

Bridges and other obstructions

Bridges

On a tour you will almost certainly have to navigate through bridges. On rivers these will probably be fixed, however on quieter, narrow rivers and canals there might be bridges that need to be moved to allow you to pass through.

A local waterway guide or navigation authority will tell you what kinds of bridges you will encounter and how to get an operating key if you need one.

Especially on small rivers and canals with low bridges be aware of the headroom. You may have to ship your blades (draw them in across the boat) and duck to get through! Through bridges where the waterway narrows, be aware that this will make the water flow quicker so everyone, especially steerspeople, needs to be on the ball. Also remember that boats coming downstream have right of way. When you go through a narrow or low archway, stay in the middle of the channel.

If you need to open a bridge, as with a lock, one of the crew will need to get out in plenty of time.

There may also be traffic barriers like at a level crossing that will need to be operated.

- Don't go through until the whole crew are ready and the bridge is safe.
- Keep everyone's hands inside the boat.
- Beware of slippery surfaces when operating bridges.
- Use the strongest crew members to operate moving bridges as they can be heavy.



Swing Bridges

The bridge will be held in place with a chain, so undo this and give the bridge a strong push to open it up. When the boat is through, don't forget to replace the chain and the barriers.

Mechanised bridges

These will either need a key to operate, which is obtained from the waterway authority, or are opened by winding with a windlass. Follow any instructions carefully.



Manual lift bridges

These are lifted by hand by pulling down on a chain attached to a balance arm. Do this slowly and don't let the bridge drop sharply. Sometimes there will be a way to keep the bridge secure and raised and sometimes you will have to hold it open whilst the boat goes through.

Aqueducts

Aqueducts tend to be narrow, so if you are in a stable boat it may be possible to ship oars and have bow turn round in the seat and paddle the boat off the structure facing forwards.



Problems

If you have any trouble operating a bridge or if something breaks down, don't try and fix it yourself, don't try and force something that is stuck and don't leave it broken for someone else. Call the Helpline number that should be listed on the bridge or contact the navigation authority.

