

Whether you've been paddling the Nene for 20 years like me or you're a complete beginner, there is so much to see and so many places to explore along the river we all love.

It's perfectly possible to paddle way above the start of the 'navigation' but I would caution against doing so as a beginner as there are many dangers lurking around fast flowing corners.

Between Northampton and Peterborough there should be enough to keep most paddlers interested for many years.

Oddly enough, one of the first things to consider is how you'll get back to where you started; round trips are possible but do you really fancy paddling against the flow for a few hours?

Most paddlers leave a shuttle car at the end of the trip or leave a bike chained up some place discreet to get back to the start although this does mean leaving your canoe chained up for a while.

A classic - short - round trip on the Nene would be to start at the bridge over the navigation on the Thorpe-Aldwinckle road where there's room to park a few cars and paddle upstream to Titchmarsh Lock.

Carry on past the lock and a couple of hundred yards past the last boat you'll see the sluice into Brancey Brook on your right; get out by the two wooden posts and if you don't fancy the white water at the foot of the sluice you can get in further down by another two posts.

Then slow down and enjoy your first Nene backwater; so much wildlife and so peaceful you'll want to savour it all as you pass under a fine stone bridge and after a few twists and turns find yourself at the Friends of the River Nene mooring at Peartree Farm.

Assuming you haven't chosen to go paddling under Strong Stream you should now have a 20-30 minute paddle back to your car. Another short one is at Upper Barnwell lock, around the inner backwater and back up past Lower Barnwell.

What to paddle? You'll no doubt see stand-up boards, sit-on-tops and kayaks as well as the open or Canadian canoes that I use. I recommend the open canoe as there's room to wriggle and avoid cramp, you can take a lot of gear with you and you don't get that fear of being trapped that some people have in a kayak with your legs under a pointy deck.

But they are expensive - even second hand - so you might want to look at hiring one from a place like Canoe2 now at Rushden Lakes.

Longer trips are more than possible, for example I regularly paddle from Irthlingborough to Thrapston and from Thrapston to Upper Barnwell lock and both these trips will take you around 4 hours depending on whether you venture down the backwaters.

Backwaters? Some, such as Wadenoe or Islip are clearly marked as canoe routes to avoid locks; others such as Addington and Elton are more difficult to access but perfectly legal to paddle - just be aware that you may find trees down and other hazards.

Talking of hazards, what to do if you have a narrowboat chugging towards you? Yes I know that technically power gives way etc and in a perfect world you'll exchange greetings whilst passing port-to-port but that isn't the real world most times.

I've often paddled the English Channel but I didn't expect the tankers to alter course to avoid me and I would advocate the same approach on the Nene.

If you can hold course then do so; if you need to change course then do so in an obvious or even exaggerated manner so the narrowboat driver can see exactly what your intention is as not many of them have been on a mind-reading course!

Camping? I have been stopping out overnight on the Nene for two decades now and generally I've had no issues through being sensible and discreet.

In fact, I've been stopping in my hammock on Peartree Farm since long before I knew it was called Peartree Farm or had met the many friendly folk from Friends of the River Nene.

There's no scope in such a short article to cover every aspect of paddling our river and in many ways I'm sure you'd rather go out and explore rather than have somebody tell you all the secrets.

However, if you do want some advice feel free to message me on Facebook and I'll do what I can to help.

Lastly, a big thanks to everyone I've met through Friends of the River Nene for making me and other canoeists so welcome.

Cheers,

Dick