

USING AND OPERATING LOCKS

How to operate a lock

A lock is basically a chamber that holds water and accommodates the boats to either lower or raise them. A lock is needed to follow the contours of the ground.

Locks are quite simple things. Locks are classified as narrow – taking one boat, and wide – taking two boats at a time.

Approaching the lock

Drop a crewmember on the canal side just before a lock, ensure they take a windlass with them, and send them to inspect the level of the water in the lock and what other boats are moving near the lock.

A lock is in **YOUR FAVOUR** if the water in the lock is the same level as your boat.

A lock is **AGAINST YOU** if the water level in the lock is not the same as your boat.

If the latter condition applies ensure that there is no boat approaching the lock from the opposite direction.

If there is allow that boat to go first thus saving water.

Windlass – the tool, which operates the Paddle

Paddle – a sort of ‘tap’, which allows water in or out of the lock when it is opened.

Ground paddle, Gate paddle – the first is on the ground at the side of the lock the other is on the gate.

Always open ground paddles first if the lock has both type of paddle.

Gate – the door to the lock, there may be a single or double gate.

Cill – the lock gate threshold like a doorstep in a house.

Pound – is the stretch of water between sets of locks.

Safety tips

Don't open the paddles fully - check how much water is coming in by cautiously opening one paddle half way and making an assessment - you can accidentally flood a boat if you open them too quickly. Also make sure the front doors of your boat are closed when going up in a lock.

Going Down

Ensure the water levels are equal, open the gate(s) and drive the boat in SLOWLY.

Ensure the back of the boat is FORWARD of the CILL marker. You can SINK YOUR BOAT if you hang the back of the boat on the cill.

Close the gates behind the boat, and check that the paddles behind the boat are closed.

Slowly let the water out of the lock by opening the paddle by the front of the boat.

The boat will descend, wait until the water levels are equal and then open the gate, drive the boat out **SLOWLY** you may have to negotiate your way past a boat traveling the opposite way.

Going Up

Ensure the water levels are equal, open the gate(s) and drive the boat in SLOWLY.

Position the boat near the front of the lock, in a wide lock steady the boat by **HOLDING** not tying the centre rope.

Go to the paddle at the front of the lock and open **ONE** paddle half way. Water will flow into the lock and the boat will tend to move due to the turbulence of the water. Control the movement with the centre rope if

required, or by letting the bow fender rest on the front lock gate in a narrow lock. There is a metal rubbing plate for this.

When the lock is half full open both paddles fully.

When the water in the lock is level with that above, then open the gate drive out SLOWLY.

Water conservation & Lock etiquette

Always share a wide lock with other boats if possible. Better to wait a few minutes than to close the gates on an approaching boat and waste up to 80,000 gallons or more of water!

For the same reason, always wait your turn at a busy lock. Be courteous and don't prepare locks ahead of you if you can see boats coming in the other direction. Check that no rubbish gets jammed in the gates as this can cause leakage.

Always ensure that all gates and paddles are closed after you leave a lock, unless you see another boat approaching, in which case leave the gates open to help them. Never dangle your arms and legs over the side of the boat or the lock as they can get crushed between the boat and lock side.

Staircase locks

These are special groups of locks where you move directly from one lock chamber to the next without an intervening pound. Near Clifton Wharf there are the Watford flight and Foxton flight on the Grand Union Leicester arm. These are large staircase sets and British Waterway's staff is on hand to help you through them – FOLLOW THEIR INSTRUCTION.

This set of pictures shows a boat going down a lock.

