



# *MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION NOTES*

**Middle Level Commissioners  
Middle Level Offices  
85 Whittlesey Road  
MARCH  
Cambs.  
PE15 0AH**

**Tel. No. (01354) 653232  
Fax. No. (01354) 659619**

**Email : [engineers@middlelevel.gov.uk](mailto:engineers@middlelevel.gov.uk)  
Website : [www.middlelevel.gov.uk](http://www.middlelevel.gov.uk)**

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBILITY

- ❖ When navigating on a river, people must accept they are dealing with flowing water.
- ❖ Boaters must be self-reliant and responsible for their own safety.
- ❖ The decision to navigate must be taken by the boat skipper.
- ❖ It is the responsibility of the boat skipper to be properly equipped for the type of boating undertaken.
- ❖ When there are strong currents, higher water levels or cold weather conditions, the risk associated with any river activity increases.
- ❖ Be courteous and always navigate with care and avoid speeding.
- ❖ Do not take risks and never underestimate the power of the water.

1. The network of fenland waterways, which provide arterial drainage and flood protection to 700sq.km. of highly productive fen farmland and a large number of commercial and domestic properties and constitutes a navigable system between the rivers Great Ouse and Nene (see map on pages 6/7), is maintained by the Middle Level Commissioners.

The cost of the continual maintenance of the channels is met primarily out of drainage rates and special levies. No charges are levied on pleasure boats at present. The name of each boat should, nonetheless, be clearly shown and visitors are required to register with the lock-keepers at Stanground or Salters Lode, when entering the system. The majority of boat-owners entering the Middle Level do so to gain access between its neighbouring major river systems. To avoid shallows or low bridges, the Commissioners request the co-operation of those persons navigating through the system by adhering to the recommended 'Link-Route' indicated on the map.

2. A maximum speed limit of 5mph is operated throughout the system with the exceptions of King's Dyke (Stanground Lock to Ashline Lock), Whittlesey Dyke (Ashline Lock to Turningtree Bridge) and Well Creek (Marmont Priory Lock to Salters Lode Lock), where the maximum speed limit is 4mph. A copy of the leaflet produced by the Commissioners on speed limits is available either from the Middle Level offices or on [www.middlelevel.gov.uk/about.aspx](http://www.middlelevel.gov.uk/about.aspx) /navigation/navigation notes.

**Speed must be further reduced in the interests of safety, to avoid wash, when passing through areas of riverside development, congested areas or by moored boats.**

3. The Middle Level Byelaws require that:
  - a) no refuse shall be thrown overboard into the river or deposited on the adjacent banks
  - b) boats shall be properly moored and secured so as not to impede or endanger the passage of other craft (mooring two or more abreast is forbidden)
  - c) sunken boats must be removed by the owner failing which the Commissioners may do so at the owner's expense
  - d) moorings are not constructed on any Middle Level watercourse without the Commissioners' prior approval and written consent
  - e) digging into the banks of a Middle Level watercourse is prohibited
  - f) craft shall meet the requirements of the Boat Safety Scheme

Boat movements during the hours of darkness are prohibited.

4. Excepting for public highways and any public open spaces, **ALL** lands adjoining Middle Level river banks are private property, and the normal laws of trespass apply to such property. There are public rights of way along some banks. **In particular, it must be noted that apart from designated public moorings, mooring is not allowed without the permission of the owner of the mooring rights. In most cases, this will be the Commissioners. It is the responsibility of boat users to ensure that they have the right to moor at any location.**
5. The Middle Level waters contain a valuable coarse fishery, which is intensively used between mid-June and mid-March. Boat users are requested to afford the usual courtesy to anglers, who will be encountered in greatest numbers on Saturdays and Sundays during the fishing season.

6. Aquatic weeds occur throughout most of the system during the summer period and ropes may be placed (floated) across the rivers to collect cut weeds. If these are encountered, they **must** be removed before passing and **carefully and securely replaced** afterwards.

The banks of certain watercourses are subject to erosion. Piles and other revetment works are installed to provide support and protection. These and shallows elsewhere may make navigation difficult. Care should, therefore, be taken when approaching or travelling close to the river edges to avoid any submerged hazards.

7. Boat users are advised to avoid the Main Drain, which is navigable only as far as the Well Creek Aqueduct at Mullicourt Priory, and Old Pophams Eau, which is a dead-end spur north of Three Holes Bridge, as conditions there can be hazardous due to sudden pumping or sluicing operations. **Navigation of Great Raveley Drain and Monks Lode ends at the Control Sluice and Conington Fen Bridge respectively.**
8. **Rainfall (flood events), pumping, water transfer in summer and wind can affect water levels.** They can thus also affect depth of water and headroom and special care/allowance should be taken when making passages with craft requiring maximum headroom, draught or length (for turning).
9. For minimum headrooms under low bridges see pages 8 and 9.

**Adequate clearance should be checked before passing under all bridges. It is the navigator's responsibility to ensure that such clearance is available.**

**A number of both publicly and privately maintained structures affect or cross the Middle Level navigations. It is the responsibility of boat users to take all reasonable steps to ensure that their vessel can safely navigate around or through such structures and to assess any risks involved before doing so. The Commissioners should be informed of any structures which appear to present a hazard to navigation.**

10. Lodes End Lock is unattended. It will accommodate boats up to 20.70m (68'-0") long.

**Boats in the lock must be kept clear of the low-side penstock access walkway to avoid entrapment when the water level is raised.**

It is necessary to open the security fence gate to navigate the lock. (see Note 15 - Keys)

Before leaving the lock please ensure that the penning sluices are fully closed, the security fence gate is locked and the chain between the large V-doors is in place. The chain must be secured by the large end link to the spring loaded catch in the other door and left loose (not wrapped round the door posts) so that the doors can open the full length of the chain to permit gravity drainage when conditions allow.

11. The turning area at Ramsey will normally accommodate boats up to 18.30m (60'-0") long. (see Note 8).

12. During the winter period and when conditions allow, ice-skating on Well Creek is a traditional local sport, which attracts many people to the area. Disturbance of the ice, while it is forming, results in an uneven surface unsuitable for skating. Boat movements at these times are, therefore, frowned upon locally and should be avoided.
13. Dimensions of locks and structures on the 'Link-Route' are described in the following 'Recommended Link Route between Rivers Nene and Great Ouse'.

Stanground Lock is closed on Christmas Day and Tuesdays during November, December, January, February and for the first week of March and after 1500hrs on Sundays. Salter's Lode Lock is closed on Christmas Day and Wednesdays during November, December, January, February and for the first week of March. Marmont Priory Lock will be closed on Christmas Day. Locking at other times by prior appointment with the Lock Keepers.

An 'Ouse Key'/Lock Handle/Windlass (see Note 15 - Keys) is required to operate the penstocks/paddles/slackers at Ashline, Marmont Priory (if the lock-keeper is not available), Lodes End and Horseway locks.

14. Pump-out and chemical toilet emptying facilities are maintained by Fenland District Council at the March Sanitation Station, which is situated on the site of the old quay adjacent to the Town Bridge. The station is secured (see Note 15 - Keys). Any malfunction should be notified to the Council by phoning 01354-654321.

Polluting matter must not be discharged into the waterways from any vessels or sanitary appliance thereon.

15. Keys:

A key, which will give access to both the March Sanitation Station and Lodes End Lock Security Compound, can be purchased (price £2.00) at:

- a) Stanground Lock
- b) Salters Lode Lock
- c) Marmont Priory Lock
- d) Middle Level Offices, Dartford Road, March
- e) Fox Narrow Boats Ltd - Boat Builders & Hirers, 10 Marina Drive, March (Marina off Old River Nene) Tel: 01354 652770.
- f) Bill Fen Marina, Mill Drove, Ramsey, Huntingdon (Marina off Ramsey High Lode) Tel: 01487 813621.
- g) Floods Ferry Marina Park, Staffurths Bridge, March, (Marina on Old River Nene) Tel: 01354 677302.

An 'Ouse Key'/Lock Handle/Windlass can usually be purchased at the locks and marinas.

16. It is the Commissioners' policy that any stoppage to navigation, to accommodate routine planned work, to one of their waterways, locks or structures, should generally be no longer than four weeks and restricted to November to mid-March (excluding Christmas/New Year) period. Emergency or other work that needs to be carried out during low flows or cannot be completed in that time span, would be the exception.
17. Ladders and chains are provided to assist boaters when passing through locks. Their use, together with any other directions that may be signed, is recommended.

# RECOMMENDED LINK ROUTE BETWEEN RIVERS NENE AND GREAT OUSE

45.8 km (28.5 miles)

**STANGROUND LOCK** Length 24.40m (80'-0")  
Width 3.50m (11'-6")

Keeper Mrs. T. Rootham-Hayward.  
Tel. 07824 600470

**See Special Note 'A'.**



Maximum draught of boats larger than 11.00m (36'-0") long not to exceed 690mm (2'-3").

**24 hours notice is now required at Stanground Lock for passage both ways. If you have not made an appointment with the lock-keeper you may have to wait.**

Closed on Christmas Day and Tuesdays during November, December, January, and February and for the first week of March and after 1500hrs on Sundays.

**Do not enter lock without keeper in attendance.**

**King's Dyke** 8 bridges;  
min. headroom  
approx. 2.10m (7'-0").



**N.B.** Restricted length and sharp bend through Briggate, Whittlesey. Width between walls 4.27m (14'-0"). **Approach bend slowly and put ashore a look-out to watch for oncoming boats while negotiating bend.** Narrow boats up to 21.30m (70'-0") long have nevertheless negotiated King's Dyke to Ashline Lock, where there is a landing stage for visitors to Whittlesey (36hr limit) and a turning bay.

Turning facilities/limits (approximate maximum dimensions).

Stanground Lock .....	18.30m (60'-0")
Horsey Toll (approximately 1.6km east of Stanground Lock) .....	21.30m (70'-0") plus
Whittlesey (approximately 100m west of Ashline Lock) .....	21.30m (70'-0") plus

**Whittlesey** : Population 12,100. Shops, Fuel, Leisure Centre.

**ASHLINE  
LOCK**

Length 27.40m (90'-0")  
Width 3.50m (11'-6")

UNATTENDED.



Boats in the lock must be held at least 1.0m (3'-3") clear of the upstream doors to avoid fouling the sill as the water level is lowered and well away from the downstream doors to avoid entrapment beneath the penstock/paddle/slackers access walkway when the water level is raised.

Please ensure that the upstream lock doors (King's Dyke side) and penstocks/paddles/slackers are closed after use. Leakage could rapidly lower the water level in King's Dyke and considerable difficulty could thereafter be experienced in restoring a satisfactory navigation level.

Navigators are also requested to leave Ashline Lock empty and the downstream lock doors (Whittlesey Dyke side) open.

In the event of problems, contact the Stanground lock-keeper or, if unobtainable, the Middle Level Office.

**Whittlesey Dyke** 7 bridges;  
min.headroom  
approx. 2.05m (6'-9")

Main drainage channel.

**Old River Nene :** 3 bridges;  
**Floods Ferry to** min. headroom.  
**Marmont Priory** approx. 1.91m (6'-4")

River is wide and deep from Floods Ferry to March and from March to Pophams Eau, but the sections through March Town and from Pophams Eau to Marmont Priory Lock are relatively shallow and should be navigated with care.



**March** : Population 18,500. Middle Level Offices, Fox's Boatyard, Moorings, Shops, Fuel, Sanitation Station, Leisure Centre.

Photograph of moorings adjacent March Town Bridge.

**MARMONT** Length 28.00m (92'-0")  
**PRIORY LOCK** Width 3.65m (12'-0")

Keeper Mrs. M. Norton.  
 Tel. 07824 821737



See Special Note 'B'.

Ensure that the lock doors and penstocks/paddles/slackers are properly closed after use. Leakage can rapidly lower the water level in Well Creek, which can sometimes require several days to restore a satisfactory navigation level. To assist in maintaining adequate water in the Creek, 'double-up' where possible when negotiating the lock. An advance phone call to the lock-keeper will assist in making suitable arrangements in this respect.

**Well Creek** 15 bridges; min.headroom approx. 1.96m (6'-5").

Some sections of Well Creek in Upwell and Outwell are narrow and relatively shallow and should be navigated with care.



Turning facilities/limits (approximate maximum dimensions).

Marmont Priory Lock (low-side).....	15.30m (50'-0")
Outwell Boat Basin .....	21.30m (70'-0")
Nordelph (approximately 100m west of highway bridge) .....	21.30m (70'-0") plus
Salters Lode (approximately 120m west of Salters Lode Lock) .....	18.30m (60'-0")

***Villages of Upwell, Outwell and Nordelph: Moorings, Shops, Fuel.***

Photograph shows a view of Well Creek in Upwell

**SALTERS** Length 18.90m (62'-0")  
**LODE** Width 3.80m (12'-6")  
**LOCK**

Keeper Mr. P. Grodkiewicz.  
 Tel. Downham Market (01366) 382292.



See Special Note 'A'.

Locking through to tidal river for limited periods each side of high tide. Possible passage for craft up to length 24.30m (80'-0") on level water (falling tide) or below, when tidal conditions allow.

Closed on Christmas Day and Wednesdays during November, December, January, and February and for the first week of March

**Telephone lock-keeper beforehand and do not enter lock without keeper in attendance.**

**River Great Ouse (Salters Lode to Denver Sluice)** (Environment Agency) This river is tidal and the times that craft can enter or leave the Middle Level are restricted. Denver Sluice is half a mile upstream of Salters Lode Lock. There are moorings on both sides of the sluice.

The lock-keeper at Denver Sluice must be notified before making a passage between the two systems. Tel. Downham Market (01366) 382340.

Special care should be taken when entering and leaving Salters Lode Lock on the tidal side; inexperienced navigators should follow the instructions of the lock-keepers.

**Special Notes :-**

'A' - Stanground and Salters Lode Locks serve dual roles as sluices as well as navigation locks. When the sluices are open, dangerous undertows may be encountered in the pens. **For this reason in particular, navigators must not enter these locks without the attendance of the lock-keepers.**

'B' - Marmont Priory Lock may only be negotiated unattended if the lock-keeper is not available and an advance phone call is preferred to assist water management, etc. Special care must be exercised to ensure that the doors and penstocks/paddles/slackers are **completely** closed after use. **This lock is similar to Ashline Lock and care must be taken to keep clear of the upstream sill and the downstream penstock access walkway.**

**OLD BEDFORD RIVER (see note under Forty Foot Navigation on back page)**

**OLD BEDFORD SLUICE** (Environment Agency) To pass into the Old Bedford/Counter Drain system, contact **must** be made with the Salters Lode lock-keeper, Mr. P. Grodkiewicz. Tel. Downham Market (01366) 382292.

**WELCHES DAM LOCK** (Environment Agency) This lock is used (self-operated by users) only on specific weekends when access for navigation is arranged. Further information can be obtained from the Inland Waterways Association or Environment Agency. Tel. 08708 506506  
 Length 14.30m (47'-0")  
 Width 3.35m (11'-0")

**HORSEWAY LOCK** Length 18.30m (60'-0")  
 Width 3.65m (12'-0") This lock is used (self-operated by users), in conjunction with Welches Dam Lock, only on specific weekends.

**Access through the Lock must only be made during daylight hours on the actual dates specified by the Environment Agency.**

# **FORTY FOOT NAVIGATION**

**ENVIRONMENT  
AGENCY**

**Due to structural problems with the Forty Foot Lock (Welches Dam Lock) the Environment Agency has not published a timetable. For more details please contact the Environment Agency on 08708 506506 or visit our website on**

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk/navigation](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/navigation).

Please note that :

Due to high water levels passage may not be possible between the Old Bedford/Counter Drain and the tidal river at the Old Bedford Sluice.

The agency is unable to guarantee that there will be enough water to fill the Forty Foot.

The Middle Level Commissioners are to be informed when boats are navigating the Forty Foot between Horseway Lock and Welches Dam Lock. Please contact the Salters Lode lock-keeper on 01366-382292 and the Operations Engineer on 01354-653232.

ADDITIONAL NOTE :

Boat users are reminded to contact the Environment Agency's River Inspector, Mervyn Day, (office 01480 483673, mobile 07889 111829) during normal working hours to check that water is available for passage through the Forty Foot. Also check with the Denver lock-keeper (01366-382340) or the Salters Lode lock-keeper (01366-382292), if navigation is possible through the Old Bedford Sluice.

THE PROPOSED SEQUENCE OF OPENING ON A NORMAL TWO DAY WEEKEND IS AS FOLLOWS :

- |                  |   |   |
|------------------|---|---|
| FRIDAY AFTERNOON | - | Open slackers at Welches Dam Lock to allow filling of Forty Foot overnight.           |
| SATURDAY MORNING | - | Adjust slackers to residual flow setting to compensate for seepage.                   |
| MONDAY MORNING   | - | Throttle slackers to Welches Dam Lock and set slackers at Horseway Lock to draw down. |

# **SLOW DOWN**

## *Don't make waves!*



**Speed limits are in force  
on the waterways of the  
Middle Level Commissioners**

**Look for the signs** on the rivers that indicate the maximum speed permitted in that area.



6.45km/h



8 km/h

### **Why should I bother?**



Because boat wash is a major cause of bank erosion - the faster a boat goes, the greater its wash and the faster the banks will erode. The Middle Level area depends, for its flood protection, on artificial flood banks and any erosion of these banks greatly increases the risk of the land and properties flooding. Also, the silt washed from the banks has to be expensively dredged from the waterways in order to maintain sufficient depths for the boats to continue to navigate the waterways.



### **Think of others**

By keeping to the speed limits, you help protect birds whose nests can easily be washed away. Even if you are within the limit, you should reduce your speed when passing other vessels. Someone might be trying to make a cup of tea or cooking food, and might get injured by your wash rocking their boat.



### **Who must obey the speed limits?**

The limits apply to all boats or craft except those used for enforcement or by the emergency services.



**Middle Level  
Commissioners**

### **What happens if you break the speed limit?**

We are sure that most people on the Middle Level will understand the need for speed limits and will observe them. The Middle Level Commissioners undertake routine radar speed checks and average speed observations. Even if you are observing the speed limit, your boat wash should be less than one foot (300mm) in height. Don't forget that anyone who breaks the limit faces a maximum fine of £5000.

