

FIFTY TOURING RIVERS OF EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago Ralph Tyas produced his French River Notes to answer numerous questions received from paddlers. This publication seeks to expand on this example, attract paddlers to the touring waters of Western Europe and fill part of the gap in the information on rivers in this area. There is a lot of information on White Water Rivers but little or nothing for placid water paddlers wishing to include canoe touring in their holiday plans. In selecting these rivers we asked contributors to offer only those waters that they considered “were worth crossing the Channel for”.

We offer no apology for the varying styles included in this guide, this reflect the individuals as much as their rivers. Neither do we apologise for the lack of maps, or pictures nor for the many missing waters that the more experienced canoeist might expect to find. This is a reprint of the first edition with minor amendments. If canoeists find it useful, it will encourage us to produce an expanded and illustrated further edition. Let us know the name of the particular rivers you would like to see included.

The information provided is given in good faith, but neither the British Canoe Union, the contributors nor the publishers can accept any responsibility for its accuracy. Guidebook by their nature are out of date from the day of publication and users have to accept that conditions change. We have taken some information contained in this guide from old records and foreign guidebooks. This guide is not a substitute for research and inspection of all hazards before you encounter them.

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BRITISH PADDLERS ENJOYING THEIR RECREATION IN EUROPE ARE REQUESTED TO BEHAVE IN A WAY THAT WILL NOT UPSET LOCAL RESIDENTS WHOSE WATERS GIVE US ALL SO MUCH PLEASURE.

GERMANY

GERMAN RIVERS - Generally

Always carry your BCU membership card with photograph attached. This will entitle you to reduced camping fees at canoe clubs and DKV (German Canoe Federation) camping places. It will also give you with a reason, acceptable to the German River Police, why your boat bears no German River registration.

Even if your canoe is not marked according to the German rules. Knowing what those rules are is useful, in case of argument, and some are easy to comply with.

The legal requirements for registration of craft apply primarily to shipping waterways. Canoes come into the official category of “small craft”. DKV Members are exempt if they comply with a few minimum requirements. Nonmembers are supposed to obtain a permit from the responsible river authority. There is an understanding that DKV members will observe these minimum requirements on any river, whether or not they are legally required to do so on that river.

The minimum requirements for DKV members are:

Boat name, or the name (or its recognised abbreviation) of the organisation to which it belongs: to appear in easily legible letters 10cm high on the exterior of the craft.

Owner’s name and address: to be affixed in a visible place outside or inside the boat.

Pennon/flag: mount DKV pennon at least 30cm x 20cm, or display a smaller flag (for instance sticker) on the hull or deck.

One crew member must carry a DKV membership card with photograph.

So with a named boat, a suitable flag sticker and a BCU membership

card with photograph there should be few problems. The point is to indicate membership of a recognised national canoe organisation.

Canoeing Reference Maps - Germany/Austria

The best are the maps in the series "Wassersport - Wanderkarten" obtainable by BCU members from the DKV Wirtschafts und Verlags GmbH, Postfach 100315, D-4100 Duisburg 1. Prices (December 1992) between DM15.50 and 17.50 plus postage and packing. Their normal practice is - no cash with order. They send an invoice including p&p and accept Eurocheques. Non-BCU members can obtain these maps from GEO-Center, Munich.

There are seven sheets:

1. North (list ref.2061)
2. Central (list ref.2062)
3. South West (list ref.2063)
4. Bavaria (list ref.2064)
6. New provinces (ex DDR) North (list ref.2066)
7. " " " South (list ref.2067)

Austria (list ref.2065)

Sheet 1 covers Schleswig-Holstein - Emden - Celle.

Sheet 2 covers Hannover - Koblenz - Aachen.

Sheet 3 covers Koblenz - Würzburg - Ulm - Basel - Konstanz.

Sheet 4 covers Würzburg - Ulm - Passau - Salzburg.

These are very well printed sheet maps showing all round geographical detail (except railways) plus enhanced overprinted conventional signs indicating navigational features (grading, distance, whether canoeable all the year, weirs, locks, location of canoe clubs, camp sites, nature reserves).

Scale 1:550,000. The one drawback is that the scale results in the detail being very small - a magnifying glass helps - but it is all there.

On the back of sheets 1 to 4 (former federal republic) there are notes, explanations of conventional signs, lists of prohibited stretches, and,

most valuable, large scale diagrams of important weirs and difficult stretches along the most popular rivers clearly indicating the portages. In time these are to be introduced into the ex-DDR sheets. The Austria map has large-scale diagrams only for the Danube weirs between Passau and Vienna.

Waterchutes

A waterchute (in German “Bootsgasse”) is a marvellous facility for canoeists paddling with either empty or laden boats. It is a sloping concrete trough with steel vanes set in the bottom to control the water in such a way that it keeps the boat in a central position as it drifts downwards.

The chute is operated on arrival without leaving the canoe by pressing a bellpush, or sometimes pulling on a chain. A steel shutter at the top of the chute sinks below the surface allowing the water to flow.

If using a rudder it should be raised out of the water and the paddles are best held on deck lengthways whilst in the chute. Do not allow the paddle to touch either the water or the sides of the chute. If one’s boat appears to be veering to one side have faith, it will turn back; this is the purpose of the steel vanes.

A young child can descend a waterchute in safety.

DANUBE Part 1 (German Section)

The Danube starts at Donaueschingen where the two streams Brigach and Breg meet.

From there to Ulm is 194km and the river is small with many weirs, some shootable, but most requiring portaging. Most are the successors of the mill weirs mentioned by John MacGregor in his first book. The pessimistic might imagine a paddle on this section to be a walking tour carrying a canoe but it is not really like this as the portages have been made easy and many paddlers make the trip each year.

Annually a few paddle with loaded canoes as an aperitif to the International Danube Tour (TID), the annual run from Ingolstadt to Silistra in Bulgaria. There are many pretty villages and more than enough camping sites. The scenery is good.

There are two stretches, the first after Immendingen, the second after Fridingen, where water seeps into the limestone and further progress is often impossible. Also, from Fridingen to Beuron canoeing is totally prohibited on conservation grounds.

From Ulm to the German/Austrian border is 365km.

At Ulm there stands the first of the international posts showing the distance from the Black Sea. Ulm is at post 2588.

From Ulm to Ingolstadt (2455) there are a number of small boats locks, which is self-operating. From Ingolstadt there are seven locks, each the size of a cathedral. All are easily by-passed by waterchutes and/or concrete portage trails. There is really no need to lift a canoe even if you do not have your own trolley, as small boat carriages are available where there is no waterchute.

From Ingolstadt one paddles through a gorge until Kelheim (2415) after which the Danube valley is wide until Passau (2226) on the German border.

There is at least one canoe club in each town offering camping and no lack of commercial campsites.

Principal towns:

Ulm, Ingolstadt, Regensburg (2382), Straubing (2321) and Passau.

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) sheet 3 has large scale diagrams of all 28 weirs/portages between Beuron and Ulm; Sheet 4 similarly for the 19 from there to Passau, 15 of these being above Ingolstadt.

DANUBE Part 2 (Austrian Section)

Perhaps the best place to start an Austrian Danube trip is at Passau (2226) on the border with Germany. There is an excellent campsite 200 metres up the little river Ilz at the Sports Association Canoe Section.

There are eight large locks in Austria, none has waterchutes but all have good portage trails. Most of the locks were constructed in specially dug straight channels so the portages lead one into the old course of the river. The trails are supplied with well made small-boat carriages.

Scenically the two best parts of this section are the entry into Austria, Passau to Linz (2133) which would make a good two day paddle, and the wine growing length, "the Wachau" which runs from Melk (2036) to Krems (2001) offers a day trip including Dürnstein where it is said the English King Richard the Lionheart was imprisoned.

From Passau passenger ships run down the river and back. It is therefore possible to return to a parked car either by ship or by railway from any of the major places. All will carry folding boats but it may be possible to negotiate for conveyance of rigid canoes on some ships. The stations at Tulln and Hainburg are close to the river, at Linz it is a fair walk and Vienna station is several miles from the river. Trains no longer have large luggage vans.

There are plenty of campsites. Canoe clubs, commercial sites and rowing clubs will extend hospitality to canoeists.

From Passau to Hainburg is 343km.

Principal towns:

Linz, Grein (2079), Stein and Krems, Tulln (1964), Vienna (1937) and Hainburg (1883).

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) (Austria) has large-scale diagrams of the portages.

ELBE (Germany)

This river rises in Czechoslovakia over 400km before it enters Germany as a broad navigable river. In Germany it flows in a northwesterly direction to the North Sea beyond Cuxhaven. It passes at first through the strikingly beautiful area called "Saxon Switzerland". Then it flows steadily unencumbered by weirs for mile after mile through the cities of Dresden, Magdeburg and Hamburg.

There are many beautiful towns and villages like, for instance, Tangemünde a walled medieval town.

Away from the larger towns there are still many opportunities for wilderness camping especially on that part flowing through the old Democratic Republic. Watch out for the many nature reserves with their "No landing" notices.

Because this is north Germany the weather is much the same as ours.

LAHN (Germany)

The Lahn is a small river, which might have been made for the tourist who travels by canoe; as the German river guide puts it, the Lahn is not

a river on which to “eat the kilometres”.

It is a tributary of the Rhine entering that river from the east just south of Koblenz.

There is much very good scenery, pretty villages, interesting towns and many buildings of historic and architectural interest.

The valley is often narrow with steep hillsides alternating with more open lengths. Woods alternate with cultivated areas and meadows all the way to the Rhine.

A good place to start is at the university town of Marburg and from there on down are many campsites. Unfortunately there are also a number of weirs but these are easily portaged. From Giessen 45km downstream, weirs, self operated locks and later attended locks can be by-passed by rollers, waterchutes or portage trails supplied with small boat carriages.

From Marburg to the Rhine is 180km.

There is a guide on the Lahn for paddlers written, printed and published by Buchandlung Meckel KG of Limburg.

Principal towns: Marburg, Lollar, Giessen, Wetzlar, Limburg, Bad Ems.

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) sheet 2 has large-scale diagrams of all portages.

MAIN (Germany)

It is said that the best place to start a river Main cruise is at Bamberg some 385km from the confluence with the Rhine at the city of Mainz.

The river is in fact canoeable from Mainleus near Kulmbach through good scenery 75km above Bamberg, 10 weirs/portages.

From Bamberg the river is locked for ships and the current is very slack but there is a self-operating small boat lock in service at each.

Whilst the general direction of the Main is westward this meandering river almost boxes the compass.

The river passes along a winding valley through several forest areas and the scenery is beautiful, picturesque villages and towns stand on the banks.

From Klingenberg 25km above Aschaffenburg industry lines the banks but camping is available at canoe clubs right down to the confluence at Mainz.

Principal towns: Bamberg, Würzburg, Aschaffenburg, Frankfurt, Mainz.

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) sheets 3 and 4 have large-scale diagrams of all portages from Mainleus.

MOSELLE (Mosel) (Germany)

The Moselle rises in France at Col de Bussand about 550km from its confluence with the river Rhine at Koblenz in Germany. The right bank becomes German just before the town of Perl (242) when the river becomes the frontier between Germany and Luxembourg until the river Sûre (German Sauer) enters after which the river flows through Germany.

In 1964 the river was converted into a navigation with the addition of twelve locks. Six of these are in the section below Trier. Each of these locks has in addition a lock for small boats and a water chute and/or a portage trail.

Below Trier (193) the river has been known for nearly 2000 years for its wines and the names of its villages can be seen on the labels of the bottles in your local wine merchant.

The river meanders between the steep sided hills of the Eifel and Hunsruck. Since the Romans brought the vines to the valley these hillsides have been increasingly terraced for the cultivation of the grape. The towns and villages have been built on such flat land as exists between the foot of the cliffs and the river.

The Moseltal (Moselle valley) is very beautiful and its ancient houses and public buildings are very picturesque.

The valley has everything for those who tour by canoe, 240km of placid water paddling, much fine scenery, many historic sites, plenty of camp sites and on both banks well waymarked footpaths leading up to the two plateaux: both offering great walking country.

A fortnight paddling and walking in this unique area will remain for ever in your memory.

Principal towns;

Trier (193), Bernkastel-Kues (129), Traben-Trarbach (106), Cochem (52), Koblenz (0).

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) sheet 3 has large-scale diagrams of the facilities for by-passing the weirs.

NECKAR (Germany)

The Neckar enters the Rhine at Mannheim but unless wishing to continue down that river most canoeists end their trips at Heidelberg.

The Neckar meanders through a beautiful valley but there are many locks, as on the Thames, but unlike the Thames the authorities have constructed a little railway by-passing each with a truck enabling canoeists to portage with ease.

The navigation (for ships) starts at Plochingen upstream of Stuttgart

about 200km above Mannheim but paddling is possible from nearly 150km further upstream but with many portages.

The villages are very picturesque and there are many historic sites. There are numerous campsites at canoe and rowing clubs spaced down the river.

Heidelberg is some 25km above the confluence with the Rhine but much of this last length is industrial.

Principal towns: Tübingen, Reutlingen, Esslingen, Stuttgart, Ludwigsburg, Heilbronn, Heidelberg, Mannheim.

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) sheet 3 has large-scale diagrams of all portages from Plochingen.

RHINE (Germany)

The Rhine starts in Switzerland and flows through France at Strasbourg, through Germany and the Netherlands to the North Sea.

In the German and Dutch sections the river is a highway for shipping. What with the considerable currents in places, the wash from the ships going upstream and ships going downstream and not forgetting the washes rebounding off the banks the water is at times somewhat confused. The river is therefore no place for a beginner in canoe touring.

Notwithstanding all that, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of canoeists safely paddle on the Rhine every year few, of whom could claim to be

well qualified or able to produce certificates or stars.

It has been suggested that before attempting this river the paddler tries out either the Mosel or the Lahn if only to experience the unbelievable facilities for the canoe tourist in Germany and on arrival at the end of the chosen river takes a long hard look at the greater river flowing by.

WESER (Germany)

The Weser starts at Hann-Münden where the Fulda and Werra meet. Both rivers are already quite big, being canoeable for upwards of 200km with a fair number of portages.

The stretch recommended by German paddlers as being their best placid river is from Hann-Münden to Minden, a length of 203km. There is a fair current all the way and only one lock at Hameln. The lock is bypassed by a water chute specially designed for canoeists.

Above Hameln the scenery is very attractive but the hills leave the river at Hameln to return just before Minden at the “Porta Westfalica”. Beware of Ministry of Defence land on the right bank below Hameln as it is forbidden to land.

There are canoe clubs with lawns for camping and/or commercial campsites near all the principal towns. Some places have more than one club.

There are plenty of sightseeing opportunities all along the river, with castles and many ancient buildings of historic interest. The towns and villages are noted for their half-timbered buildings.

Because this is north Germany the weather is much the same as ours.

The principal towns are:

Hann-Münden Bad Karlshafen Höxter

Corvey Hameln Rinteln Minden

It is possible to continue downstream from Minden for a further 160km of uninterrupted paddling to the city of Bremen below which it is estuary canoeing for approximately 70 km to the North Sea.

FULDA and WERRA (Germany) (headstreams of the Weser)

The upper parts of both rivers have weirs involving many portages; on the lower parts they can be by-passed with ease because of special facilities provided for loaded canoes. Either can be included as an enjoyable preliminary to a trip down the Weser.

On the FULDA there are 11 weirs in the 118km from Hersfeld to Hann-Münden, and there are facilities for canoes after the first three. The valley is attractive with interesting towns and villages.

On the WERRA start could be made at Eschwege, 60 km and 5 weirs above Hann-Münden, three of them near Allendorf. The scenery is very good. The portage at Hedemünden can be avoided by turning left half a mile upstream into a branch called the "Lache". Portage with facilities at the Letzte Heller generating station dam a short way below the motorway and railway bridges about 3.5km above Hann-Münden. At Hann-Münden the portaging facilities are on the right hand branch.

The Wassersport Wanderkarte map (DKV) Sheet 2 has large-scale diagrams of the portages on the Weser, Fulda and Werra.

A personal recommendation: Kassel on the Fulda 31km with 3 locks to the Weser and then on to Minden for a 7 day trip of 244km. Minden, Hann-Münden and Kassel have train stations convenient for drivers to return to parked cars.

ISAR (Germany)

The 58km from Lenggries to Munich is a popular paddle at weekends for Munich paddlers. Enjoyable easy wild water, Grade I-2.

The river is not practicable above the Sylvenstein dam. A starting point could be looked for at a parking place on the main road B.13 about 4km below the Sylvenstein bridge, or from a camp site at Winkel. The weir at Fleck must be portaged on the left. There is a parking place at Lenggries 0.5km above the bridge.

Just beyond Lenggries at Isarhorn there is a natural rock-weir that normally must be portaged. 3km beyond Bad Tölz bridge portage left of the dam, rollers. From here to the mouth of the Loisach near Wolfratshausen the river flows through two lengths of nature reserve; passage along the main river channel is allowed. Campsite at Einöd. From Lenggries to the Loisach confluence 36km.

Icking weir, 1km beyond the Loisach confluence, is impracticable. Two alternatives: on the extreme left, if enough water is being released down the natural river, portage into it. If not, enter the channel a short way upstream of the weir on the right, indicated by an arrow. At Mühlthal, near the end of this channel there is an impracticable weir, portaged on left (steps and rollers).

8km from Icking at Baierbrunnen weir (also impracticable) if the arrow points to the right the natural river can be entered by a portage. If pointing to the left, the channel on the left of the weir must be taken. There are two weirs on this channel, at Höllriegelskreuth and Pullach, with portage facilities.

Above the impracticable weir at Grosshesselohe the natural river 6km from Baierbrunnen land on left; there is an easy carry over into the above mentioned channel nearby; turn right along the channel.

At the second bridge turn left into a long raft channel, with several harmless and enjoyable little slopes and a final swoop into the old raft basin at Thalkirchen on the outskirts of Munich. Camp site.

Map: Wassersport-Wanderkarte Sheet 4 (from DKV). Has a large-scale diagram of the weirs and portages.

LOISACH (Germany)

A classic and enjoyable grade I trip from Garmisch-Partenkirchen through the foothills of the Bavarian Alps for 35km to lake Kochelsee, after which it continues for 50km to join the Isar at Wolfratshausen. From here the paddle can be enjoyably extended for 23km to Munich, making a total

of about 100km.

Two weirs at Garmisch can be avoided by starting at the road bridge at Farchant about 5km from Garmisch. There are two weirs to be portaged shortly before the Kochelsee.

At Schönmühl 20km beyond the Kochelsee it is necessary to land below the railway bridge at the signboard and carry over the hill to a signposted launching place below the power station. After two portages, at Beuerberg and Eurasburg, take the left hand channel at the island above Wolfratshausen. The other one is impracticable. There is a final portage at the weir at the end of Wolfratshausen before the Loisach joins the Isar.

Campsites at Garmisch, Kochelsee, Wolfratshausen.

For the rest of the paddle to Munich, see Isar.

Map: Wassersport Wanderkarte (DKV) Sheet 4. No large scale diagrams of weirs on this river.

DENMARK

GUDEN Aa (Denmark)

The Guden Aa is a narrow slow running river that frequently opens into large lakes. The river flows through the unspoilt natural landscape of Jutland and on its hilly pine wooded banks you will find plenty of friendly campsites.

The total length of the Guden Aa from the source to Randers Fjord is about 180km. There are between five and seven portages at low bridges and weirs, depending on the water level, but trolleys are provided for public use.

Törring is the best place to start from. There is a campsite and as in

many other places you can hire canoes. A small fee is required for access to the river. It is not allowed to paddle the stretch from Törring to Moss” without a valid permit from 1st January till 15th June. In this period the best starting place is Skanderborg.

We suggest a five-day tour from Törring to Randers, a total distance of 157 km.

1. From Törring to Klostermölle you find a narrow winding stretch of river. After entering Mossö (sö means lake) we paddle 8km to the east, to Hem odde. There is a campsite and a Kro, here you can have a meal and stay the night. This is a distance of 48km.

1a. Alternatively you can start from Skanderborg and paddle the Skanderborg Sö in a westerly direction, followed by a narrow stretch of river towards the Mossö. Then continue in a westerly direction to find the outflow of the lake in the northwest corner, a distance of 18km.

2. We paddle back from Hem Odde in a westerly direction to find the outflow of the lake in the northwest corner. After 1km from Moss” we paddle up a tributary on the left which leads to the Salten Langsö. It is prohibited to paddle on this lake, but the tributary brings you to the Guden Aa Museet, which has a collection of tools from the stone age period.

We paddle back to the river and continue to Ry. The total distance for this day is 20km. You will paddle over beautiful lakes. Wind can however blow up steep waves, so it is advisable to use a spraydeck, to wear a buoyancy aid and to paddle a stable boat. In Ry there is a portage at the weir. This brings you into the Birksö. There is a campsite in the northeast corner of the lake. If you prefer a youth hostel, you can paddle under the bridge into the Knudsö where you will find the hostel on the east bank.

3. A series of lakes follow from Ry to Silkeborg, a paddle of 17km and the possibility to relax your muscles in the local sauna afterwards.

4. On the stretch from Silkeborg you can enjoy the narrow river again and you will meet only one more lake, Tange Sø, before reaching Bjerringbro. A distance of 39km.

5. From now on you paddle quietly the remaining stretch to Randers, where you finish your trip after 33km.

Törring, Ry, Silkeborg, Bjerringbro and Randers all have holiday accommodation. We stayed at the youth hostel in Ry. The address is: Knudhule Vanderjem, Randersvej 90, 8680 Ry, Denmark. Tel: 01045 06 861407.

There is a tourist map of the Guden Aa with plenty of information and a sheet with regulations for canoeing (in English) available from the tourist office in Silkeborg. The address is: Turistbureauet, Torvet 12, Silkeborg, Denmark. Tel. 01045 06 821911.

Once a year, at the end of August, there is a well-organised race, the Tour de Guden Aa, over a distance of 120km, held in two days and paddled in stages. There is a division for touring boats: K1 or K2 for men, ladies or mixed crews. The only limit is that you must finish within a certain time and will be disqualified for having a cup of coffee on the bank, but the nice hot shower and a tasty meal at the prize giving will put that right after the finish. There is an early closing date. The address is: Tour de Guden Aa, Postbox 512, DK 8660 Skanderborg, Denmark.

THE NETHERLANDS

GELDERSE IJSSEL (The Netherlands)

The Rhine enters The Netherlands from Germany. In this low country the river divides into several branches. The branch that runs from Westervoort near Arnhem in a northerly direction to Kampen is called IJssel and is 118km long.

The amount of water is dependent of rainfall and the water regulation

of the Rhine. The flow varies from 5km/hr at Westervoort, 3km/hr at Deventer to 0km/hr at Kampen.

There is much traffic on the IJssel, barges as well as pleasure boats. A provision has been made for them to cut the corners; coming upstream they can take the inside and downstream they can choose the outside of the bend. Trade barges indicate this manoeuvre with a blue cone on the starboard side. Please take care, especially of the traffic from behind, the captains often cannot see you. Canoeists must always give way! Over the weekends it is reasonably quiet on the river.

The IJssel is an attractive river to paddle. On its banks you will see old brick works and stork nests. The meadows along the river are grazed by cattle. The many cut off bends and the little "beaches" in between the breakwaters provide suitable picnic places.

Easy access to the river is available at the ferry slipways in Diever, Brummen, Olst and Wijhe. From most campsites you can just paddle towards the IJssel.

We normally choose a campsite halfway, eg in Olst: Camping 't Haasje, Fordmonderweg 17, 8121 SK, Olst. Tel 01031 5708 1226, but there are many other nice campsites along the river.

The best map to use is the ANWB waterways map D, Gelderse IJssel. If you would like to canoe camp, you will find Canoe Camping Guide of the Ned. Kano Bond very helpful. Nice places to visit are: Arnhem, Zutphen, Doesburg, Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen.

The driving time from Oostend is approx. 4 hrs, from Calais 5 hrs.

ALBLASSERWAARD (The Netherlands)

The Alblasserwaard is a polder situated north of Dordrecht and south east of Rotterdam in the province of Zuid Holland.

There are two major attractions:

Groot Ammers, the Dutch stork colony, that can be visited from Tuesday

to Sunday from 1-5 pm and Kinderdijk, where 19 windmills are looking after the water level of the polder.

In Kinderdijk there is a small car park and a restaurant where you can have a drink. Along the river Alblas you can find typical Zuid Hollandse farmhouses.

The more experienced paddlers, who are confident with tidal rivers and big barges, will like to paddle on the River Lek and make a round tour. Either clockwise or anticlockwise, depending on the tide.

You can paddle from the campsite in Schoonhoven, near the ferry to Kinderdijk, continuing (route A or B) to Groot Ammers. Then portage the IJssel to paddle back to Schoonhoven. Along the river are kilometre signs. Schoonhoven is at 971km, Groot Ammers at 975km and Kinderdijk at 988km.

If you are not confident on big rivers it will be better to paddle one way following route A or B from Kinderdijk and include a car ferry.

Route A. The canal on the east side brings you onto the Boezem van de Overwaard (a canal). Paddle north eastwards. At a T junction where you will see three windmills you paddle to the left onto the Ammerse Boezem to reach Groot Ammers. This is a 16km paddle.

Route B. The western canal brings you first to the place Alblasserdam. Here you must not turn right towards the lock, but continue along the old river Alblas passing the villages of Oud Alblas and Bleekers Graaf. Here the river changes name and is now called the Graaf Stroom. We pass the village of Molenaars Graaf. From here there will be three easy portages before we turn left at the T junction onto the Ammerse Boezem to Groot Ammers. This is a 21km paddle. It is also possible to combine the routes A and B to make a round tour of 38km, but this will be a long day trip. For in the polder you will find narrow placid water.

The best map to use is the ANWB waterways map K, Grote rivieren, middenblad.

This area is very suitable for canoe camping. The Ned. Kano Bond's camping guide is very useful.

Campsite in Schoonhoven: 't Wilgerak, Lekdijk Oost 3, 2871 AD, Schoonhoven. Tel 01031 1823 2836. The site is situated on the river Lek near the ferry.

VLIST (The Netherlands)

Day trip in the province of Zuid Holland.

The river Vlist runs north westwards from Schoonhoven on the river Lek to Haastrecht, near Gouda, through farmland and past old farmhouses, from some of these you can buy cheese. Its total length is 9km.

There is an easy access and ample parking possibilities on the west bank north of Schoonhoven and at the bridge over the Vlist near Haastrecht. Halfway, in the village of Vlist, there is a restaurant where you can buy a drink.

The paddle up and down the river is 18km and very suitable for a family paddle.

If you would like to extend your paddling distance you can make a small diversion through the beautiful polder of the Lopikerwaard. This makes your trip 3km longer and includes four portages. To do so, you turn after passing the dwelling Bonrepas at the bridge to the right and continue over the Kerkvliet to Polsbroek. Here you will see a church. Portage at the left bank onto the Molenvliet. After 4km, you come to two dams that have to be portaged and with another portage, over the road, you will be back on the river Vlist. From here you can paddle to Haastrecht, to the right, or back to Schoonhoven to the left.

Campsite in Schoonhoven: 't Wilgerak, Lekdijk Oost 3, 2871 AD, Schoonhoven. Tel 01031 1823 2836.

Places of interest: Gouda, beautiful place, famous for pottery, candles and cheese making. Schoonhoven, old silver art exhibition in the town hall.

ZAANSE SCHANS (The Netherlands)

A tour round this area in Zaanstad, 8km north of the centre of Amsterdam. Paddling distance 16km.

To preserve them, the typical wooden houses and old windmills of Zaanstad have been rebuilt in the open air museum “De Zaanse Schans” along the river Zaan. Here you can visit the working mills and see other traditional arts like cheese making and clog making.

For the tour you can start at Kayak Centre/camping/ hotel etc Nieuw Weromeri, Poelweg 1B, 1531 MD in Wormer. Tel 01031 75 218805, where you can also hire canoes.

From here you cross De Poel and paddle 500m to the east where you'll see a narrow canal and a bridge, this is the Schans sloot in Wormer. Follow this canal, after four bridges you come to a sports hall. Here you turn to the left and directly after the bridge you turn to the right and paddle along the Zaandammer straat, which brings you to the beautiful (dry) Bartels sluis. Here you portage onto the river Zaan, where you must cross to paddle on the right hand side of the river. This is a left turn, but be careful, watch out for barges from behind. A canoeist always has to give way.

The river Zaan is, as you will see, an important trade river with many old factories.

After 1km, when you see a church on your right hand side, you cross the river again and portage at the fifth windmill that you pass, called “De Gekroonde Poelenburg”, into the Zaanse Schans.

You continue on the small creek straight ahead and make a right turn to

paddle along a big building - which is a college - and weave your way through the polder, that at the right time of the year will be full of waterfowl and waders, towards the American windmill. Here is an official canoe portage onto the Womer ringvaart. Here we paddle to the right. After 500m you will see a bridge and directly after this bridge you turn right onto the Braaksloot, a narrow canal with houseboats on both sides. At the end, past a bridge, the canal widens and can be a bit choppy in the wind, but only for two minutes, for we make a right turn to return onto the river Zaan. Beware of the barges and stay on the right hand side.

Now it is an easy paddle along the river. After 5km you are at the bridge where the river makes a bend to the right. From here it is 1km to the Poel sluis on your right hand side. Here you portage for the last time and find on your left hand side the place where you started. Apart from the river you will paddle through very quiet rural Dutch landscapes.

For your orientation you can use the telecom mast of Wormerveer.

The best map to use is the Falk road map of Zaanstad, obtainable from tourist office: VVV and most local fuel stations and good bookshops.

There are more touring opportunities in this area. The best map to use is ANWB watermap G Amsterdam Alkmaar.

If you like to canoe camp in this area you will find the addresses of clubs and their campsites in the canoe camping guide of the NKB. One of them is Canoe Club "De Zwetplassers" in Wormer.

BRABANTSE BIESBOSCH (The Netherlands)

Until 1970 the Biesbosch was tidal, now it is a nature reserve consisting of small polders, islands and a maze of little creeks. In 1988 beavers have been reintroduced in this, for them, original landscape.

The Brabantse Biesbosch is situated near Breda and south east of Dordrecht. It is an attractive spot for canoeists who like a quiet paddle

of 15 - 40km.

It is advisable to have a good map in this maze of waters eg the ANWB watermap K - Grote Rivieren middenblad. A more detailed map can be obtained from: Rekreatieschap Nationaal Park de Biesbosch, Biesboschweg 4, 4924 BB Drimmelen.

In Drimmelen is a campsite "Drima" from where you have easy access to the Amer. From the Amer you paddle into the Biesbosch. There are canoes for hire. The contact address for the campsite is: Camping Drima, Biesboschweg 8, 4920 AB, Made. Tel 01031 1626 5795. Campsite "Drima" in Drimmelen lies on the Amer between km 253-254.

Mind: The Amer can be busy, wind and washes from barges can cause big waves. It is advisable to have buoyancy for yourself and for your boat. The river is less busy on Sundays. The distances are indicated by km signs on the river banks.

If you would like to canoe camp, there is a small campsite in the Gat van de Kerk sloot, between km 256-257 of the Amer (one night only). Address to contact: National Park De Biesbosch, Postbus 84, 4920 AB, Made. Tel 01031 1626 2233. Directions Drimmelen: Take the A27 to Raamskonkveer direction Made.

The NKB organises a three-day event at Whitsun (including Whit Monday) from Rekreatie Park "De Kuren polder", Hank. This is adjacent to the east side of the Biesbosch.

WEERRIBBEN AND THE WIEDEN (The Netherlands)

This is in the province of Overijssel west of Meppel.

In these two reedland areas is the Weerribben a very quiet place and most suitable for a family paddle. The reeds will protect you from the wind.

In the north, Ossenzijl has a visitors centre and campsite, but if you want to paddle in both areas, Blokzijl is the best place to camp. The site is situated in between the Weerribben and the Wieden. It is also suitable for groups, but booking is required.

The Wieden has also quiet reedlands near Dwarsgracht and Beltschutsloot. Here you can find typical water villages, farmsteads with thatched roofs and low bridges.

The Belter and Beulakker wiede are small lakes on which the wind can blow up, but they can be avoided.

The whole area is excellent for long distance paddles. The canals can however be busy at weekends during the summer season.

Very nice is a paddle through Giethoorn, the Venice of the North, best to be visited by canoe.

Giethoorn is famous amongst paddlers for its pancakes; up to 32 varieties. During the summer season Giethoorn is best avoided because of exhaust fumes and hired boats.

Campsites:

Ossenzijl: "De Kluft", Hoogeweg 26, 8376 EM, Ossenzijl. Tel 01031 05617 367/370.

Blokzijl: "Tussen de Diepen", Duiningerveerweg 1a, 8356 VZ, Blokzijl. Tel 01031 05272 565/406.

There is the possibility to hire canoes. The use of a good waterways map is essential in this area eg watermap C of the ANWB. In the tourist offices you can also find good canoeing information.

SPAIN

MINO (Spain)

The Mino has its source to the north of Lugo in the northwestern corner of Spain. The river is some 340km long. The lower length forms the boundary between Spain and Portugal, the last 40km being suitable for larger craft, with the final destination being the Atlantic. It rises in the hills that are generally well supplied with rain but does get low in the summer. However it is substantially controlled with weirs and substantial dams and is likely to be canoeable throughout the year.

The river is canoeable from Meira, some 13km above Lugo, and possibly higher when there is sufficient water.

There are occasional rapids grade 2 and 3 and long stretches without any interruptions.

The countryside is wooded, hilly and cultivated with almost no industrial problems beyond the dams themselves. Pleasant rather than spectacular.

The majority of the weirs require portaging and all the dams but some weirs may be shot subject to inspection.

From the point where the river becomes the border with Portugal there are numerous grade 2 stretches almost as far as the formal customs post at Salvatierra de Mino. Shortly below here the river becomes tidal and opens out after Tuy to the estuary.

Roads are never far away and there is adequate access at bridges etc.

Towns: Lugo, Orense, Tuy.

There are numerous Roman relics in the region.

Guide: Rutas Deportivas, Conoce el Mino, published by the Ministerio de Cultura.

GUADALQUIVIR (Spain)

Here is the 560km river serving the great architectural and historic cities of Córdoba and Seville in the south of Spain and discharging into the Atlantic. The area is generally dry and the river suffers from very low water in the summer months.

Canoeing is possible from Torre del Vinagre with a series of small rapids in the 2km to the lake Tranco de Beas. This area is the Cazorla reserve with numerous interesting plants and geological features.

From the bottom of the reservoir at Tranco to Chincolla the levels are affected by the dam releases between 1100 and 1600 each day. This reaches grade VI and should only be paddled by skilled paddlers with local knowledge. From Chincolla to Mogon the river grade drops to 3-4 with a number of essential portages which require careful inspection.

Mogon is probably the starting point for a tour as down river there is little difficulty but numerous portages, generally at weirs. There is fast water to Solana de Torralba and then it settles down to Audujar which is a small town with most services.

Between Audujar and Villa del Rio there is a short section of grade IV water. Below here there are no special difficulties but some stretches may be very shallow in summer. From Córdoba the river is slow and meanders through plains and is less attractive. The last weir is at Alcaba del Rio about 3km above Seville.

Below Seville shipping may be encountered creating waves up to 1m high.

Roads are never far away.

Guide: Rutas Deportivas, Conoce el Guadalquivir, published by the Ministerio de Cultura.

DUERO (Spain)

The Duero (Douro in Portugal) drains the largest hydraulic basin in the heartlands of the north west of the country. Something over 800km running through Spain and then a further 160km through Portugal to the Atlantic at Oporto.

The Duero now has its origins in the reservoir at Cuerda del Pozo. The river appears to be canoeable from here but the guide starts at Soria. The river is weir and dam controlled which provides for long stretches of flat water, but the higher stretches do get low in late summer.

This is a river enjoying easy paddling, a variety of scenery from tree lined banks and green countryside to bleak steep hillsides. The water is equally varied with dams, weirs and some rapids. Generally wild countryside and small villages providing a feeling of remoteness. The last 100km before entering Portugal near Barca d'Alva is a steep valley with water levels controlled by dams.

Once inside Portugal the engineers have had a field day creating extended navigable lakes from the border almost to the tidal limits. They have built some five dams, including the highest in Europe at Carrapatelo, between Barca d'Alva and Oporto. The upper river valley is the home of the vineyards of the grapes used for producing port wine. The whole valley is lined with terraces of vineyards up the hillsides producing vinho verde and the ros, Mateus.

Roads are never too far away but their location should perhaps be noted for each day as access is not generally easy.

Guide: Rutas Deportivas, Conoce el Duero, published by the Ministerio de Cultura.

Portugese length is covered by the Michelin tourist guide to Portugal in English.

TAGUS (TAJO) (Spain)

The Tagus rises to the east of Guadalajara and runs for some 600 miles to the Atlantic at Lisbon. See Portuguese entry for this section.

The upper section of the river from Aranjuez, thirty miles from Madrid and once the head of navigation, through Toledo to the Valdecañas lake to the south of Navalморal de la Mata has at least two dams and is now often shallow.

Below the lake the levels are controlled by the four large dams which form long lakes of flat water in the harsh, hot and isolated region of Extremadura. Paddling here will require carrying supplies and organising support access very carefully. Only Alcantara is beside the river. Torreon el Rubio, Serradilla, Talavan, Garrovillas, Acehuche and Cedillo are a few miles from the river. Sections below the dams may be dry or when the dams are running may provide some excitement but paddlers should exercise care. The main tree growth will be cork and the area is rich in wildlife.

BELGIUM

SEMOIS (SEMOY) (Belgium)

The Semois flows along a deep and winding wooded valley with little or no industrial development in the southern Belgian Ardennes parallel to the French border, the last 20km to its confluence with the Meuse at Montherm, being in France.

The upper part from near Tintigny, west of Arlon, to Bouillon (97km) is practicable in spring and early summer, unless the level is low. Grade 1. There are 11 weirs, mostly ruined, including one that must be portaged, and a good deal of bump and scrape. Caution if in spate.

From Bouillon to the Meuse (68km) practicable all the year. Very little current for most of the way, but the scenery remains striking. 5 weirs, of

which two, between Bohan and Montherm, in the last 25km, must be portaged. One of these, below Tournavaux at the “Forges de Phades” may involve an 800metre portage.

There are many organised campsites, which in holiday periods are likely to be crowded. The principal landscape features along the valley are marked on the Michelin map. Further details in tourist guides.

Below the confluence the Meuse can be followed through good Ardennes scenery through Givet into Belgium, portaging at the locks.

Guide: Guide to Ardennes Rivers (G. Haesendonck) in French, German, or Dutch

Maps: Ardennes River Map (G. Haesendonck). Diagrammatic; marks features relevant to canoeing. Text repeated in all three languages.

(Michelin 241 or Belgium 4)

LESSE (Belgian Ardennes).

This popular and pretty river is navigable for 71km and offers three different sections. The upper sections are only practical in winter and after rain. The lower river is satisfactory all the year.

The high Lesse 8.5km from the bridge at Maissin to the bridge at Barbouillons is grade 2/3 normally but 3/4 in high water and requires great care.

The middle Lesse 17km continues to Belvaux. Grade 1+ to Neupont through a lovely wooded section. Below Neupont grade 1/2 but increases to grade 3 in places in high water. 1km below Belvaux there is a grade 3 rapid (grade 4 in high water) known as the Sautdu Butoir. It is essential to land just below it. Although you can continue with care as far as the cave entrance where the whole river goes underground (the caves are worth a visit). There is nor road access there (Gouffre de Belvaux). Portage to Ham.

The lower Lesse starts below the caves at Han, 45km to Anseremme where it joins the Maas (Meuse) grade 1+. This section is described as “pastorale” and passes the romantic chateaus of Ciergnon and Walzin and through the Furfooz Natural Park.

Camping is available in the valley.

Map: Michelin No 4.

OURTHE (Belgian Ardennes).

The hilly and well-wooded area of the Ardennes places the river in an attractive backdrop throughout. One of the most beautiful Ardennes rivers.

The first upper section of the Ourthe (Orientale) from Moulin de Bistain to Houffalize is 9km up to grade 2, then a further 17km to the dam at Nisramont with some grade 2 sections dropping to the reservoir above the dam. This tributary depends on adequate water levels (74cms on the gauge on the right side of the bridge at the dam) and has some difficulties and is not recommended for beginners.

The second upper section of the Ourthe (Occidentale) is navigable from Moiricy for 37km to the dam at Nisramont, is grade 1/2 depending on levels, and is suitable for beginners (74cms on the gauge at Nisramont bridge is recommended). The best section is the first 11km to Lavacherie but this is narrow and difficult for beginners.

The ideal start for a tour is however below the dam, left bank, at Nisramont with 130km of gentle flowing water to its confluence with the Meuse at Liège. Canoeable all the year. The most picturesque section is Nisramont-Mabage-La Roche 22km. In dry summers it can be shallow above Mabage. Do not attempt to shoot the first weir at La Roche, portage left up steps near bridge. This is grade 1 with some small rapids but will increase to grade 3 in flood. If only making a short trip it is recommended to continue to Barvaux at least, a further 50km.

The river continues as grade 1 in attractive countryside especially past

Sy. Weirs below Comblain, following junction with the Amblève, can usually be shot after inspection but should be treated with care especially in high water when they can become dangerous.

There are a number of campsites all the way down the valley.

Visit La Roche, Hotton and Durbuy en route.

Map: Michelin No. 241.

LUXEMBOURG

SÛRE (SAUER) (Luxembourg)

The Sûre (German Sauer) flows down a deep picturesque wooded valley winding through the Luxembourg Ardennes to Ettelbruck, and then along a more open attractive valley to the Moselle at Wasserbillig.

The highest part does not carry enough water except in the early part of the year, and is interrupted by a hydroelectric dam above Esch. Below this the first few miles depend on the volume released from the dam, but after the mouth of the tributary Wiltz at Goebelsmuhle there is usually enough water up to early summer. In the 20km from here to Ettelbruck - Grade 1 (2 in spate) - there are about four weirs, three of which may be shootable (depends on water level) and one near Erpeldange must be portaged. There are a number of camp sites in the valley. The area is so attractive that even if water levels are too low a stay of two or three days without canoeing is enjoyable.

From Ettelbruck past Diekirch and Wallendorf to Echternach (35km) the river (grade 1) flows with a good current past attractive villages and small towns, with campsites at intervals on both banks. The confluence of the Our at Wallendorf adds to the volume of flow. From here the left bank is German. The weirs are mostly shootable. After Echternach the river continues similarly for another 30km until it enters the Moselle at Wasserbillig, except for the loop following the hydroelectric dam at the

impounded stretch at Ralingen. In the loop eastward between Ralingen and Wintersdorf where the diverted water returns, there are 5 weirs that have to be portaged. The alternative is a fairly long portage by road from Rosport to opposite Wintersdorf.

The trip can be continued along the Moselle for 10km to Trier, where the classic holiday paddle down the Moselle starts.

Map: Canoe map: Kanusportkarte Eifel und Umgebung (DKV)

Michelin Belgium 241

Maps of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

PORTUGAL

TAGUS (TEJO) (Portugal)

The Tagus has its source in the heart of Spain. The upper reaches are canoeable but have frequent dams and outline details are included with the Spanish entries.

The river is clean enough for swimming above Santarem with the exception of local pollution that can be observed. In summer the temperatures can be very hot and care is needed to avoid sunburn and dehydration. There are no river side camp sites. This is probably the best starting point.

0 Vila Velha de Rodao. Launch right bank above the bridge. Narrow road down from village. River cuts through the Serra da Nisa. Deep water through olive treed steep winding valley. Scenery harsh.

18km Fratel dam. Land left at slipway and then long portage across dam. Launch right down rough path into pool and then portage into main river, either into or below short grade 2 rapid. Further small rapids to Belver.

34km Belver town on top of hill right after road bridge.

- 38km Belver dam. Land right and portage past electricity generating installations and down rough path to river. Below dam the river, after a rocky start, begins to open out with some grade 1 and 2 rapids. Rapids on this river will change in winter or at high water levels when water is coming over the dams.
- 44km Alvega.
- 59km Rossio left bank landing at slipway between bridges. Abrantes on top of hill on right bank. The valley is now opening up with more trees and more gentle scenery. The river is shallow with sand banks.
- 74km Constancia on right bank. Attractive town to visit. River Zezere joins.
- 79km Almourel castle on island.
- 95km Chamusca on left bank some way back from the river is a pleasant town.
- 119km Santarem on right bank. The river basin is wide and open from here with the river following a narrow meandering course often close to the pleasant treed banks. The area is a fertile and well watered plain.
- 138km Valada on the right bank. The nominal head of the tideway. Tide times must be considered from here to Lisbon. 148km Salvaterra de Magos up creek on left.
- 170km Vila Franca de Xira on right. From here the north bank is heavily industrialised. The south bank is mainly a nature reserve with mud banks exposed at low water. Landing is possible on the right bank which has road access, probably at the boating centre about 1km below the bridge.
- 175km The river opens out into the Tagus basin which is wide and can be very exposed. Very large ships use the estuary as well as numerous ferries and create considerable waves.

South bank

192km Alcochete is a possible landing but a long muddy portage at low water. The mud includes mussel shells which can cut unprotected feet.

210km Seixal.

215km Cacilhas point just beyond the dry docks can be very choppy before approaching the Tagus road bridge.

North bank

200km Centre of Lisbon on the right bank. Tagus road bridge. Landing places are readily available with the Portuguese national canoeing club (CRACK) base in the Doca de Santo Amaro immediately above the bridge.

Further 5km to river mouth.

A careful party in good weather can continue along the north bank following the beaches for about 15km to Cascais but going further is not recommended.

This section is used for the Maratona de Tejo tour, one of the annual Portuguese tours on different rivers, which provide an excellent opportunity to paddle the rivers in good company. If attending this tour and borrowing a canoe then there is a railway line up the river valley to Vila Velha de Rodao and rail access is easy from Lisbon.

DOURO (Portugal)
See Duero (Spain).

ITALY

LAKE GARDA (Italy)

This beautiful lake is set against a backdrop of mountains, and is 52km long and a maximum 17km wide. The island of Garda is the only outstanding island.

The southeastern slopes are covered with vineyards whilst orange, lemon, laurel and cyprus trees abound. The northern end includes spectacular cliffs of several hundred metres.

Changes of wind are frequent and care is needed before going out or crossing the lake. A morning northerly wind can change, mid morning, to one from the south east or south west. The lake can become very rough. There are also some currents.

A road goes almost the whole way round so access is easy.

There are numerous attractive lakeside towns and excellent walking in the surrounding hills.

FRANCE

The FFCK strip map guides and other river guides mentioned in this part are marketed by Editions La Pirogue, Service Documentation, 403 rue de Poissy, 78070 Villennes sur Seine, France. Tel: 010-33-1-39 75 89 45. (This address is in an outer suburb of Paris near Poissy, near an exit from the A13 autoroute).

They will supply on request a combined price list and order form (send an international reply coupon with the request). The quoted price is post free. Payment must be sent with the order. They accept Eurocheques.

LE LOIR (France)

This river is controlled by weirs for some way above Chateaudun and is large enough to suggest that paddling would be practical however Vendôme is the highest starting point recommended in the summer.

The usual starting point is below La Chartre-sur-le-Loir at which point the river is closed off by a factory with private ground on both sides making portage impractical. Launching is however possible from a small lane off the D305 on the outskirts of the town about 200 metres beyond the factory.

The weirs from here to La Flèche can be portaged direct at summer levels. The weirs are generally sloping concrete on the downstream side and may be slippery. The control gates should be avoided especially the rebuilt one above Le Lude which is lethal.

From La Chartre launch point to the bridge at Le Port Gaulier has a good flow and includes some interesting currents setting under trees but is otherwise no problem. From here the river is fully controlled by weirs, the first below the N138 road bridge at Le Château-du-Loir, to the junction with the Sarthe.

The very long weir below La Gravelle (between Vaas and Le Lude) should be portaged over the left bank to below the weir pool. The weir below the bridge at Luchè-Pring, (restaurant/bar right bank before bridge) is portaged from the right hand end of the weir round into the pool.

At La Flèche there is a small channel close to the left bank, to the left of an island building, which shoots easily into the pool below the weir. The only portage here is up the steps below the house on the island beside this shoot. Landing can be made using a small side stream between the two bridges on the right bank into the park.

The river from La Chartre down to Le Lude (about 45km) is very attractive and is well worth paddling but below Le Lude the scenery becomes more open. Le Lude to La Flèche is about 26km with a further stretch

to the Sarthe.

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000 numbers 25 and 26. Michelin 232.

The following towns and tourist attractions merit visits:

The chateau at Le Lude including the Son et Lumière show.

La Flèche

CREUSE (France).

The upper river is subject to changing water levels, is most suitable in the winter months and has some major dams. Whilst the retained lakes provide good water there may be a shortage of water below some of the dams. A suitable start could be made at St Gaultier below Argenton for a pleasant journey of 94km grade 1/2 to the junction with the Vienne.

Map: Michelin 68.

GARTEMPE (France).

From Le Bancheureau (south of Montmorillon) there is some 65km grade 1, subject to sufficient water, to its confluence with the Creuse.

Map: Michelin 68.

DORDOGNE (France)

This river has been described as “the Wye in the sun” and must be one of the best touring rivers in Europe.

The Dordogne rises high in the Auvergne near La Bourboule and eventually joins the Gironde.

The upper-most reaches and tributaries are small wild rivers during the early spring discharging into some 100km of dam controlled lakes. These lakes and their inter-connecting river lengths are set in attractive valleys but portages around the dams are often difficult and lengthy.

The water gauge above the bridge and opposite the quay at Argentat - below 0.5m very low, some small rapids to Carennac - above 1.5 m high flow, care needed

The river from Argentat to Lalinde is amongst the classics for touring paddlers covering 173km. The river above Beaulieu has a number of Grade 1/2 rapids and one Grade 3 on the right channel at Le Malpas, (the left hand channel is straightforward) and then settles into its tranquil flow through rural scenery and small attractive towns and villages.

The unshootable weir at Beaulieu can usually be avoided if there is sufficient water by taking the left hand channel next to the leisure complex a short way above the weir; alternatively, land on the left of the weir itself, walk along the weir footbridge and launch left off the island at the right hand end. The weir above Carennac can usually be shot but inspect, or portage the island.

In the early part of the year the flow can be substantial but in summer it is a gentle river and, whilst the levels will drop, passage is rarely difficult.

Access is readily available at almost all the bridges and towns. Camp sites are numerous throughout the valley.

Whilst the usual stopping point is at the dam above Lalinde the river can be continued down to the sea by those with time although it is above this point that the river is at its best.

Maps: Upper reaches Cartes IGN Série Verte 1:100000 number 49, main section number 48. Michelin 75 (covers Argentat to the Gironde).

The following towns and tourist attractions merit visits:

Carennac Rocamadour Sarlat Domme and its caves Souillac Peche Merle caves Prehistoric caves in the Vézère valley near Limeuil.

TARN (France)

Here we have a sporting river for the recreational paddler who does not aspire to the wild water. The Tarn has its source on Mont Lozère in the Cevennes and its first 24km include water up to grade 5, which is technically difficult and has restricted access.

Below Florac the river offers 62km of magnificent grade 2 and occasional 3 to Le Rozier, set in the Tarn gorge. The river is followed quite closely by the road. This section should be paddled early in the year as in dry summer weather it can be too low by July.

Launching at Florac the river starts with a number of grade 3 rapids and then at St Enimie generally settles to grade 1-2. The weir at Prades should be portaged left (or perhaps shot after inspection) but keep away from the right end where there is an underwater tunnel. The bridge at Castelbouc is low and may have to be portaged right. The weir at St Enimie is portaged left but can usually be shot subject to inspection. La Malène to the Pas de Souci includes the stretch known as Les Détroits which is a popular tourist attraction viewed from commercial punts. The Pas de Souci where the river flows underneath a large rockfall caused by a landslip, marked with a red board shortly before Les Vignes MUST be portaged right - this is a 2km portage to Les Vignes. Look out for a prominent pinnacle rock to the right of the landing point. Below Les Vignes there are a number of rapids, one being made more tricky by rough blocks in the river from road construction works.

From Le Rozier to St Rome de Tarn is another 40km of easier water and an attractive paddle. The Barrage de Saint Estève, at the start of the municipal campsite above Millau must be portaged left. It is also possible to portage through the town. Continue to St Rome where we suggest finishing as there are a number of major portages of dams downstream.

Florac to Ispagnac 10km. Ispagnac to St Enimie 18km. St Enimie to Pas de Souci 24km. Les Vignes to Le Rozier 10km. Le Rozier to Millau 20km. Millau to St Rome 23km.

Camp sites are numerous along the river.

Guide: Les Gorges du Tarn en Canoe-Kayak.

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000 numbers 57 and 58. Michelin No 80.

Places to visit: The gorge towns themselves.

Aven Armand caves.

Point Sublime for views of the gorge.

Montpellier-le-Vieux for rock formations and views.

LOT (France)

The Lot rises in the Montagne du Goulet in the Massif Central and then runs for 480km to its confluence with the Garonne.

The upper reaches are generally only suitable before the end of May with general grades 2/3 and some 4/5 over a distance of 135km.

It is possible to launch below the Golinac dam (check when the release time is for that day) for a grade 2 fast fun ride down the 5km to Entraygues. Land left before the first bridge as there is a footbridge which floods and will trap the careless canoeist just below.

Alternately start at Entraygues below the footbridge. The river is immediately joined by the Truyère, which if in flood will swell the river below considerably and make the weirs more dangerous. For the best enjoyment of the next stretch ride the dam release if possible as this will make the rapid at the confluence with La Daz, 7km down, a memorable ride. A big wave rapid creating a helter skelter ride but throwing you out at the bottom if you make a mistake and an eddy allowing a return upstream for a second ride.

From here down beware of the weirs, inspect and portage if necessary. Entraygues to Port d'Agrès, where navigation locks formerly started, is 35km of grade 1 river in a pleasant valley. Port d'Agrès to Cahors is

around a further 120km with some 35 portages and then a further 157km with 41 portages to the Garonne.

A long placid river with many portages but passing through pleasant country and far south enough to be warm and sunny! There are no large towns, Cahors and Capdenac being the largest, but numerous small villages.

Campsites are numerous.

Road access is generally easy throughout the valley.

Guide: La Descente du Lot. (2 separate strip maps overlapping between Vieille Ville and Capdenac cover the river down to Aiguillon)

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000 numbers 56, 57 and 58. Michelin No 235.

Places to visit: Cahors with its Pont Valentré St Cirq Lapopie
Pêche Merle caves, The side valley of the Célé

DURANCE (France)

Alpine glaciers feed this river and snowmelt carries a large volume of water, and runs fast and cold.

The highest possible access in summer is at Argentière-la-Bessée (N94), and there are plenty of other access points down to Embrun.

From Argentière to Roche de Rame the river is grade 2 (5km), then grade 1 and 2 to St Clément (13km), however the grade is deceptive and less experienced paddlers are advised to consider a commercial raft trip. After this the water gets more difficult, with the famous Rabioux rapid, grade 3 or 4. (Road access from Châteauroux). From here there is a series of grade 3 rapids down to Embrun and into the Lac de Serre Ponçon. (The rafters describe "good surfing waves"). The lake is enormous, formed by a dam, and you can enjoy wind-surfing, sailing, trip boats, pedalos, swimming and all beach activities.

Rafting is very popular on the Durance, from Argentière (30km) or St Clément (17km) to Embrun - great fun.

The river valley is open, with a backdrop of mountains - there are ski resorts up there. There is excellent walking and climbing in the Parc National des Ecrins (visit the glaciers, Noir et Blanc, at Pelvoux if you are fit); and the Parc Natural Régional du Queyras. Visit Vauban forts at Mont Dauphin and Briançon; ride a cable car up an Alp. Views are breathtaking.

There are several campsites. An excellent one is La Cabane at St Crépin, a village that boasts a really excellent pizza restaurant. From here too you can watch gliders taking off and landing from the small airfield.

Points to note: this is not a swimming river - the cold water temperature contrasts sharply with air temperatures that can be over 30 degrees C.

The river from La Rabioux down to Embrun should not be attempted by people without white water experience. The river is not technically difficult, but the strength of flow might be daunting for novices.

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000 number 54 and Série Bleu numbers 3537 and 3538. Michelin No 77.

HÉRAULT (France)

L'Hérault river rises near Mont Aigoual in the Cevennes National Park and flows south to the Mediterranean at Agde.

Report on the section between Ganges and St Guilhem le Désert during August.

At the town of Laroque (2km downstream from Ganges) on the D586, one can gain access to the river on its left bank just above a small car park where steps descend to the flat water above a long weir. Most of the water descends a small chute, but debris may encourage you to

slide or walk down the gently sloping and mostly dry weir face. After a quarter of a mile the river descends on the right over a boulder strewn fall of about five feet in height. It is easily portaged on the left of the flow if you are concerned about a glass fibre boat. There is a further small fall navigable by plastic boats just before St Bauzille de Putois. Immediately above the bridge at St Bauzille on the left bank there is newly built and extensive car park with access to the water. Under the bridge there is a shingle and boulder rapid extending about 50yds. The descent is easy but shallow. After about 4km there is a natural boulder weir on the left, some fifteen feet high, in which it may be possible to descend without portaging. The river continues for at least another five hundred yards, but with only a few inches of water before descending a bedrock fall that can easily be portaged. As the river continues, the sides of the gorge approach making a very scenic paddle. Near Brissac there is a barrage which can be portaged on the left. On the right of the barrage there is a restaurant and access to the road (D4). As the river continues there are occasional easy gravel and stone rapids. For half a mile above the bridge at St Etienne d'Issensac the river is constricted by rocky banks on the left causing the river to increase speed. There is easy egress up the slope above these rocks to the road (D4). There is an easy paddle along 6km of dammed up water to the 18m high barrage at Embougette (Moulin Bertrand). There is egress again (very steep) on the right, where the D122 bridge crosses the river below the village of Causse de la Selle. The river descends now with little incident to a barrage where the road (D4) rejoins the river having descended a steep and narrow rocky gorge. Stop here. Do not continue to the barrage de Cabrier which has not been completed and is not marked on the map. It has a dangerous tunnel and the difficult canyon of St Guilhem beyond it. D4 follows the river from the stopping point to St Guilhem.

Distances (approx): Laroque to St Etienne 13km.
St Etienne to the stopping point D4 10km.

Camping: There are sites at St Bauzille de Putois, at the barrage at Brissac and at St Etienne d'Issensac.

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000

number 65. Michelin No 83.

Towns and tourist attractions:

Grottes des Demoiselles, the town of St Martin de Londres, Chateau de Londres, the village of St Guilhem le Désert, Grottes de Clamouse, the ancient town of Pézenas, Cirque de Navacelles, Lac du Salagou, Cirque de Mourêze and prehistoric camp.

CANAL DU MIDI (France)

Starting at Agde where it runs into the Bassins de Thau and the Mediteranean, the three way lock there joining the Hérault to both legs of the canal is worth studying. The next point of interest is the crossing of the river Libron at river level; to deal with floods a system of running gates and locks is arranged to shut half the river at a time to prevent silt coming in. The first 20km are a bit flat and dreary, but gets interesting as you approach Béziers. This quite something, and from then on the scenery is always good; far views of the Pyrenees to the south and Montagne Noire northwards. The Fontseranes flight at Béziers is quite something, climbing over 50 feet in the seven lock staircase with a further two of 20 feet and 15 feet preceding is on the near side of the aqueduct over the river Orb. (There should now be a water slope for the commercials, a concrete slope with a mighty bulldozer type machine spanning the canal pushing a huge blade up the slope with the boat on the water in front). The canal used to cross the Orb at river level and then rise in another three locks (they are still there and a huge climb) but they lost so many boats in the floods, and had the weirs torn away, and again silting up that it got changed and the aqueduct first mooted by Vauban in 1739 was finally built in 1854. Remember the canal was built in 1667-81 originally, engineered by Pierre Paul Riquet a salt tax collector. He got his original financing from Colbert, chief minister to Louis XIV the Sun King but had to finish it using his own fortune. Unfortunately he died with a few kilometres to go but his son saw it through.

The Malpas tunnel is next and again was not just a simple hole but has a drainage shaft connecting it with the 13th C drainage tunnel (dug by the monks to drain the Etang de Montardy into the Etangs de Poiles and Capestang) that lies 51 feet below. The circular agricultural system resulting really has to be seen, as does the ancient Iberian town of Enserune on the ridge dating from the 5th C BC. The Roman road also crosses the ridge here and the modern railway runs through a tunnel beneath the canal; what a long period of history is available for us there.

It is now 47km to the next lock at Argent Minervois (this is Minervois wine country) but the banks are lined with lime and conifer trees, which were grown in their own nurseries. This section was apparently known as the Colon because of its twists and turns. Another 45km and 20 locks to the Fresquel locks (climb 31 feet) and the Vauban aqueduct and then the rebuilt fortified City of Carcassonne, which must be visited, but preferably in the evening.

The same sort of scenery for 40km and 24 locks brings you to Castelnaudary and after climbing the four St Roche locks you enter the Bassin; (length 1km with almost the same breadth and all dug by hand) it looks calm but beware if the wind is blowing, and it nearly always is, it literally howls through the town bridge and kicks up quite a horrendous chop. Castelnaudary itself is a very pretty town and is a Foreign Legion centre. There are showers and toilets at the Blue Line Cruisers Club.

11km and 8 locks bring you to the Ecluse de la Méditerranée, and the summit pound through le Ségala to the Col de Naurouze; where the water is fed in from the Montagne Noire at St Ferréol some 40km away. There are two plaques and an obelisque to Riquet at Naurouze and the altitude is 633 feet. The designing and building of the water supply which was done before the canal itself, is a story of its own; but if possible a visit should be made to St Ferréol to see the dam, underground connecting river and huge fountains all from the 1660. The dam itself was the greatest civil engineering feat of its day, and holds back 180 million gallons has never had to have any major maintenance in 300 years, and the reservoir is self scouring. Some seven rivers are joined to supply the St Ferréol with water, and the two other later reservoirs

have been built above; the Lampy in 1777-81 and Les Cammazes in 1956.

On from the summit and downhill from the Ecluse D'Emborrel is 26km to Montgiscard and a further 26km to Toulouse. The scenery is much the same with the canal still tree lined and pleasant in the hot southern sun. The trees being very important allowing paddling to be done in the shade.

Mandatory reading before embarking on the Canal du Midi is "From Sea to Sea" by L.C.T.Rolt published by Allen Lane in 1973 obtainable through the libraries.

The Carte Guide Navigation Fluviale Map is obtainable from Stanfords in London. Michelin 235, 240.

FRENCH CANALS

Apart from the Canal du Midi detailed above there is a major network of canals across France and, in fact, the whole of Europe.

Within France however the following are considered particularly attractive:

Nivernais (Canal du) centered on Clamecy where it parallels the river Yonne. The scenery is pastoral and wooded. One way there is some 30km to Maily la Ville and in the other direction 60km over the summit to Châtillon en Bazois towards Decize. The summit tunnel has hand controlled traffic lights to allow safe passage and then you come to the Etang du Baye separated from the canal by a concrete retaining wall. There are water sports on the Etang. Map:

Michelin 238.

Bourgogne (Canal du) centred on Pouilly en Auxois. Pleasant scenery throughout with some 50km north towards Montbard and the other way to Plombierre just outside Dijon. The summit tunnel has a cable tug for passage.

Maps: Michelin 243.

ORB (France)

The river Orb rises in the Causses du Larzac, runs south as a small stream and bends westward along the plain where the water is deeper, but the river meanders until it reaches the Moulin de Tarassac.

Report for the river Orb where it passes through the Upper Languedoc National Park between Tarassac and Cessenon in August. Its feasibility depends on the releases from the Arène dam and the flow in the tributary Jaur at Tarassac.

Here the river enters a gorge and flows south to Béziers and the sea. In August there has been sufficient water depth to paddle. There is a car park above the old mill on the right bank off the D908. At the mill at Tarassac, entry to the water above a rocky rapid is easy, but novices would be advised to portage down on the left as the route through the boulders may not be clear. (Or launch left bank 200m below the confluence with the Jaur, on the left bank 1km below Tarassac bridge which is 0.5km below the mill and reached by a tarred path through vines from the road to the Tarassac municipal camp site at Mons la Trivalle) The river continues with several rocky rapids where the route can be carefully picked whilst paddling. There is the occasional very rapid flow at the end of a rapid which will produce some excitement. There is access to the water at the bridge at Ceps. At Roquebrun access to the water is on the left at the end of a long weir. The weir is too dry to shoot. Between Roquebrun and Cessenon the river provides the same variety, but at the Electricity station there is a weir to portage followed by two hundred yards of narrow rocky stream almost too bumpy to be

worth getting into a boat. At the end of the stream the water enters a two foot wide zig-zag over a five foot fall with a bit of rock in the middle at the bottom. An exciting plunge with a plastic boat, but anything else ought to portage over the rock to the left. The access at Cessenon is by the camp site on the left just before the bridge in town. The road D14 follows the valley from Tarassac to Cessenon.

Distances (approx): Tarassac to Ceps 9km
Ceps to Cessenon 14km

Camping: There are many camp sites between Bédarieux and Tarassac. We recommend a site on the left bank across the bridge from Le Poujol sur Orb. There are camp sites at Tarassac (Mons la Trivalle) and at Cessenon.

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000 number 65. Michelin No 83.

Towns and tourist attractions: The town of Lamalou les Bains, a walk up the Gorges d'Héric, the mountains of L'Espinouse, Lac de la Ravière, Lac du Salagou, Cirque de Mourèze and prehistoric camp.

ARDECHE (France)

The river Ardèche rises in the Forêt de Mazan, flows easterly to Aubenas, then southerly to Ruoms where it turns south-easterly to flow through its gorge on the way to the river Rhone. This entry covers the majestic paddle through the famous gorge from Vallon Pont-D'Arc to St Martin d'Ardèche. There is however at least a further 30km of grade 2 river above Vallon during the spring time. During the spring and autumn the river can run much higher creating more, and larger, rapids until it actually washes out the rapids and becomes a very difficult flood. The river is in spate when the gauge at Vallon-Salavas bridge is 1m plus.

This river flows through a most stunning, magnificent and spectacular

gorge. For all practical purposes it is not possible for a car to reach the water's edge between Vallon and Sauze (3km short of St Martin). The road runs a thousand feet above the water at the gorge's rim. There are a few steep tracks down in places on the left side and only one from the FFCK base camp on the right. Having committed yourself to this 27km journey to Sauze you will encounter a few isolated rapids. Each of these can be avoided by portaging during summer water levels. The rapids are all easily dealt with at normal summer levels by an average tourer (but beware of flash floods). Not more than grade 2 in our experience. There are shingle banks and overhanging trees for shade in plentiful supply for meal breaks and rests. The only danger is from the numerous open canoes on hire to novices!

Camping: Lots of camping at Vallon and back up the valley towards Aubenas, but it is booked up very early in the season. None in the gorge itself.

Maps: Cartes IGN (Institut Géographique National) Série Verte 1:100000 number 59. Michelin 245.

Canoe guides to the gorge itself are readily available at Vallon and many campsites.

Reach Vallon from the Rhone valley by the D4 at Bourg St Andéol.

Towns and tourist attractions: Vallon, the arch at Pont D'Arc, the chateau at Labastide de Virac, the caves at Aven d'Orgnac.

ALLIER (France)

This is the longest tributary of Loire, having its source in the Cevennes, and flowing north for 410km, about 360km of which are canoeable. It can be classified geographically into three parts: first, above Prades, a mountain river through volcanic gorges, with almost continuous wild water; second, a longer part to Pont du Château, still

lively, with easy rapids, flowing through Auvergne farmlands in a broader valley still bordered by high hills, interspersed with narrower stretches, and good scenery, making it an enjoyable holiday touring river with towns, villages, castles etc to visit; and third, an extended paddle along placid water through lowland countryside and forest to the Loire near Nevers. The beginning of the second part is close enough to the Ardèche valley for one holiday to combine a trip on the Ardèche with a longer one on the Allier.

The popularity of watersports on the Upper Allier has led to the introduction of local bylaws and agreements designed to allow watersports to continue without damaging the superb environment. In the Département of Haute Loire, covering 120km of the Allier to a point about 18km beyond Brioude canoeing is permitted only between 10.00 and 18.30 hours throughout the year. On the 18km between Monistrol and St Arcons just upstream of Langeac canoeing is prohibited in November, December and January except for holders of the FFCK membership "licence" for competition. Rafting and other wild watersports are subject to more severe restrictions.

Launching and landing are limited to specified marked points. The access points for summer touring are Monistrol d'Allier, Prades, Ferme du Pradel, Chanteuges, Langeac, Chilhac, Lavoûte-Chilhac, Chambon de Cerzat, La Vialette, Vieille Brioude, Brioude, Auzon.

These are clearly marked by blue signs, which apply to all access and egress, not just the minibus/trailer launching pictured on the sign. If in doubt, help can be obtained from canoe hire sites. It is important that British canoeists observe these local agreements.

Part 1 - Langogne to Prades.

This part of the upper Allier in practice divides into two lengths: Langogne to Pont d'Alleyras 39km, and Monistrol to Prades 10km. In between continuity is interrupted for 14km by the Barrage de Poutès and a dry stretch beyond where the water is diverted to the generating station at Monistrol.

Even at favourable water levels the Allier gorges have continuous wild water of exacting grade 2, 3 and 4 standard, which include a few impracticable places. Above Pont d'Alleyras the natural flow of the river is most likely to be favourable in spring to the end of May or early June. In summer, even when the level is supplemented by discharges from the balancing reservoir at Naussac near Langogne the difficulties become highly technical and remain exacting. From Monistrol summer levels depend on the discharges from the power station there and are more dependable but the continuous wild water remains, and this section also is for experienced white water paddlers only, there is no road through the gorge. In spite the difficulties throughout the gorges increase considerably.

The river in the gorges is closely followed by the railway. You can see the river frequently from the train. The scenery throughout is magnificent. You can also experience this part of the river during the summer months by joining one of the rafting trips run by local commercial watersport bases. As this is not a wild water guide we give no navigational details.

Part 2 - Prades to Pont du Château.

Maps: IGN Série Verte No 50. Michelin 239 or 76,73.

Guide: "L'Allier en Canoe Kayak" FFCK - from tourist offices.

Prades to Langeac 13km, grade 2. Langeac to Pont du Château 129km, grade 2 easing to grade 1.

Gauge at Coudes bridge (near N.9 north of Issoire): scale 20 - 40 low, 40 - 80 good.

The first starting point for touring paddlers is Prades, a charming village, with beach, cafes etc and good parking by the river. There is a grade 3 rapid just below the start, which may need to be portaged by novices - inspect first. In the 13km from here through St Arcons to Langeac there are some grade 2 rapids, and a very pleasant run. At the Ile de l'Amour just above Langeac there is a weir - either portage over the weir

(inspection from the left bank) or go down a steep chute on the right. Langeac has easy access and parking on the right bank by the road bridge, and there is a riverside camp site on the left bank below the town.

After Langeac the valley opens out for a while. Further on the river enters a fairly narrow and winding ravine, with rocky spurs from time to time within the main valley, passing villages and the occasional ruined castle. The towns of Brioude and Issoire stand back from the river.

Along this stretch there are some grade 1 and 2 rapids. After about 7km is the Barrage du Chambon - either portage left, or go down the salmon ladder, also left - inspect first. After Chilhac (hill-top village on right) there is a weir - either portage left, or after inspection, shoot the weir anywhere (normal summer levels only!). On down to Lavoûte (15th century bridge). More little rapids. Beware submerged rocks just above Lavoûte. There is another weir just above St Ilpize - take passage on right, portage should not be necessary, but watch out for rocks if the water level is down.

2km further on, the weir at Vialette should be taken in the middle, but the barrage above the bridge at Vieille-Brioude must be portaged across the island between the barrage and the outfall from the factory on the left bank. After 2km there is another barrage, the Barrage de la Bageasse - portage. Above this barrage, on the left, near the campsite, a mill race diverges. This is suggested in the French guide as an alternative to the barrage portage. It avoids an unattractive section of the main river (shallows, gravel workings etc) but is often blocked by fallen trees. Near the end of the race there is a new road bridge, (D.588) Pont de Lamothe. Where the race passes through three circular tunnels. At the end of the tunnels there is a fall and rocky constrictions - beware concealed rocks in stopper waves. Portage or inspect before shooting. On the left is Brioude Canoe/Kayak Club. Shortly after the club the race rejoins the main river. To avoid this stretch boats could be taken by road from La Vialette to Pont de Lamothe.

This is a very pretty river, with plenty of campsites, eg Langeac, Chilhac

and Lavoûte. There is much to do and see besides canoeing - visit Brioude and Le Puy, famous for its volcanic pinnacles; Chilhac (cow-byre in main in main square, and a museum of local prehistory - mammoths, sabre-tooth tigers etc); Lavoûte, Langeac. Go up the gorge by train from Langeac to Langogne; see the wall paintings in many of the ancient churches in the old villages.

Beyond Brioude after opening out for a while again at Auzat the valley narrows at Orbeil. Easy rapids continue to Pont du Château. The weir at the road bridge is impracticable.

Part 3 - Pont du Château to Vichy and the Loire at Nevers.

Map: Michelin 239,238 or 73,69. Guide: L'Allier en canoe kayak (FFCK)

Pont du Château to Vichy 55km. Vichy to Moulins 60km. Moulins to the Loire 56km. Grade I except for the major hazard described below.

The river leaves the hills and flows placidly across the Limagne plain through open country and forest. The only towns are Vichy and Moulins.

About 3km below Pont du Château there is a major hazard where the river drops into a breach in the river bed produced by gravel extraction. Land well above it - portage either bank. At Bellerive (Vichy) there are several riverside camp sites. At the impracticable barrage / road bridge at the end of the Vichy regatta course there is an artificial channel and slalom course beyond it and a canoe base. At St Germain des Fossés reconnoitre the barrage beyond the railway bridge. At Moulins portage the barrage below the road bridge left. Near Apremont portage the barrage des Laurins on the right. The rapid at the railway bridge following it, and the weir at the canal aqueduct should be reconnoitred for obstructions. D.976 roadbridge beyond. At Bec d'Allier confluence with the Loire. For Nevers turn right.

CÉLÉ (France)

Use of this river is restricted by agreement to between the hours of 12 noon and 5pm as much of it is private. Public access points must be used. Nevertheless this is an attractive paddle through a deep valley with riverside cliffs, all undisturbed by time and with attractive old mills, villages and castles.

It is 67km from Viazac to Bouziès at the junction with the Lot. The best part is the 53km from Figeac to Cabrerets. The river can be paddled all the year but levels can be low in July and August. If the water gauge at Liauzu reads 1m or more this can create grade 3, otherwise grade 1 and some 2. Being a small river there is some danger from low or fallen trees and care should be taken at the weirs. Some of the weirs can be shot but all must be inspected.

The road follows the river. There are numerous camp sites.

Leisure centre at Liauzu near Cabrerets.

Maps: IGN Série Verte No 57. Michelin No 235.

Guide: FFCK guide La Descente du C.,.

AVEYRON (France)

The Aveyron lies between the Lot and the Tarn. It offers good paddling in remote countryside. The weirs must be inspected, some are shootable but some have nasty stopper waves. It is at its best before the end of June.

Villefranche de Rouergue to Monteils is 13km and is a good warm up section offering grade 1/2. The water gauge is 300m above the bridge on the right bank - good level 0.6m, high 0.9m, flood 1.5m. This is a suitable launch point. The road is never far away.

Monteils to Najac sees the start of the gorge, no road access and no rapids for 13km.

Najac to Laguépie in a further 13km with no road but rapids grade 2-3. Laguépie to Nègrepelisse is some 70km generally with road close and generally grade I with only occasional grade 2. The gorge widens out to a steep valley for this section but is still an excellent setting.

Campsites are numerous.

Maps: IGN Série Verte No 57. Michelin No 235.

Guide: Canoë Kayak dans les gorges de l'Aveyron.

AIN (France)

Formerly one of the classic French wild water rivers in the Jura region flowing through a long wooded ravine with much grade 2-4 water. Now over many scores of kilometres the central part is drowned under a chain of four hydroelectric reservoirs, which are still scenically magnificent. Their surroundings have been developed as holiday areas with camp sites, beaches and leisure facilities. Anyone looking for lake canoeing in a beautiful environment can find attractive locations for an enjoyable holiday.

There still remain about 30km of up to grade 3 water between Champagnole and upper end of the first reservoir, possible in spring. The upper part of this stretch includes the long "Jean Mathieu" rapid above the confluence of the Angillon and another grade 3 below. Below Pont du Navoy (D.471), 15km from Champagnole, the grade of difficulty eases off. It is essential to stop upstream at the bridge at Pont de Poitte (N.78). If the water level in the reservoir downstream is low there is an impracticable waterfall (Saut de la Saisse).

Below the chain of reservoirs the river is again possible from Pont d'Ain (N.75) for 30km to Port Galland (D.65), grade I-2, and the Rhone.

Map: Michelin 243 and 244.

DOUBS (France)

Flows from near Pontarlier through good scenery along the Franco-Swiss border in the Jura region then turning north west and then south west through Besançon and Dôle to the Saône. Unfortunately long stretches in the upper part in France often carry insufficient water. Beyond the Saut du Doubs, a 60 foot waterfall at the Swiss border, there is a deep gorge with too many navigational complications to describe, followed by an industrialised stretch. Finally the river is joined at Vaujourcourt near Montbéliard by the Rhine - Rhone Canal, which roughly follows the riverbed. The canalised part passes along a scenic wooded valley through Besançon for 168km to Dôle, where the canal cuts across to the Saône. The Doubs continues through less interesting country for another 66 km, grade 1, till it too joins the Saône.

Map: Michelin 243.

GAVE D'OLORON (France)

One of the few rivers in the French Pyrenees that is likely to carry the best water level in summer. Formed by the union of the Gave d'Aspe and the Gave d'Ossau at Oloron Ste Marie. Flows to Navarrenx and Sauveterre, and on to Peyrehorade after which, combined with the Gave de Pau, it joins the Adour.

Needs to be treated with respect and difficulties increase with higher water levels. All lengths have places that need inspection before being attempted, in addition to the weirs.

Oloron to Navarrenx, 26km grade 2-3, rapid at Maumour grade 4 with stoppers. About 6 weirs requiring portages. Start can be made at railway bridge below Oloron (gauge 0.60).

From Navarrenx to Sauveterre 21km grade 2-3 no portages.

Campsite. Canoe club.

From Sauveterre to Peyrehorade 29 km, grade 1-2, danger from

draglines at gravel workings.

For detail see guides: Rivières Occitanes Vol 1. Le Bassin des Gaves en Canoe-Kayak (FFCK)

Map: Michelin 234.

LOIRE (France)

Upper Loire

Between its source in the Massif Central and Roanne the Upper Loire flows through a number of ravines and gorges, most of which are now drowned by impounding dams serving hydroelectric generating stations.

The 18km wild water stretch from Arlempdes (D.54) to Pont de Chadron (D.27), south of Le Puy and a few miles east of the Allier gorge, starts through a strikingly beautiful gorge grade 3-4 with a series of four even more difficult "steps" up to 3 metres high which need to be portaged. From Goudet (D.49) Grade 3, threatened by a projected dam. The big drawback is that except in spring there is usually insufficient water because of the diversion of the flow upstream at Issarlès into the Ardèche basin. A good level is said to be 0.90 at Goudet.

There is a section, grade 2-3, 63km, from Lavoûte s/Loire (D.103) past Retournac to Aurec (D.46), south west of St Etienne. Besides a number of rapids there are about a dozen mill or other weirs, some broken. These are reported to be all in course of reconstruction, including the provision of fish passes, and need to be inspected for hazards, stoppers etc.

The gorges below here are now drowned by reservoirs.

Map: Michelin 239.

Middle and Lower Loire.

There are 500 miles of river flowing over long stretches through pleasant surroundings. Above Orleans the river flows steadily along an unspoiled course, from time to time passing pleasant towns and villages, gradually getting wider. The best stretches are from above Digoin to Decize, where the Canal du Nivernais from the Yonne at Clamecy links up. Another attractive stretch is from below Nevers to Gien. Below Orleans it is a really wide river, passing between Blois and Saumur through the heart of the chateau country. There are numerous camp sites.

It is a classic holiday touring river of the traditional kind. It is too long to do in one holiday, except by those seeking to establish a long distance paddling record. The best thing to do is to look at ordinary touring literature for the region and decide which part of the river offers easygoing paddling with plenty of side visits to interesting chateaux, old towns and villages, vineyards, etc. The left bank between Blois to beyond Amboise, along a string of islands, is especially attractive, and is close to a group of towns, villages and chateaux along the nearby valley of the tributary river Cher.

Navigation is fairly straightforward, but there are some important points to remember. Although the Loire at Roanne is still more than 910 feet above sea level, its 640km course to the upper tidal limit near Ancenis means that its average gradient is less than 50cm per km. It has never been controlled by locks and there are very few weirs. For the most part it flows steadily along over beds of gravel of varying size or of sand. Caution is needed at many bridges, where there is often a drop in the river bed and arches may be blocked by debris. In places the river divides into many channels which vary from year to year; often it may not be possible to judge which channels carry enough depth of water and which start promisingly but lead to shallows and stranding. In some places the sand may be too soft to stand on, and may even resemble quicksand.

Weirs should be inspected. Those at nuclear power stations should be portaged on account of stoppers. Keep clear of draglines collecting

gravel from the riverbed.

Maps: Michelin 238 and 232.

LOUE (France)

Tributary of the Doubs in the French Jura region. Emerges in full flow from a cave into a magnificent limestone valley overlooked by the old main road from Besançon to Pontarlier (now D.67). Close to the resurgence there is a large dam and power station. The highest canoeable point is about 1km above the bridge at the village of Mouthier. But between here and Lods (pronounced LO) there is a succession of oblique weirs, quite close together, only some of which may be shootable. The weirs are difficult and have stoppers with backtow except at low water levels. For a tour it is inadvisable to start above Lods, where there is a camp site across the bridge at the former station.

The best part of the river is private water and access between Mouthier and the D.101 bridge near Rurey is governed by official regulations. Details from the local syndicats d'initiative. Access only at authorised points, marked by notice boards. In the fishing season (March to September) canoeing is prohibited between 10 April and 10 May, and also on Tuesdays and certain specified days. On permitted days it is allowed between 10.00 and 18.00, and a sticker must be obtained from the local syndicat d'initiative. Outside the fishing season canoeing is allowed on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

The authorised starting point below the weirs is at a car park between Lods and Vuillafans. From here grade 2. There is a dangerous weir with an undershot waterwheel at Vuillafans and four weirs in Ornans, which can be avoided by landing above the town and re-embarking below it at Ermitage From Ornans the river flows through a remote wooded valley, very beautiful, to Cléron (11km) and on to Quingey (34km from Cléron) (D.101 bridge at 11km). The weir above Quingey is dangerous. Portage at Quingey bridge, obstructed arches and an unshootable weir. The river leaves the wooded hills near Arc-et-Senans

and crosses the plain to the Doubs. Port Lesnay, upstream of this point, 14km beyond Quingey and close to N.83, is a convenient stopping place. Camp sites beside the river at several places.

There is an annual ICF canoe rally at Whitsuntide.

Map: Michelin 243.

OGNON (France)

A tributary of the Saône in the French Jura region north of and parallel to the Doubs. It rises in the Vosges and after a short wild water section only practicable in early spring flows slows to grade 1, becoming a pretty meadow and woodland river with moderate flow normally canoeable in the summer from Villersexel.

A river for a lazy holiday trip. It winds along a pleasant valley with low hills, sometimes in meadows, at other times through woodland and may be obstructed by fallen trees. Numerous weirs, mostly shootable or easily portaged. Interesting villages and small towns, e.g. Villersexel, Montbozon, Pesmes. There are riverside camp sites at these places and others along the valley. Villersexel to Montbozon 28km; Montbozon to Rigney 30km; Rigney to Voray (N.57) 30km; a further 60km to the Saône.

Maps: Carte-Guide Vallée de l'Ognon (canoeing strip map with navigational detail). Published by the Haut Saône Departemental Tourist Committee, Vesoul, obtainable locally.

Map: Michelin 243.

RHONE (France)

The Rhone is one of the major French rivers, but the exploitation of its waterpower between Geneva and the Mediterranean for electricity generation, and beyond the confluence of the Saône at Lyon also as

part of the major commercial inland shipping route to the Mediterranean has seriously impaired its attractiveness for canoeing.

From Geneva the river carries a large volume of water through beautiful Jura country with fine scenery to Yenne and then through flatter country to Lyon. There are five dams between Geneva and Seyssel, which before 1980 was the starting point for over 100km of classic grade 2 water. There are now five hydroelectric power stations in the 96km from Seyssel to Sault-Brenaz. The pattern is: an impounded stretch of several miles to a dam where the flow is diverted into an unnavigable artificial channel for several more miles to the turbines and back into the river. After a short distance, where there is usually a road bridge, the next impounded stretch begins. There may be facilities for portaging at the dams, but whether there will normally be enough flow into the old riverbed below the diversion depends on the time of year and when the turbines are working. At Chanaz the "Canal de Savières" enters the river below the dam with water from the Lac du Bourget, from which an alternative start can be made. After the bridge at Jons the approach to Lyon is by taking the Canal de Jonage on the left for a short way and portaging right, back into the old river course (called the Canal de Miribel).

At the beginning of Lyon there is a dangerous weir with stopper below the first double bridge. Land above the bridge on left and portage.

From the confluence of the Rhone and Saône at la Mulatière in Lyon to Avignon is about 230km with about ten locks. Where the commercial navigation still uses the river, it has been graded and regulated. The usual pattern is that the artificial navigation canal branches off a short way before a dam, which must be portaged to continue along the old river. The bypassing canals are uninteresting, and often quite long. The generating station and associated lock may be anywhere along the canal. The scenery is better along the old river, which often passes riverside towns and villages. Summer levels are likely to be sufficient, though shallows may be encountered. Flood water is not controlled. It flows over the dams into the old river.

Maps: Michelin 74 or 243 above Lyon; 246 below Lyon.

SWEDEN

“Everyman’s Right” (Allmansrätt).

Swedish law allows specific freedoms in the countryside as follows:

Permitted: Boating on all waterways.

Freedom of passage over unenclosed land.

Tent-camping by one or two persons for one night well away from private plots of land. But camping of groups requires the landowner’s consent.

Collecting bits of fallen wood for a fire. But there are restrictions on actually making a fire. Primus stoves allowed. Use of side roads and castaways unless prohibited by traffic signs.

There are rules about sanitation and litter, about respect for other persons and wildlife and respecting cultivated ground when portaging.

Prohibited: Entry into enclosed ground and dwellings, taking mechanically propelled vehicles off roads and ways, cutting down trees and bushes, picking protected flowers.

In popular holiday areas where there are villages and weekend chalets, there are further restrictions e.g. not camping within a prescribed distance from the water. There are numerous prepared picnic areas, camp sites etc. that paddlers are expected to use.

VÄRMLAND, DALSLAND-NORDMARKEN (Sweden).

The lakeland areas of Sweden offer the touring paddler an unrivalled area of beauty and peace which are best enjoyed in an open (Canadian) canoe. It is possible to travel for days at a time without meeting other people. Free campsites with basic facilities are available and are shown

on the lakeland maps. The lakes provide your drinking water, clothes/ cooking utensils washing and personal washing facilities. There are numerous hire bases who will organise group tours or deliver you and your canoe to a remote starting point and leave you to work your way back to the base. The options are endless. Details from the national tourist office.

To quote from the publicity material:

“There are probably more lakes in North Dalsland and the Nordmarken district of south west Värmland than in any other part of Sweden. They are linked by the Dalsland Canal, famous as one of Europe’s most beautiful waterways. The Dalsland Canal is no ordinary canal. It is in fact a 250km long system of large and small lakes and reaches of canalised river, the water is pure and clean and can be used without boiling. Around the lakes of the Dalsland Canal the country is undulating and slashed by a network of valleys, depressions and plateaus. The forests, hills and lakes naturally dominate the landscape, but here and there one finds cultivated land, red farmhouses and idyllic mill villages. Show respect for nature, enjoy the common right of access, known as everyman’s right, but remember its attendant obligations.”

Midges can be a problem on the shallow lakes and elsewhere overnight and netted tents are recommended. Sweden is an expensive country but the experience will justify the outlay.

SOUTHERN IRELAND

The ferries across St George’s Channel to Rosslare and along the south coast to Cork from South Wales bring you within easy reach of three attractive touring rivers in the south of Ireland: Blackwater, Suir and Nore. Their geographical orientation makes it easy to link them in an enjoyable two week holiday. The Blackwater from Mallow, 20 miles north of Cork, flows from west to east parallel to the south coast, and a short road portage over the Knockmealdown Mountains enables you to continue eastwards along the Suir to Waterford. A short trip on the Nore

continues the general line to New Ross, 35 miles from Rosslare.

BLACKWATER (Co. Cork). (Southern Ireland).

The Blackwater is one of the loveliest and most varied rivers in Southern Ireland, with a good current, clear navigation, many small rapids, mostly easy, and only two or possibly three portages between Mallow and the sea.

The source of the Blackwater is in the hills to the NW of Killarney and its tributaries rise in the mountains to the S and SW where the rainfall is heavy. Its headwaters being unregulated it is subject to a sharp rise and fall in level after storms in the hills. Tidal influence starts just below Lismore, but the tides are rarely strong.

For most of its course the Blackwater flows along a charming valley, well wooded, between parallel ranges of heather-clad hills, turning abruptly from E to S at Cappoquin and then cutting through three or four ranges of hills at right-angles. Unlike most tidal sections, however, the tidal part of the Blackwater between Cappoquin and the sea is very fine.

To link with the Suir at Cahir or Newcastle, transport boats from Lismore (R.668) or Cappoquin (R.669), both of which are only about 11 miles from the Suir. The road climbs right over the Knockmealdown Mountains, with striking views.

Map: O.S. 21,22 half inch layered edition.

Mallow - Lismore Grade 1-2.

Below Lismore: Tidal.

High water Youghal: Dover -5 hrs 30 mins.

At Mallow (N.20 or N.72) look for a launching place near the railway viaduct other than at the town bridge. The river flows by Killavullen

bridge and passes a number of castles and ruins of Bridgtown Abbey, through good scenery to the town of Fermoy, where a weir runs obliquely across the river.

3.5 miles further on there is a second weir at Clondulane. Continue past Mocollop Castle to Ballyduff bridge and through fine parkland to Lismore. At Lismore weir, half a mile below the bridge there is a gap in the weir which may be shootable. Lismore Castle stands prominently on the right. The town rises on the right up the hill. Below Lismore bridge the river passes Kilbree Castle on the right to Cappoquin village and bridge. Landing on left at steps. Road link to the Suir (N.669) over the Knockmealdown Mountains. Enquire about tide tables at Cappoquin.

The Blackwater now turns sharply to the south along its estuary, cutting through three or four hill ridges at right angles and passing some big houses and a castle. Good views back over Cappoquin to the Knockmealdown Mountains. 2 miles before Youghal town the estuary is crossed by the long Youghal Bridge (N.25). Youghal is an interesting place. Sir Walter Raleigh was once its mayor. Land at quay on right or, if the sea is not rough, on the sandy beach beyond.

Distances from Mallow in miles:

6.5	Killavullen bridge.
30	Fermoy.
23.5	Clondulane weir.
36.5	Lismore bridge.
37	Lismore bridge.
40.5	Cappoquin bridge.
54.75	Youghal bridge.
56.75	Youghal.

SUIR (Southern Ireland)

The Suir (pronounced “shoor”) rises to the NW of Templemore in Co Tipperary and flows S through Thurles and Cahir turning N and the E when it comes up against the mountains to the N of the Blackwater

Valley. It continues through Clonmel and Carrick on Suir becoming broad and tidal and finally opening out into Waterford Harbour.

Beyond Cahir the scenery is delightful to Clonmel and thereafter pleasant enough. FrommCahir to Clonmel the current is fast and the few weirs cause little trouble. After Clonmel the river becomes broader and deeper and beyond Carrick it is tidal and majestic.

Maps: O.S. 18,22,23 Half inch layered edition.

Grading: Cahir to Clonmel grade 1.

The starting point is at Cahir below the weir. The castle is worth a visit. Delightful park scenery for 3 miles followed by good views of the Knockmealdown Mountains. Beyond Newcastle the river turns north through charming scenery with high ground to the right to Knocklofty bridge and then turns east to Clonmel where there are three bridges. The portage at the weir at the middle bridge is rather awkward.

There are two bridges over the river before Carrick on Suir where there is a castle. Weir above the bridge, channel on R, covered in high water. Tidal from now on and a head-wind can be a nuisance. The tidal stretch on the Suir is fine but not so good as those on the Blackwater or the Nore.

At Fiddown bridge 5.5 miles beyond Carrick either arm is navigable. The river turns to the north east at Mount Congreve and reaches Waterford in another 5 miles or so. Land at rowing club house half a mile beyond the bridge on the left bank.

High water, Waterford: Dover -5hrs.

Distances from Cahir in miles:

10.25	Newcastle bridge
16.25	Knocklofty bridge.
20.25	Clonmel.
32.75	Carrick on Suir.
51	Waterford.

NORE (Southern Ireland)

The Nore rises in Co Tipperary near the source of the Suir, and flows E and then S through Abbeyleix and Kilkenny to join the Barrow near New Ross.

From Thomastown it enters a deep, winding valley, with fine wooded sides to Inistioge with enjoyable rapids.

Grading: Thomastown - Inistioge grade 2.
 Inistioge - New Ross tidal.

Maps: O.S. 18,19 half inch layered edition.

Start at Thomastown weir down the lovely valley with an almost continuous series of rapids past Dysart Castle on the right, under Kilmacshane bridge to Inistioge bridge and village.

The influence of tides starts just below. The scenery remains fine most of the way to the confluence of the Nore and river Barrow. Follow the Barrow to New Ross bridge, landing below the bridge.

For Wexford and Rosslaire, join the N.25 outside the town.

High water New Ross: Dover -5hrs (est.).

Distances form Thomastown in miles:

6 Inistioge bridge.

15 Confluence with River Barrow.

18.5 New Ross.

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