

Going through Locks

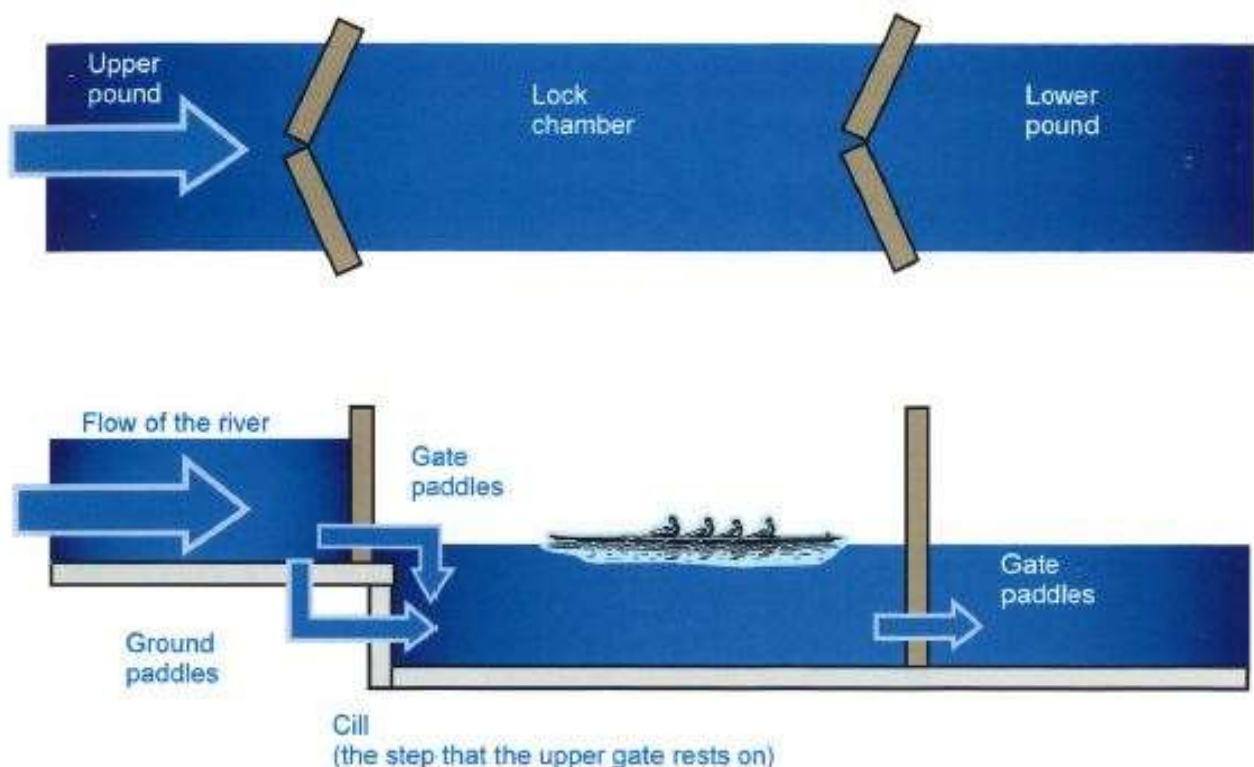
Keep calm and carry on!

There's no need to feel nervous about going through locks provided you follow these guidelines and, if there is a lock-keeper, always follow his or her advice.

Throughout the summer many locks on busy waterways are operated by lock-keepers so it's possible to do a tour like a Thames row and not have to get out of the boat. However, it's best to be prepared and to know how to navigate different kinds of locks should you need to. You may encounter manual locks or automatics and ones with different types of gates and paddles.

Remember that it may not be possible to get out of your boat at the lock, so if you know there is no keeper you should plan to have someone available on the bank to open and close the lock. This could be a crew member who has got out further up the bank or, if you are lucky enough to have it, one of your support crew. A Waterways guide will have details of what access the locks on your route have.

The parts of a lock are as follows:



At both ends of the lock are gates with a set of sluices or paddles built into them. The upstream (higher level) paddles fill the lock chamber and the downstream ones will empty it.

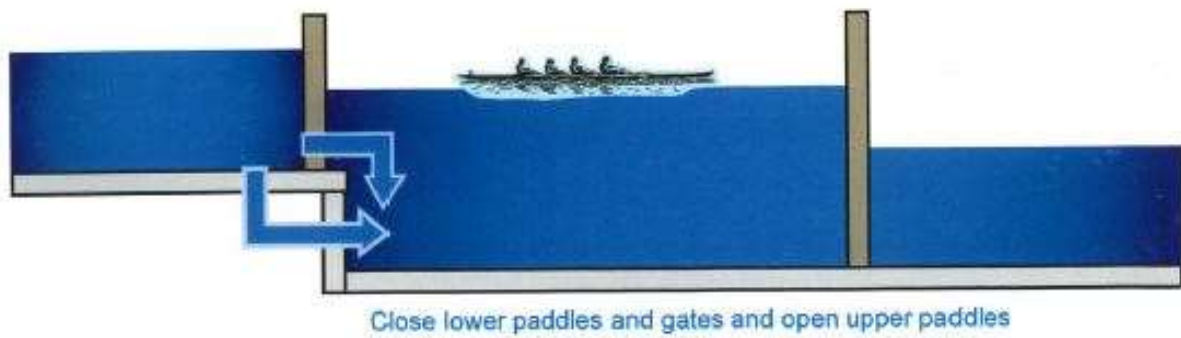
The pressure of the water holds the gates shut and it is virtually impossible to open them unless the water is the same level either side.



Lock Safety Tips

- Ensure that your boat has a bailer and a paddle
- Crew should take their feet out of the straps when going into the lock
- All personal belongings should be in a waterproof bag which is tied into the boat – and leave your valuables behind!
- When going downstream, check that the stern of the boat is well clear of the cill of the gate behind so that the rudder does not get caught
- Check that the bows of the boat are well clear of the gates and any obstructions on the sides of the lock
- Ensure that the blades do not get caught in ladders or other indentations on the wall of the lock
- Keep the blades flat on the water and under control
- If crowded, rafting up with adjacent boats may be useful
- If ropes are used, ensure they run freely around bollards and are long enough for the fall of the lock
- Remain vigilant whilst in the locks. It is not the time to relax and let go of the blades to fiddle with cameras, sunscreen or foot plates – all of that can be done once you are out of the lock
- If you notice a problem, shout to the lock-keeper or volunteers on the bank so they can take appropriate action

Going upstream



To go downstream, just reverse the procedure

- If the lock is in use, tuck into the lay-by while waiting for the lock to open.
- Keep clear of motor boats - they are bigger than you and they have propellers!
- Approach the lock slowly, maybe with just 1 or 2 people rowing or if the lock is narrow by using a paddle.
- As much as possible keep the oars on the water whilst inside, and try to keep the boat straight. You should stay alert to keep the boat from hitting the walls of the chamber or getting too close to the gates.
- In larger locks you will be able to take tap strokes to keep the boat in position.
- Going upstream, watch out for turbulence from the water coming in, and going downstream you could get stuck on the cill. There will normally be a marker to show you where the cill ends.
- In both directions, the flow of water will push you along. Many locks have chains down the sides which you can hold on to (this is where a boat hook comes in handy) or you can loop a rope round the bollards at the top. If you are holding onto the sides with a rope or with a boat hook, make sure the boat is able to float freely as the water level changes.



If you have more than one crew, you can hold each others' boats for stability.

