

Waterways

The branch covers the River Nene below Thrapston (above this point is covered by the IWA Northampton Branch) the Middle Level Waterways, Forty-Foot Drain (Horseways to Welches Dam) and the Old Bedford River.

The River Nene

The River Nene links the waterways of the fens (the Middle Levels, the Cam, the Great Ouse and its tributaries) to the national waterways network through the Grand Union Canal Northampton Branch that joins the Nene just above Northampton Bridge. One of the best-known features of the river are the guillotine gates at the bottom end of the locks. These are now being reduced in number as the Environment Agency has replaced some with conventional mitre door lock gates. The river is mainly rural in character as it progresses through 37 locks taking the boater from the Midlands plateau down to sea level. Although facilities on the river have improved in the last few years, with new moorings and an increased number of electrically operated guillotine gates, the river is still less well served than the Great Ouse or most canals.

Right: Lower Barnwell Lock on the River Nene. One of the locks with an electrically operated guillotine gate.



Lock Sizes and maximum craft dimensions: Length 78 foot, beam 14 foot. Note - Irthlingborough Bridge restricts the maximum beam of craft navigating the Nene to 13 foot.

See also the [Table of Locks and distances](#).

The Middle Levels

This is the collective name for a network of waterways between the River Nene and the Great Ouse. The Middle Levels are a mixture of natural rivers, streams and artificial cuts. These were built to drain the land but have also been used for navigation for over two hundred years. The drainage of the area has caused the land to sink and much is now below sea level so that many pumping stations are necessary to maintain drainage. The area includes the lowest point in the UK, which is near Holme.

The Middle Level Commissioners are the navigation authority. They for historical reasons have no powers to charge for navigation.

To encourage further cruising on the Middle Level system as a whole the Peterborough Branch runs a **scheme to award a cruising plaque**. Those navigating the Middle Level and obtaining proof of cruising to all four of Holme, Nordelph, Ramsey and Stonea can, on submission of that evidence and payment of £5 plus £2 postage and package purchase the basic round plaque. Those navigating through Horseway lock and Welches Dam lock into the Old Bedford and obtaining and submitting proof can claim the separate bar on payment of £2 plus £1 postage and package. Both items are made of brass: the main plaque is 4 inches in diameter. Each item can be bought separate from the other. [Note: at present as Welches Dam lock has been closed by the Environment Agency the separate bar is not currently available]

Application for a plaque [and/or bar] together with proof of navigation and an appropriate remittance should be sent to John Shotbolt at Bill Fen Marina, Mill Drove, RAMSEY, Cambridgeshire. PE26 2RD.

See also the Middle Level Through Route [Table of Locks and distances](#).

The most used part of the Middle Levels is the through route from the Nene at Stanground, Peterborough, to the Great Ouse at Salters Lode. The route consists of several different waterways and many junctions and is well signposted for the visiting boater.

