

Gloucestershire & Herefordshire Branch

Welcome to the Severn Waterways!

This information sheet is produced by the Gloucestershire & Herefordshire branch of the IWA to help boaters new to the Severn below Upper Lode Lock and to the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. At the time of writing, the new Canal and Rivers Trust is taking control from British Waterways. There may therefore be changes to the information given below.

Bridge and lock opening hours

The following hours apply to both locks on the River Severn above Gloucester, and the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal. Check the notice boards or www.waterscape.com for exact dates.

Winter 0800 – 1600 (roughly, 22 October 2012 – late March 2013)

Spring / Autumn 0800 - 1800 (2012: 19 March – 20 May, 1 October – 21 October)

Summer: 0800 - 1900 (2012: 21 May – 30 September)

Note that the bridges at Llanthony and over Gloucester Lock shut during rush hours (08:20 - 09:00 and 16:30 - 17:30 on weekdays). Fretherne Bridge also closes 0820 - 0900 on weekdays during school terms.

No bridges or locks are user-operated. The table below indicates approximate air drafts for boats that will not require the structure opened. The bridges at High Orchard and Netheridge require 24 hours' notice to be opened and will only be operated outside "rush hour".

During the period roughly November – March, the canal is closed (other than to commercial traffic) on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Check the dates on www.waterscape.com. During this period on Thursdays - Mondays, many keepers will operate two or more structures. If no-one is available at a bridge, there is a contact telephone number posted in the windows of the keeper's hut. Operation of the Severn locks (other than Gloucester) requires 24 hours' notice during the winter periods.

The Severn

The river between Upper Lode and Gloucester can be hazardous due to the possibility of high water levels and tidal conditions and the final entry into Gloucester lock can be difficult.

Water levels on the river between Gloucester and Upper Lode lock, just below Tewkesbury, are controlled by weirs close to Gloucester. The river channel splits about 3 miles above Gloucester, the Eastern channel being navigable and the Western no longer so. There is a weir at Maisemore just below the upper parting on the Western channel, and one at Llanthony on the Eastern channel just below Gloucester lock.

Tides occur regularly on the river above Gloucester, generally at spring tides around times of full moon and new moon. If you are entering the river during tide times it is advisable to contact Gloucester Lock keeper on 01452 318032 who will advise on times and safety. The tide coming up from the estuary encounters a sudden narrowing of the river about ten miles below Gloucester, and this may cause a tidal-wave to rush up the river towards Gloucester - the "Severn Bore". The Bore may overtop the weirs causing an increase in water levels in the upper river. Boaters should beware of navigation on the river below Tewkesbury at these times, as levels of water can increase rapidly, high currents may be encountered, and high water levels will cause large increases in the amount of floating debris in the river. In particular, the rising tide rushes up the Western channel faster than the Eastern channel, and for a few minutes after it has overtopped the weir at Maisemore will flow back down the Eastern channel until the levels equalise. This is not a good time to be in the Eastern channel in a boat, as very strong currents and turbulence will be met.

The river Severn is also prone to flooding and water levels may rise rapidly with strong currents and debris.

The trip from Upper Lode to Gloucester can be readily completed in 3 hours (4 hours for the upstream trip). Take the opportunity to ask the lock-keeper at Tewkesbury about river conditions and any commercial traffic expected (see below). If in doubt, ring the lock on 01684 293138 or call on VHF channel 74, especially around spring tides to get advice on best departure times. Do not contemplate the trip without an adequate anchor with chain and rope, and a plan on how to deploy it. The anchor must be ready to use.

There are limited opportunities to stop below Upper Lode: the banks of the river are mostly gently sloping mud. The only water available between Tewkesbury and Gloucester is on the Lower Lode moorings.

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Moorings on the river are available at:

- Upper Lode Lock (above the lock).
- Lower Lode Hotel (BW moorings).
- Yew Tree Inn (pub moorings).
- The Coalhouse Inn at Apperley (pub mooring for one boat).
- Haw Bridge (BW plus pub moorings).
- The Boat at Ashleworth (pub moorings, fee for overnight).
- The White Horse in the Eastern Channel (formerly the Globe Inn, now a Chinese restaurant). (Moorings are currently in very poor condition and not recommended if a tide is running!)

All of the above are on the West bank, except the Coalhouse Inn and the White Horse. Note that the river close to the Red Lion on the east bank at Wainlodes Hill has underwater obstructions and there is no safe access.

The Eastern channel is just past an area of open meadow on the east bank. It is marked from a distance by a small factory chimney, and is clearly signposted. Before entering the Eastern channel it is essential to contact Gloucester Lock on VHF channel 74 or 01452 310832 : there may be large boats coming up the channel and passing room is limited.

Once in the Eastern Channel, beware of boats coming in the opposite direction. There is limited passing room, and some tight bends. This stretch of water is still used by commercial traffic, albeit at much lower levels than in years gone by.

The final approach to Gloucester is under three bridges and a series of sharp, blind bends. Gloucester lock is manned and the opening times vary with season. When nearing the lock, (e.g. at the first of the bridges, about ten minutes from the lock) give the keeper a second call to ask him to set it for you.

On rounding the final bend towards Gloucester lock, drop speed and keep to the left (East) bank. The previously tree-lined left bank becomes a tall, concrete quay. The final hundred metres or so before the lock has chains and vertical lines let into grooves in the concrete for mooring. If the lock is not ready, do not try to turn the boat upstream. Have the stern line available, and keeping as close to the quay wall as possible bring the boat to a halt with reverse gear. Slip the stern line around one of the mooring chains as far back from the lock as possible and fix it to a stern stud, then allow the boat to drop back onto the line.

Just in front of the lock, the river sweeps sharply to the right and will take the bows of the boat around very rapidly if there is any current flowing. Aim for the left hand wall. Be prepared to enter the lock a bit faster than normal: there is plenty of room inside to stop. In most years boats have to be recovered from below the lock: the channel below the lock is very narrow, rubbish-strewn and fast-flowing, and leads quickly to the weir.

There are vertical mooring straps set into the lock side, or the lock-keeper may lower a hook to take bow and stern lines around a bollard. As the lock is very deep, lines of at least 10 m, preferably 15 m, are needed. The lock is quite turbulent when filling, so keep as far back from the front gates as possible (avoiding the bridge at the tail of the lock!).

The Gloucester and Sharpness Canal

Moorings

Most visitor moorings on the canal are 48 h (five days in parts of Glos. Docks in the Winter months, 6 h between Sandfield and Junction Bridges). In most places there is at least 1 m of water at the bank. It is possible to moor just about anywhere safely on the towpath side except:

- Between any traffic lights and the bridge controlling them
- Approximately 100m North and South of Patch Bridge
- Between the Upper and Lower Purton Bridges
- Between Purton Lower Bridge and the former dredger station beyond the cottages
- Beyond Sharpness High-level bridge
- Just below Fretherne Bridge

Gloucester Docks moorings are: on the West side between the pumping station by the dry dock and the lock; on the North Quay; on the East side as far down as the National Waterways Museum, and in the Barge Arm

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(just before the Waterways Museum). Visitor mooring is not permitted in the Victoria Arm and Basin near Merchant's Quay. There is a disabled mooring in the Barge Arm and several moorings with electricity points on the West side (payment by card from the BW office or Llanthony bridge keeper). Beyond Llanthony Bridge are pontoon moorings on both sides, and bankside beyond High Orchard Bridge near Sainsburys (some restricted to 4 h).

Speed Limit: 6 mph throughout the canal subject to no breaking wash.

Traffic Lights

Movements through all bridges and locks are controlled by traffic lights which must be obeyed. Red means "stop"; flashing red is used to indicate that the bridge-keeper knows you are there and needs you to wait; green means "go". If no light is showing, the bridge is un-manned, proceed with caution (air draft permitting!)

Bridges, Locks and Useful Telephone Numbers	Air draft	Tel.
BW main office, Gloucester (E of North Warehouse)		01452 318000
Gloucester Lock	4.4. m	01452 310832
Llanthony Bridge	1.6 m	01452 312143
High Orchard Bridge – open by arrangement only with Glos Lock. Keep to the centre channel	5.6 m	01452 310832
Hempstead Bridge	1.4 m	01452 521880
Netheridge Bridge – open by arrangement only with Glos Lock.	4.5 m	01452 310832
Sims Bridge	3.0 m	01452 501994
Rea Bridge	2.3 m	01452 723638
Sellars Bridge	2.7 m	01452 720251
Parkend Bridge	0.9 m	01452 720016
Junction Bridge	0.9 m	01452 740444
Sandfield Bridge	0.8 m	01452 740565
Fretherne Bridge	0.5 m	01452 740582
Splatt Bridge	0.9 m	01452 740578
Cambridge Arm Bridge	0.8 m	01453 890272
Patch Bridge	0.6 m	01453 890324
Purton Bridges (Upper and Lower)	1.3 and 1.0 m	01453 890324
Sharpness High Bridge and Sharpness Low Bridge	5.1 and 1.4 m	
Sharpness Pierhead		01453 511968
BW Sharpness Office (for Sharpness High and Low Level Bridges)		01453 811862

VHF Radio

VHF Radio is used by many boats and bridges on the Gloucester-Sharpness canal, and by the lock-keepers on the River Severn. Channel 74 is used for boat - bridge and boat - lock traffic. The normal channels should be used for boat - boat traffic. If you do not receive a reply to a call, remember that the bridge- or lock-keeper may be busy.

The following points on the canal maintain a watch on 74:

Gloucester Lock; Llanthony Lift Bridge; Junction Bridge; Purton Bridge

Sharpness Docks listen on VHF 13

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Slipways and launching places

The only slipway is in Saul Marina - 01452 740043

Water points and Sani Stations

Water points are listed below, with sani-stations indicated where appropriate

- Gloucester Docks: in the Barge Arm
- Llanthony Pontoon (immediately below the lift bridge): water, toilet, Elsan disposal, bins and self-service pumpout (prepayment cards £10.00 from the bridgekeeper, the BW office and Gloucester Lock)
- Sellars Bridge: close to the bridge.
- Saul Junction: sani-station with self-service pumpout, Elsan disposal, showers, washing machine, water point, toilets, bins: between Junction Bridge and Sandfield Bridge. Pumpout tickets from the bridge-keepers and the Heritage Centre (open weekends and bank holidays) (£10.00).
- Fretherne Bridge: in the off-side car park
- Splatt Bridge: on the long-term moorings. Bins by the bridge.
- Patch Bridge: two water points on the visitor moorings, bins by the bridge.
- Between Purton and Sharpness: self-service pump-out and water point (no Elsan).

Fuel, Chandlers and Boatyards

- R&B Canal Art, in “Upstairs Downstairs” antiques centre across the road from Gloucester Lock – coal and small chandlery
- A&D Marine: below Hempstead Bridge. Dry dock and chandlery.
- Saul Marina: turn into the Stroudwater Arm below Junction Bridge. Note: no left turn into the Arm for boats travelling south. Wind if necessary below the bridge. Diesel, pump-out and small chandlery.
- R W Davies: near Junction Bridge: dry dock, crane-out, boat builders, engines, moorings.
- AP Fuels: between Sandfield and Fretherne Bridges. Diesel, coal, oil, gas sales.
- Slimbridge Boat Station (a.k.a. The Black Shed): above Patch Bridge. Very small chandlery, boat fitting-out and sales, moorings, provisions, café, bar, day boat hire and cycle hire. Recent additions include diesel, pump-out and Elsan disposal.
- Sharpness Marine: at the end of the old dock arm. Chandlery, repairs, moorings.

Launderettes

- The Laundry Centre, 104 Westgate St: walk towards the cathedral and turn left into Westgate St; the laundrette is on the right hand side. Open 0800 - 1800 every day.
- Soap and Suds: Eastgate Street near the GL1 leisure centre.

The Estuary

This guide does not extend to the estuary below Sharpness. Gloucester Harbour Trustees has a useful guide for small craft on its web site at www.gloucesterharbourtrustees.org.uk Advice on accessing Bristol Harbour is linked from www.bristol.gov.uk Use of a pilot is strongly recommended for the passage to Bristol (usually done with an intermediate stop at Portishead Marina). Access can also be had to Lydney Docks (Environment Agency controlled) which is a nice, short trip under good conditions. Passages through Sharpness lock must be booked in advance via the Sharpness Pier Head on 01453 511968. Please leave a message on this number and your call will be returned.

This information was believed correct at the time of print April 2012 – Published by the IWA with help from BW.

For information on the Gloucestershire & Herefordshire IWA Branch, please contact us via: gloucandhereford@waterways.org.uk or via the local pages on www.waterways.org.uk. We organise regular social meetings throughout the winter months.