

# A SKIPPER'S GUIDE to the YORKSHIRE and TRENT COMMERCIAL NAVIGATIONS



Aggregate barge on the ACN in Knottingley - painting by Stuart Sampson

This is mainly for pleasure boat skippers unaccustomed to rivers, tides and waterways carrying freight.

The advice is given in good faith and **no liability can be accepted for any consequences of its use.**

It cannot be comprehensive in a booklet of this size so you should gather as much information as you can from other sources including CRT's Boater's Handbook, charts, tide tables, experienced personnel and other publications.

Original content courtesy of First Mate Guides, NABO and the barge operators, updated by Stuart Sampson in 2021 with information kindly supplied by IWA, CBOA and CRT, and endorsed by HNBC, NABO and BMIB.

## BOATING SAFELY WITH THE BIG BOYS



Canal &  
River  
Trust



Inland  
Waterways  
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Commercial  
Boat  
Operators  
Association



British  
Marine  
Inland  
Boating



National  
Association  
of Boat  
Owners



Historic  
Narrow  
Boat  
Club

## IN EMERGENCY

If life is at risk dial 999 and request the emergency services or the Coastguard.

Otherwise ring CRT on 0800 4799947

or, in office hours, CRT on 0303 040 4040

email for non-emergency use only:

[enquiries.eastmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.eastmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

[enquiries.yorkshirenortheast@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.yorkshirenortheast@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

## PREPARATION

If you are intending to use the tidal Ouse or Trent it is a legal requirement to be insured for 'tidal access' and have Marine band VHF and full navigation lights, as well as normal river safety gear, anchor, life-buoy, life-jackets etc. and a light to see by is essential if moving after dark. A minimum of port and starboard lights should be fitted if navigating commercial waterways.

If on flowing water make sure your anchor is accessible and attached to your boat. Using heavy chain helps the anchor grip. Additional rope, preferably nylon which is springy and sinks, can be added between boat and chain to bring the length up to the recommended five times the depth. Attach it where your boat can stand the backwards and downwards pull when the anchor bites. If your lifebuoy has a lifeline, ensure that is attached too.

Check your fuel supply, engine, propeller and steering gear for anything that might cause you to lose power or control during a continuous run of up to nine hours at high throttle if on the Trent tideway.

## CHARTS

The Boating Association's "Sissons Charts", essential guide to the tideways, can be obtained from the locks adjoining the river.

Note that the red lines on these charts only show the line of deepest water and barges in particular need to follow it more closely than you do.

## BOOKING and MAKING PASSAGE

Locks on the canal navigations are mainly user operated unless a commercial vessel is due in which case a mobile lock keeper will be present.

Lock-keepers on tidal access locks need to be warned at least 48 hours in advance. They can then give advice on departure times to suit the tides, conditions and your destination.

Once you are penned out onto the river they inform their colleagues at locks on your route by phone or VHF Ch. 74 when to look out for you. This communication is maintained along the whole river so your whereabouts is known.

If you change your plans you must let them know.

You can break your journey on the Trent tideway at pontoon moorings in Torksey Cut or south of Dunham Bridge. Notify lock-keepers of this intention too.

## SHIPPING

Aggregate traffic towards Leeds is being revived, from the North Sea via Goole and from other quarry wharves. Petroleum products are shipped up the SSYN for Rotherham and anywhere you might meet a barge carrying an Abnormal Indivisible Load. Barges may be up to 200 ft by 20 ft, carrying up to 600 tonnes - i.e. BIG.

Around Keadby you may meet coasters - even bigger.

Despite their size, barges may well travel faster than you, so keep a good lookout behind. Make positive and decisive course changes to avoid them and to show you have seen them. Remember your sound signals.

1.  2..  3...  4 gap 1.  4 gap 2.. 

**Prolonged blast:** “Warning - I’m here/coming”

Skippers of commercial vessels have a living to earn, but many boat for pleasure too.

Remember they have to treat you as you would treat a fragile dinghy, so assume they can't see you or avoid you, and give them the deep water, and plenty of room to swing. Empty barges are badly affected by cross-winds, and can't see ahead so well.

Don't try to 'nip past' a barge. A boat can become trapped in the water level depression beside a moving barge and only escape by stemming up against the bank, or turning and taking on its stern wave using full power. Both actions are very risky in confined waters.

## LANDING

If you can see a barge about to emerge from a lock, or the lock is emptying and a red light shows, hang back so both you and the barge have steerage-way when you pass. If you must land a crew, tie up securely as far from the lock as you can so the barge has room to counter the effects of cross-winds, currents etc. before passing you. A side-swipe from an overhanging barge stern would do your boat no good.

Never try to hold your boat or moor it on a handling line when a barge passes. You may be safer staying at the helm and letting your boat ride the wash.

## MARINE BAND RADIO Channels

On CRT waterways keep a listening watch on Channel 74 for messages between barges and locks. You may be asked to switch to Channel 6 to free up 74. Some barges give helpful position reports when approaching hazards and warn each other about pleasure craft. You can benefit from these messages too if you know the call signs and the names of locations along the route. Listen for lock names. If followed by '-mobile' the keeper is at his designated lock, a lock nearby, or travelling in his van.

Don't expect strict radio discipline, and familiarity with Yorkshire dialect helps. Don't be afraid to announce your own position, and share what you glean about barge movements with boats without radio.

For Associated British Ports, channel 15 is used. See the Trent map

## LOCKS

It is essential to obey the traffic lights: the lock-keeper will only display a red light with the gates open for a good reason, for instance a barge is coming through.

**Red flashing** = River in flood. Tie up. No keeper.

**Red** = Wait. Keeper maintaining or working the lock.

**Red+Green** = Wait, keeper preparing lock for you.

**Green** = Enter with care. Keeper to operate

**Amber** = Land a crew to operate. No keeper

Seek lock-keeper's advice if you have any doubts about river conditions. Portage unpowered craft round lock.

## WASH and WAVES

Large and fast vessels can cause considerable disturbance, that from big cruisers can be particularly uncomfortable. Few skippers look back to see how their wash affects smaller and moored craft. Take waves head-on if you can. Winds can also make long reaches too rough for inland vessels, await calmer weather. Even then, keep front doors closed and ensure anyone on open deck has good reason to be there, is holding on and wearing a life jacket.

Don't venture out on spring tides if there is any likelihood of meeting a tidal wave, the Aegir.



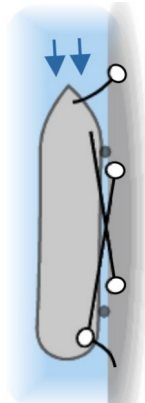
Don't forget the other kind of wave - that used by skippers, both pleasure and commercial to greet each other.

## MOORING

If not properly tied up, boats can be dragged off moorings, or heeled over to the point of sinking by the displacement current of barges. On rivers moor up facing the flow. Narrow-boats can often use the inside of pontoons leaving more space for others.

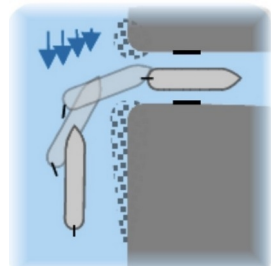
Ensure you have ropes to resist fore and aft movement (springs) and keep all lines as near level as you can and securely tied to cleats, bollards or rings - **not mooring pins**. The pull on steep ropes, e.g from roof cleat, can cause severe tipping. Allow slack for level change.

Use big fenders and place them so they will not get caught under anything - boats and pontoons do not always move together in choppy water.



## ENTERING TIDEWAY LOCKS

Keadby, West Stockwith and Selby locks may have to be entered when there is a current flowing across their mouths. To enter without making contact with the side walls, approach slowly against the flow with your boat about half its length away from the bank, and parallel to it. When you are about half a boat's length from the entrance apply throttle and rudder to steer into the lock, tie up and then acknowledge the applause from the bystanders. Longer narrowboats need full power



## OUSE AND TRENT TIDES

Twice a day a tidal surge comes up both rivers at around 11 m.p.h.: i.e. eleven miles further up the river it arrives one hour later. The surge is a level rise followed by up to 3 hours of upstream flow at Keadby, the 'flood', which diminishes in strength and duration as it goes up river, usually losing its battle against the natural river flow before reaching the weirs at Cromwell and Naburn. This explains why the end of the upstream journey on the tideway can be so tedious.

The assistance you get going with the flood tide will be greatest on spring tides, but even then it can be disappointing if there is a large amount of "fresh" coming downstream.

Time your journeys north, i.e. downstream, to avoid fighting the flood by mooring at Torksey or Dunham as it passes.

## VIGILANCE POINTS

Question - Where are you most likely, and least wanting, to meet a freight barge on these waterways? They may appear suddenly at bends, narrows or junctions, or be encountered broadside across the navigation, possibly even aground both ends. We have tried to identify points where this is most likely and mark them on the sketch maps in red triangles if the risk is current, or yellow if in the more distant future. (Think railway signals)

These also include wharves, where, even though barges might be tied up, they might be running their



propellers to tension their lines creating a swirl that can send you off course.

## VESSEL NAMES YOU MAY HEAR ON VHF

Tugs:

Robin Hood, Arthur-a-Bland, Little Shuva, Kirkby

Work Boats:

MCB13, Pride of Collingham, Calder, Hood, Hiddekel, Grampus, Grebe, Exeter

Tanker:

Exol Pride,

Dry Cargo Barges:

Battle Stone\*, Farndale H, Fossdale H\*, Fusedale H, George Dyson\*, Humber Princess\*, Cawood

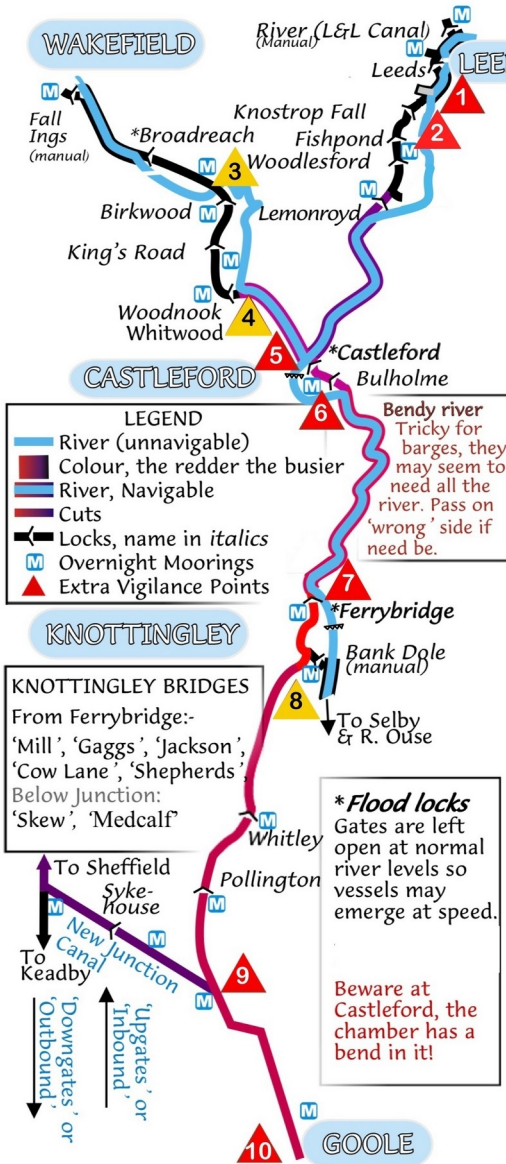
Note - \* marks vessels in preparation in 2022

Also note - barges often omit the 'H' or 'Humber' from their name on the radio.

## STRONG STREAM INDICATORS

The following maps show with [blue](#) the course of river stretches, where flow can increase dangerously, and canal sections where you will be safe. If in doubt and no flashing red, check the level indicators set into the entrance walls of river locks before entering a river stretch. Levels in the red may not seem to present headroom risk but the real danger lies in the strong currents that accompany them. The relationship between current and level depends on weir lengths and whether sluices are open. Put your trust in whoever calibrated them and stay put.

# AIRE & CALDER NAVIGATION



## Extra Vigilance points

Keep a special look-out for barges on the cut through Knottingley, (Ferrybridge to Kellingley), and at these locations marked on the map:-

- 1 Knostrop wharf
- 2 Knostrop Lock to M1 Bridge  
Bendy, narrow, moorings, wharf & rowers
- 3 Birkwood Quarry Wharf
- 4 Whitwood Aggregate  
Staithe and blind bridge (Stephenson's). Barges need middle arch
- 5 Castleford junction
- 6 Castleford Cut
- 7 Ferrybridge Flood Lock
- 8 Kellingley Konect (formerly Coal Staithes)
- 9 'Went End' or New Cut Jctn
- 10 Goole - sand wharf and general barge mayhem!

 **Current hazard**

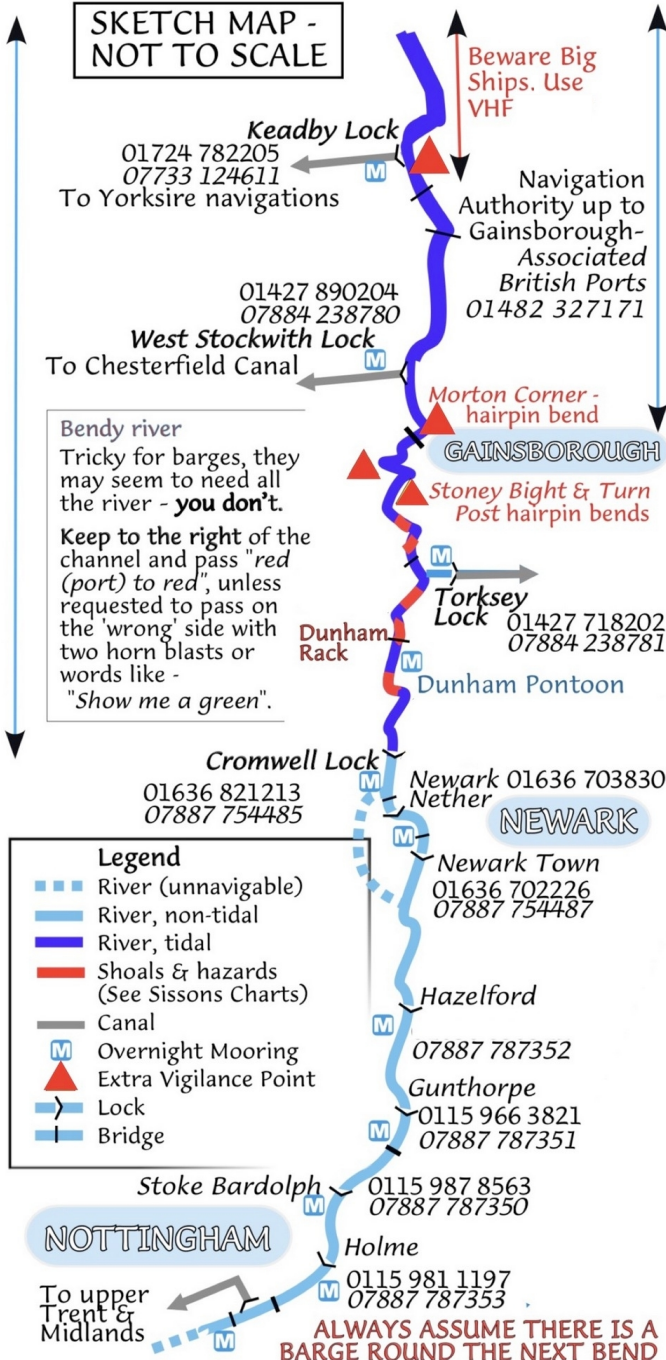
 **Future potential hazard**

## Surges

When lock-keepers pen barges through quickly, tell-tale surges are produced. Barges also send fast moving low waves both ways when they pass through bridges. Both can make moored craft restless 10 minutes or more away, but are more difficult to detect from a moving boat. If you know the feel of your vessel these surges can give you useful warning.

# RIVER TRENT

SKETCH MAP - NOT TO SCALE



VHF Ch 15

On ABP waters it is a legal requirement to keep a listening watch on Channel 15

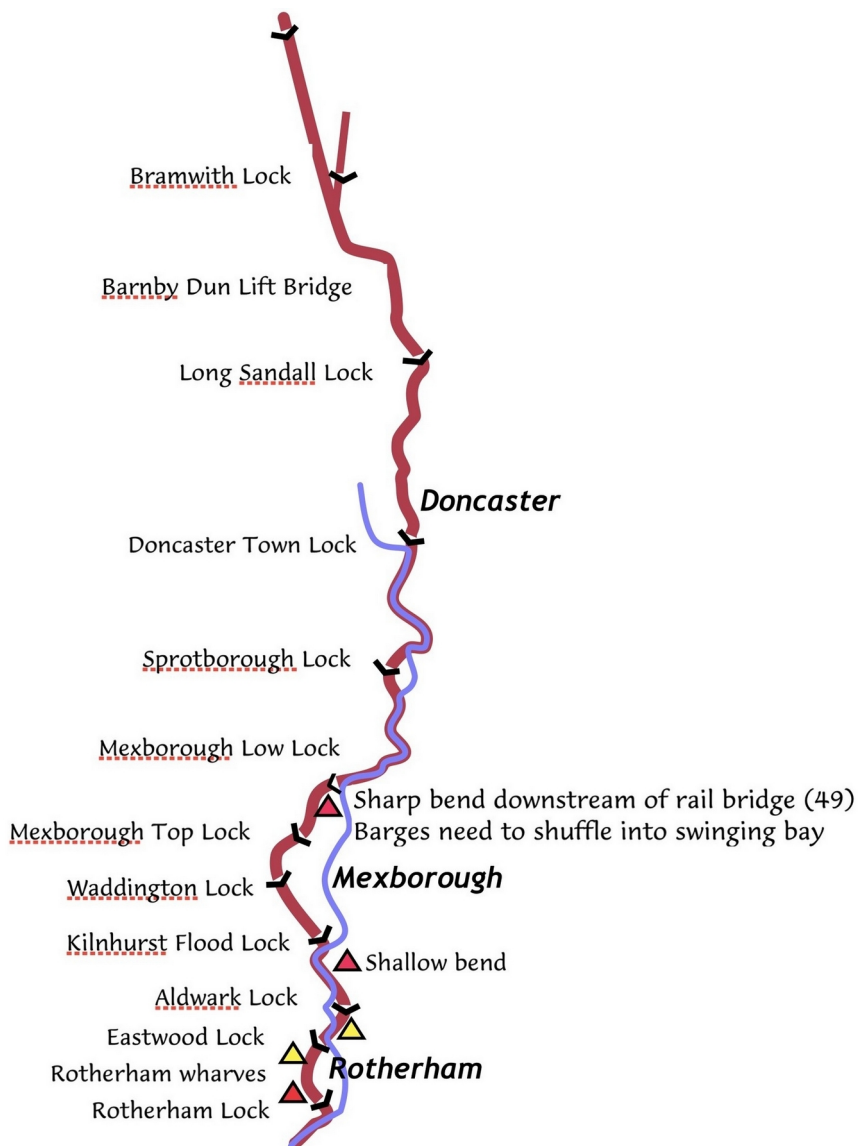
Bendy river  
Tricky for barges, they may seem to need all the river - **you don't**.  
Keep to the right of the channel and pass "red (port) to red", unless requested to pass on the 'wrong' side with two horn blasts or words like - "Show me a green".

**Beware** central shoal north of bridge at **Dunham Rack**. Use eastern bridge arch.

**Extra Vigilance** ▲  
Keep a special look-out for barges at wharves and hazards marked by triangles on the map.

**ALWAYS ASSUME THERE IS A BARGE ROUND THE NEXT BEND**

# SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE



This guide can be downloaded at  
<http://www.cboa.org.uk/downloads/010222-skippers-guide.pdf>

Latest updates are available at  
<http://www.cboa.org.uk/sgupdate.html>

