

Gate 7 Canoe Race – Risk Assessment - OVERVIEW

Date of Assessment. 17th March 2026.

General particulars of event

A canoe race along the River Wear from Durham to Finchale Abbey. Five and a half miles of grade 2 to grade 3 water (depending on weather and water conditions).

The main hazards are injury, drowning or hypothermia resulting from capsizing or collision.

We need to speculate/judge the level of danger presented by the potential circumstances.

The risk is the chance of injury, drowning, or hypothermia occurring.

Basic principles

Can an accident occur?

If it does occur, what will be the risk to the participants? Can they escape in safety?

Where the risk is considered significant, are our safety provisions sufficiently efficient and reliable?

Where that is not the case, what should be done about it?

Possible number of participants, based on experience - previous maximum was seventy four.

Age range and participants – eight years and upwards. Both sexes. Members of the Humbledon Outdoor Activities Association which caters for persons (age over sixteen) with special needs. Other physically handicapped persons may participate. (Usually only one or two).

Participation is encouraged for members of canoe clubs and individuals, who take part at their own risk.

Spectators, carers/helpers, family and friends will be present.

Known hazards Canoes and kayaks may capsize resulting in immersion – possible drowning and hypothermia: Entrapment in a closed cockpit kayak: Entrapment of boat on or between rocks resulting in the need for the paddler/s to exit the vessel in possibly fast flowing water to escape. Possibility of having to swim to the side of the river. Injury to the head from contact with submerged objects. Sundry cuts, bruises, dislocations or breakage of limbs. General minor injuries.

Injury due to overhanging branches.

Strains, sprains or other injuries resulting from lifting boats on or off vehicles, or on to, or off the water.

Damage may occur to participating boats due to collisions with submerged or other rocks or with other boats.

Possible loss of paddle resulting in no means of propulsion.

Possibility of contracting Weil's disease.

Problems previously experienced during the 36 years of the race. Several capsizes have occurred. No known cases of injury. Hence the risk of all these possible occurrences is **LOW**.

Ensuring the safety of participants.

Basic written guidance is provided for all participants and is displayed at the start area.

Participating boats should be seaworthy and carry sufficient buoyancy to allow the boat to float in the event of a capsize.

All participants are expected to be able to swim.

Helmets are compulsory for all competitors, including those with balance or mobility difficulties, in order to protect the head from injury.

All competitors must wear an approved buoyancy aid to provide support in the event of a capsize.

A spray cover is compulsory for all kayaks in order to minimise ingress of water at all times.

The race numbered bib (or boat sticker) must be worn (stuck to the bow of the craft) to provide identification of participants and to distinguish participants from other users of the river.

Novice competitors shall have had experience of paddling Grade2/3 water or shall be accompanied along the course by an experienced paddler.

Safety cover is provided along the course at appropriate points (especially Pipe Bridge) and a competent paddler is appointed to follow the last boat in the race. This is to enable the organisers to account for all starters. Safety cover includes provision of throw lines, spare paddles and mobile phones.

First aid equipment is provided as required and qualified first-aiders are available if needed.

Refreshments are available at the finish.

Telephones are available in the event of any problems.

All competitors are advised that they participate at their own risk and must judge for themselves whether they are competent to participate, bearing in mind the prevailing circumstances.

Participants are covered by the insurance provisions of Paddle UK.

An entry form will be provided for all competitors to enter their relevant details. This will also include a disclaimer which will be worded so as to protect the organisers.

Action to be taken.

Ensure that safety rules are prominently displayed at the start area, together with a warning card relating to Weil's disease.

Confirm that safety personnel are actually present.

Conduct a physical check that helmets, buoyancy aids and spray decks are worn where necessary.

Check on location of telephones and the availability of mobile phone signals.

Prepared by David Edward Mills. Paddle UK membership no. 67986.

Dated Tuesday 17th May 2026.

David E. Mills .

Risk assessment – Gate 7 May Day Canoe Race

Location: Durham to Finchale Abbey	Assessment date: 17 th March 2026. Prepared by David E. Mills. Paddle UK no. 67986.	Next review January 2027
---	---	--------------------------

Benefits of the activity: Canoeing enables people with a range of experience and ability to enjoy paddling in a competitive atmosphere.

Those affected:	A: Competitors & helpers	B: Participants, some with disabilities & their carers.	C: Non-paddling family members, helpers & spectators .
------------------------	--------------------------	---	--

Hazards	Affected	Hazards	Affected
Drowning	A, B	Lifting injuries	A, B, C
Hypothermia/severe cold	A, B, C	Trapped fingers	A, B, C
Sunburn	A, B, C	Injury by moving vehicles/trailers	A, B, C
Falls and slips, embarkation accidents	A, B, C	Weil's disease	A, B
Underwater dangers	A, B	Medical problems	A, B, C
Overhanging trees	A, B		

Hazard (as above)	Explanatory details	Precautions taken to reduce risk	Risk
			H, M, L
Drowning	Canoe capsize, submersion in cold water, panicking swimmer, possible entrapment.	Buoyancy aids worn at all times by all participants. Adequate and secure canoe buoyancy. Conditions assessed on the day and activity; event adjusted or cancelled if necessary. Briefing re hazards before race if conditions dictate. Briefing re duty of care for others when on the water. Check all boats accounted for at finish.	L
Hypothermia/severe cold	Danger of hypothermia in cold, windy conditions while	All to be appropriately clothed. All in vicinity to assist following capsize.	M

	participating, waiting, supervising or spectating and particularly following immersion.	Minimize time in water.	
Sunburn	Sunburn, depending on weather.	Use of sun protection when required depending on sunshine level and probable exposure.	L
Falls and slips, embarkation accidents	Injury or falling into water resulting from slips, trips and difficulties getting into/out of boats; on steps, difficult/slippery/wet banks, access pontoons or jetties.	Suitable footwear to be worn and special care to be taken. Ropes provided down grassy / muddy slope down to water at start.	L
Underwater dangers	Rocks, debris, sharp objects below waterline. Danger of foot or head injury and bodily impact.	Helmets to be compulsory for all paddlers.	L
Lifting injuries	Risk of injury, especially to back, from assisting participants and from carrying and loading boats.	Avoid lifting individuals. Share all loads/tasks among sufficient number to manage comfortably. Show correct lifting techniques to new helpers.	L
Trapped fingers	Risk of trapping fingers between boats or between boat and landing, wall, steps, pontoon etc.	All to avoid placing fingers over boat edge when alongside other boats or fixed objects.	L
Overhanging branches	Risk of injury to head/eyes when paddling close to water's edge.	Keep clear at all water levels.	M
Injury by moving vehicles/trailers		Driver to ensure that there is no danger of vehicle or trailer contacting an individual. Helpers to be engaged to supervise bystanders and keep well clear. Inform those present of intended manoeuvre. Use hazard warning lights. Proceed with caution.	L

		<p>When manhandling trailers have adequate help taking into account load and slope. Ensure all clear re intended action. Supervise bystanders as above.</p>	
Weil's disease	Possible disease carrying vermin, or infected water at venue.	<p>Persons present expected to use common sense re NOT drinking river water. If unusual symptoms appear following the race, especially following a capsize, advise to consult doctor. Any open cuts or grazes to be covered with Elastoplast or dressing.</p>	L
Medical problems.	<p><i>David E. Mills .</i></p>	<p>All attending expected to have appropriate medication with them and to know how to administer the same.</p>	L