

RIVER IVEL

The River

The source of the River Ivel is at Ivel Springs in North Hertfordshire, on the outskirts of Baldock. The River Ivel flows in a generally north direction for 20 miles/ 32km past Biggleswade and Sandy before joining the River Great Ouse at Tempsford, 6 miles / 10km east of Bedford.

History

The River Ivel was made navigable between Tempsford and Biggleswade in 1758. Goods such as timber and coal were shipped from Newcastle to King's Lynn where they were transferred onto barges or 'lighters'. The lighters were then drawn by horses along the River Great Ouse and the River Ivel, with the goods being delivered to the many wharves on the way. The lighters returned to King's Lynn with flour, grain and vegetables. In 1823 the Navigation was extended from Biggleswade to Shefford.

Many new structures were required along the river, including locks, tow paths, wharves and bridges. Where water mills obstructed the passage of the lighters, as at Blunham and Holme, by-pass channels were dug and bridges constructed.

Until the 1850's business on the Navigation thrived as the primary means of transporting goods to and from the Ivel valley.

But trade rapidly declined after the arrival of the railway and in 1876, the Navigation was closed by the 'Ivel Navigation Abandonment Act', with debts of £14,350.

Natural History

The Ivel has a rich and diverse flora and fauna and is home to many endangered species, including the Water Vole , Otter, water shrew and white clawed crayfish.

Canoe and Kayak

The 7 miles from Biggleswade to Tempsford offers the canoeist a very pleasant and varied entirely rural paddle on a clean unpolluted stream with enough flow to create small and simple rapids. The course is obstructed by several weirs which are quite easily negotiated.

Access & Egress

The best launch point is in Biggleswade from the small park in Mill Lane, just below the Mill shoot. (Map Landranger 153: 186445.

Egress may be made at Sandy (onto the A1 slip road to Shefford 162490, on the old ford at Tempsford (Church End) - below the weir 155530 or at the Anchor Inn, Tempsford on the Northbound A1 at 161540. If you use the pub landing, then ask permission AND buy a drink or two!

Access Agreement

The Ivel is extensively fished and no formal access agreement exists. Avoid paddling at

weekends (particularly Sundays) during the coarse fishing season as fishermen use the places that you will want to use to portage. Please be polite and respectful and report any problems or encounters that you may have to David Savage BCU Regional Access Officer.....: squeezer@ntlworld.com

PADDLERS GUIDE

Please note: Descriptions of weirs and hazards are as the author found them at a medium water levels. Conditions on a weir can change dramatically with a small change in river level and careful inspection and experienced judgement is vital. ALL weirs can become dangerous under the 'wrong' conditions!!



0 Km (186445) At the small park beside the river in Bigglewade, park in the small car park on the main road rather than block the lane, carry your canoe or kayak across the grass (don't drag it), launch and enjoy 5Km of gentle flow with clear water, lots of wildlife and good views.

5km Weir (175486). This is a simple gentle slope that may be portaged on the left if required.



6.8Km Egress to A603 (162490)

8Km Weir (154503) A modern structure with long sidewalls, a straight drop and a deep recirculating stopper. If attempted it will be vital to hit it fast to clear the tow.



Portage left

8.2Km Weir A small gentle slope –sidewall stains suggest that a stopper may form at high water levels. May be portaged left.



8.9Km (156518) Take the Right hand fork (left leads to some very posh Mill houses who may not like you paddling through their garden!), enjoy a mini rapid and a very small straightforward shoot over a small (15cm) drop. Portage will be difficult.

If you take the Left fork, you'll come down to this shoot which runs through a private garden - best avoided!



9.5Km (158530) Sluice with weirs. Portage to the right of the sluice gate on the left hand bank and relaunch at an old ford on the side (mill) stream. The weir at the mill (private) has a single fairly wide step which could be difficult and which is followed by a fast narrow shoot through the old mill sluice.



Egress can be made onto the lane (use the metal angler's stile) onto Mill Lane by paddling across the old ford to the opposite bank.

OR

10.8Km Paddle on to join the R.Ouse below Tempsford lock and weir and get out at the Anchor Inn (RH bank) (161540) If you use the pub, then PLEASE don't drag you boat - carry it - and don't strip off and make an exhibition of yourself in the car park.... and do buy a meal / drink.... but DO NOT eat your sandwiches on the pub premises or in the pub grounds.