Take Care When Entering or Leaving the waterway** – use designated slipways and other suitable access and egress points.
- 5. Other waterways users** – be courteous to other waterways users. Keep the towpaths clear for walkers, cyclists and works access.
- 6. Encountering Powered craft** - Remain alert and give way to powered craft by moving to the starboard side (right-hand side) of the channel when you can be seen by the helmsman of the approaching powered craft. Hold position until the powered craft has passed by and be careful of the wash created by powered craft. A group of unpowered craft should avoid dispersing either side of an oncoming powered craft.
- 7. Be Vigilant** – weirs and sluices open and close routinely to regulate the flow of water through the waterways. Be aware that larger vessels may be gathered at bridges and locks.

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# SAFETY WHEN ON THE WATER

**8. Daylight** – Always ensure that you are off the water before sunset. It is unsafe to be on the water in darkness in an unpowered craft.

**9. Locks** – The following procedures apply to unpowered craft at locks on Waterways Ireland navigations:

**a. General rule** - Unpowered craft should normally portage around locks, except in certain circumstances where prior approval from Waterways Ireland has been granted.

**b. Risk Assessment** - The Waterways Ireland Lock-keeper/ water-patroller may give passage to unpowered craft through locks providing that the craft follows the hierarchy of controls in accordance with the risk assessment for the particular lock.

**c. Long Lining craft into locks** - The majority of locks passages for unpowered craft shall be made by portage. Where portage is not viable then the passage may be made by long lining the unpowered craft into the lock, the user then loops the lines over mooring bollards at the side of the lock thereby safely raising or lowering the craft as the lock fills or empties.

**d. Manned passage through locks** - Where there are permanent rescue ladders in a lock and the rate of flow is controlled and the competence of the users is assessed, a manned unpowered craft may be permitted passage through the lock by prior arrangement. In such circumstances the boat should be positioned so as to be visible to the lock-keeper at all times. Where groups of unpowered craft are in a lock together they should raft together to provide greater stability during the filling / emptying of the lock. The occupant(s) of the unpowered craft should follow the instructions of the lock operator.

**10. Canoeing Safety** - Shooting weirs is prohibited without prior permission of Waterways Ireland.



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# SAFETY WHEN ON THE WATER



## **Actions by Powered vessels in the vicinity of unpowered craft**

Powered vessels encountering unpowered craft on the waterways should do the following:

1. Keep to the starboard side of the channel and avoid sharp alternations of course.
2. Reduce speed in order to minimise the wake.
3. Remain vigilant and keep good lookout until well clear of the unpowered craft.
4. Powered craft should be particularly careful of approaching unpowered craft in the vicinity of locks / bridges / quay walls where there is a risk of crushing the unpowered craft.

## **Water-borne and land-borne diseases**

1. Waterborne diseases, including Weil's Disease (leptospirosis), are uncommon, but it's sensible to take a few precautions.
2. If you've got any cuts or scratches, keep them covered.
3. If you fall in, take a shower and treat cuts with antiseptic and a sterile dressing.
4. Wash wet clothing before you wear it again.
5. If you develop flu-like symptoms within two weeks, see your doctor and mention that you fell in the water. Not all doctors will know to look for signs of Weil's Disease, so do suggest it as a possibility.
6. Clean hands before handling foodstuffs (Antibacterial hand gel can be used).
7. Waterways Users should be aware of invasive species that can harm the waterways and should take necessary precautions to prevent their spread.

## **Consider others and enjoy the shared space**

1. Keep noise to a minimum and don't damage the banks of plants growing there.
2. Take home your litter and anything else you brought with you. Leave No Trace.
3. When passing anglers, unless they ask otherwise, follow a straight course in single file.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BLUEWAY PADDLING  
TRAILS ON WATERWAYS IRELAND'S NAVIGATIONS VISIT  
[WWW.BLUEWAYSIRELAND.ORG](http://WWW.BLUEWAYSIRELAND.ORG)

