

INCIDENT FILE

First conviction under new safety law

A man who crashed his speedboat into a 15 year old kayak paddler near Milford Haven was sentenced to 12 months in jail, suspended for two years, in the first prosecution by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency under recent watercraft safety legislation.

Adam Russell, 28, of Burton, Milford Haven, was sentenced at Swansea Crown Court over a life threatening incident which took place on 11th August 2024 on the River Cleddau.

In addition to the suspended prison term, Russell must complete 15 hours of required activity and 200 hours' unpaid work and pay his victim a total of £1,676 in compensation for damage to property and personal injury plus £3,000 prosecution costs.

It is the first prosecution under the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023, introduced in 2024 to empower prosecution of anyone who puts others at risk by using powered watercraft of any size in a dangerous manner, including small motorboats and jet skis.

The court heard how the crash near Milford Haven wrecked the boy's single kayak and left him with cuts and bruising to his arms and lower lip.

He has not returned to watersports since, describing the experience in his witness statement as 'terrifying'.

Moments before the impact Russell had been seated, steering a single

engine duo prop speedboat upstream at unsafe speeds of up to 40km/h which lifted the bow and obscured his vision. He was carrying six passengers, including children.

Coming in the opposite direction was the victim in a group with his father and friends in brightly coloured kayaks and wearing red personal flotation devices.

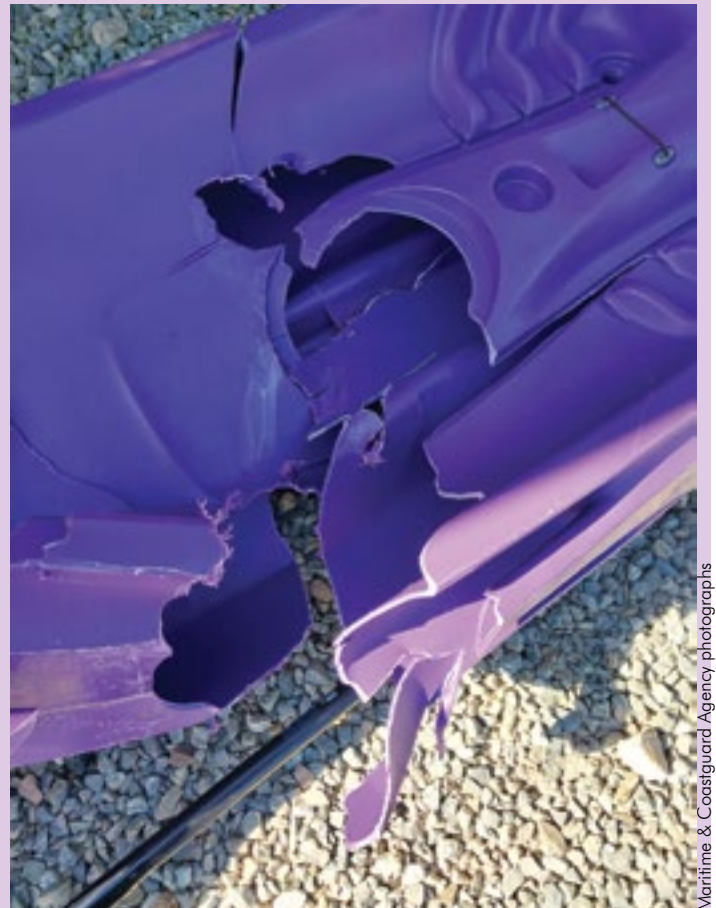
The kayak paddler spotted Russell's vessel approaching near Rudders Boatyard, an area with which Russell was familiar and which is known as a busy location for moorings and leisure activities.

The teenager tried to paddle out of the way but, unable to see the danger, Russell changed course and struck the kayak, driving over the victim and throwing him into the water.

The MCA led the prosecution with support from Dyfed Powys Police and Milford Haven Port Authority.

Judge Geraint Walters said 'Just like our roads, our seas and our rivers are not playgrounds. They are required by all of us to recognize the risk to others innocently going about their business.'

MCA Investigator Paul Atkins said 'This case shows the importance of keeping a proper lookout and operating safely. It was a very close call; if circumstances had been only slightly different there could have been a terrible tragedy.'



'This prosecution, the first under new watercraft safety laws, sends a clear signal that people flouting the requirements that keep us all safe on the water are liable to be held accountable for their actions.'

Mike Ryan, Harbourmaster at the Port of Milford Haven, said 'The incident on the Milford Haven Waterway was extraordinarily dangerous with a very real threat to life yet it was also completely avoidable.'

'We support the MCA's decision to prosecute the defendant for failing to keep an effective lookout. It is an important reminder that not only do Waterway users have a responsibility to keep themselves and any passengers safe but also a responsibility towards every other user of the Waterway.'

'Keeping watch is one of the most important aspects of staying safe afloat: look ahead, look behind and look left and right, adjust your speed as necessary and take early, clear and decisive action to avoid collisions.'

Russell was sentenced, having previously admitted two charges at Haverfordwest Magistrates' Court on 2nd December 2025:

* Failing without reasonable excuse to prevent the loss or destruction of another watercraft and/or serious injury to another person, contrary to Section 6 of the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023.

* Failing without reasonable excuse to comply with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972, namely failing to

adhere to Rule 5 (look out), Rule 6 (safe speed) and Rule 7 (risk of collision), contrary to Section 6 of the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals & Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996.

Russell became the first person to face prosecution in court under the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023. It was used previously in 2024 to caution a jet ski rider.

Withernsea dump

The tragic loss of three people in the sea at Withernsea at the beginning of January is a stark reminder of the high tide dump on this beach. While preparing our 2000 Holderness guide I swam ashore here, trying to land at the top of a spring tide, as this time but in summer, not January's snow. With the kayak safely ashore I had a serious dilemma over whether to risk going back in for my paddle, which was floating away. I was relieved to get back ashore with the paddle but lost a wetsuit boot in the process. Relaunching later needed the help of a bystander.

Killer alligator killed

The alligator that killed a canoeist in Florida (May, p10), in the vicinity of another alligator attack last spring, has now been killed. It measured 3.5m.

Undercurrents



New Zealand museum dropped

After spending £31,000 and over four years of planning, Paul Caffyn's intentions for a kayak museum at Shantytown (May 23, p11) have been shelved. A downturn in tourist numbers has been the main problem. Meanwhile, Paul is stuck with a collection of kayaks, books, photos, diaries and historical files.

Pitching for sport

The Government have announced they are investing £85,000,000 to build and upgrade grassroots sport facilities across the UK in 2026-27 as part of a £400,000,000 boost for facilities over 2025 to 2030. This funding is going to artificial grass pitches, goalposts, floodlights and community hubs through the multisport grassroots facilities programme, with a further £15,000,000 to be invested in England in 2026-27.

In addition, they have published updated lists of 991 projects funded by the multisport grassroots facilities programme so far in 2025-26. A full list can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/multi-sport-grassroots-facilities-programme-projects-2025-to-2026> and will be updated in due course.

Clubs and organizations across the UK are now being urged to come forward and apply for funding available in 2026-27, which they can do by contacting the relevant partner in their country. Further detail can be found on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-and-upgraded-grassroots-sport-facilities-to-get-the-uk-active>

The Government's future investment in grassroots sport will take into account a range of funding options, following engagement with the sports sector and local leaders to understand the demands of regions across the country. This will ensure that funding reaches a wider range of sports so that as many people as possible are able to participate in physical activity.

The emphasis seems to be on 'pitches' so perhaps canoe polo clubs wanting pitches should apply. Activities that do not use pitches might also try as a reminder that many sports do not involve balls.

Loch Rannoch with me two years ago. The wind was gusting to 40mph. We were both in river racers, and he would normally beat me by six or seven minutes over a 9-mile paddle, but I beat him by 15 minutes, and he was shocked of course. Why? I had a rudder and he didn't. QED. So what did he do? He got an older, spare river racer, and fitted a T-bar and fin rudder. He loves it to bits. A few months later I paddled the same loch in a ski with a gale behind me and averaged 8mph (13kph) for the distance. That's my fastest ever, and I'll never do that again - too risky now as I slowly lose power and balance.

Can't thank you enough for the wonderful work you have done for so many years covering canoeing in all its aspects - a massive achievement.

I first ran Loch Rannoch in 1985, west to east with a following wind, in a river racer without a rudder, for our guide. The waves got progressively bigger until, by the end of the loch, most of my effort was going into reverse strokes, trying to stop the kayak broaching. I don't recall so much difficulty on any other paddle. Ed.

From **Paul Caffyn**.

Indeed, it is the end of an era.

I thought 27 years editing the KASK mag was enough but, my goodness, 57 years!

A hearty well done for your efforts over the years.

Hopefully, I will have the Alaskan books delivered before the end of January.

ACCESS & environment

Antisocial behaviour

Wera Hobhouse (Bath, LD) led an Adjournment Debate on antisocialism on canals, particularly the Kennet & Avon Canal in Bath. Problems aired included loud music late at night, bonfires, drug and alcohol misuse, public urination, towpaths obstructed by furniture, rubbish dumped, human waste being dumped in canals, bags of excrement and beer bottles left beside towpaths, diesel and oil spills, vandalism of water safety equipment, abandoned boats, damage to property, physical threats and assault, stag parties, fly tipping, speeding boats and out of control dogs.

She began by recording 'that more than 30,000 boats are licensed to navigate our canals and rivers,' far more if you include PUK's compulsory licenses, even if many of them are paid for by people who do not want them and will not use them. The CRT do not have the resources to police towpaths and their financial circumstances were contrasted with those of the National Trust with 'commercial properties, thousands of paying members and huge tourism resources,' unlike CRT with a portfolio of listed historical properties, expensive to maintain with declining Government support and legal powers not clearly defined. CRT, the EA, local authorities and the police all have responsibilities for different aspects but do not communicate properly with each other, not helped by GDPR restriction on information sharing.

Responding, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Mary Creagh gave the usual excuses for the funding situation and also said 'Canals, towpaths and river banks are shared spaces,' [our emphasis].

She closed by saying 'People deserve to enjoy these blue walkways and amazing places. Who would have believed that it is possible to see a kingfisher on Coventry canal right next to the old Cash's silkworks, one mile from the heart of Coventry city centre? It was a sight I never thought I would see - my first ever kingfisher.' If she got on the water she might find that kingfishers are not so unusual.

A variation on the antisocial problem comes from George Parsonage of the Glasgow Humane Society, who, helped by Land Rover enthusiasts, has been involved with recovering around 60 cars from the River Clyde between Cambuslang and the tidal limit.

Electric scooters with their lithium batteries are a problem in Birmingham, along with bricks, rubble and scaffolding. The bicycles in *The Netherlands* show that this kind of attitude is an international scourge.

How far will Defra budge?

This is one of four Parliamentary Written Answers on water and recreation to Abtisam Mohamed (Sheffield Central, Lab) on January 7th. It is not clear how far reforms will go. At the end of 2024 Defra

From **Julie Howard**, *Paddle Sport Designs, Compton Verney, Warwicks.*

I just wanted to say hello and thanks. Thanks, for producing the only canoeing magazine that ever mattered. Thanks for providing so much interesting information and paddling snippets that nobody would ever know about if not for you. Through all my years in the business I have always marvelled at your sheer dedication and pursuit of your passion to report on our sport. It has been a true privilege to know you and I will truly miss having *Canoeist* to read in the future.

From **Graham Mackereth**, *Pyranha Mouldings, Runcorn.*

I was very sad to see you've done your last edition.

The end of an incredible era that our sport no doubt doesn't appreciate as much as it should.

Thank you for all the good that you've done over the years, the information you've passed on and especially the inspiration that you must have given to so many.

I know how important *Canoeing* and *Focus* were to me as I was growing up and then *Canoeist* as business developed.

I will always treasure the hard copies that I have kept and the memories they preserve.

My grateful thanks and very best wishes.

From **Colin Broadway**.

I sorry that we no longer have an independent voice letting us know

Question



To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans her Department has to improve the water quality in blue spaces used recreationally for activities such as paddle boarding, canoeing and kayaking.

Answer



Answered on

6 January 2026

The Department is working on a response to the Independent Water Commission's final recommendations through a White Paper and a new water reform bill, bringing forward root and branch reform to secure better outcomes for customers, investors and the environment and restore trust and accountability. The recommendations intend to cut pollution and restore our rivers, lakes and seas, including those used recreationally, to good health for future generations.

The Environment Agency also has an active Research and Development programme exploring innovative contamination detection at bathing waters. It also participates with other UK and international agencies on the development of analytical techniques, with the aim of improving water quality in blue spaces.

In the November - December 2024 consultation on bathing water reforms, we asked respondents about wider reforms including the expansion of the definition of 'bathers' to include other water users.

The Government's response, published in March 2025, noted a clear majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to expand the definition, with many suggesting which water users to include.

The Department is now exploring how to gather evidence to deliver this reform, considering which users to include and how to set safe classification levels for all. The timeline for detailed policy development will depend on this scoping work. Defra will engage with local and national stakeholders as work progresses and welcomes any information they can provide.

held a consultation on bathing waters and expansion of them. The final sentence here does not make it clear whether there will be a wider public consultation or just engagement with selected stakeholders.

The Government have announced the launch of *A New Vision for Water*, a White Paper. It will cover water supply and pollution of rivers but not use of rivers.

what is happening across our canoeing world. *Paddler* magazine doesn't do it for me and the centre pages from our governing body tells us nothing about what is happening or plans for the future. Your magazine will be truly missed.

I understand and appreciate the work, hours and effort that you have put in over the years.

Wishing you the best for the future. I'm sure you will be able to fill your newly found hours and stay paddling.

From **John Chamberlin**.

73 years is one heck of a stint and the mag was always something you should have been very proud of!

Take care, matey.

Paul Caffyn - Classic Kayaking Books

Now available in England, both the Australian and South Island books.

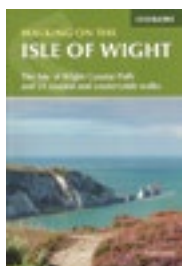
Sadly, the exorbitant cost of overseas postage has killed off mailing these A4 size books from NZ.

However, an old work colleague, Mick, loads up his hand luggage after he visits NZ annually. He has already sold out of the recent 2nd edition of the Stewart Island book but the two classics are available in England from: paulskayakbooksuk@gmail.com

BOOKS

The Netherlands

Walking on the Isle of Wight



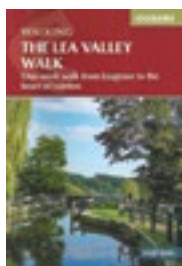
Paul Curtis
Cicerone
978 1 78631 256 3
2013. 2nd edition 2025
170 x 120mm
210 pages, paperback
£14.95

Since the first edition of this walking guide to the Isle of Wight (Nov 2013, p63) probably all of the pictures have been replaced. Much of the text has been updated but there are slightly fewer

walks.

The most important thing for kayak users remains the coastal circuit. This time it is all taken in an anticlockwise direction, contrasting with the first edition which took each of the north and south coasts from east to west.

The Lea Valley Walk



Leigh Hatts
Cicerone
978 1 78631 287 7
2001. 4th edition 2025
170 x 120mm
114 pages, paperback
£16.95

The major change on this route since the second edition (Jun 2008, p45) has been the 2012 Olympic Games with all the remaining facilities down the valley. The first of these is the white

water course, about which there is a paragraph with a photograph of a paddler on white water although it does not show much of the course itself.

The pictures are mostly new and a number of them show powered craft, mostly moored.

As well as the full length of the river from the source above Luton to the Thames opposite the O2, there is an alternative ending at Limehouse Basin. With all the extra features it is surprising that the guide now has two dozen less pages.



Paul Heiney
Adlard Coles
978 1 3994 0996 4
2026
220 x 140mm
223 pages, firmback
£20.00

This is a book to accompany pilotage, not replace it, to tell you all you need to know once off the water. Despite the title, it is restricted to the environs of marinas on a canal route for fixed mast sailing boats while crossing the Netherlands from Vlissingen to Den Helder then Lemmer to Delfzijl.

As well as brief mention of facilities for sailing vessels there is information on where to eat, supermarkets, bakeries, laundries and, often overlooked elsewhere, activities to keep younger family members happy. Cycle hire is located and distances are usually given in terms of time to walk. Even trains are given as journey times to major centres. Canoe hire is located in Gouda. Map sections mark every single road.

There are more museums than anywhere else in the world for the size of population and, inevitably, cheese and windmills feature strongly. Less happily, the Dutch also have mosquitoes and 25,000 bikes thrown into the canals every year.

The many colourful photographs give a lasting impression of bright buildings of all sorts along this canal route.

Alaskan vanity project

Paul Caffyn is printing just 200 copies of the book of his Alaskan voyage (May 20, p16, Nov 20, p19, May 21, p14). The case bound luxury item is described as a vanity project, its cost of \$62 per book exceeded only by the cost of posting it overseas.

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Disclaimer

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or publishers.

Governing body enquiries

Canoeist is the not for profit magazine of Paddlers International. Enquiries to governing bodies and associations should be addressed as appropriate.

Back then

20 years ago



- * Comparing expenditure on canoeing disciplines and the subsequent results achieved showed a marked lack of correlation over the previous 23 years.
- * Canoeist no longer had paid advertising or a cover price but returned to being an amateur hobby in the face of problems resulting from canoeing's management.
- * David Train completed his four year ban from the BCU and immediately received a second four year ban with no hearing.
- * Mark Stocker paddled the 107km from Poole to Cherbourg in 14 hrs 25 mins.
- * Sport England were to quit Holme Pierrepont.
- * John Kelly was to set up a Path of the Paddle website for open canoes.
- * Peter Begent died after being involved with the running of the Devizes to Westminster Race for 57 years.
- * The Chartered Institute of Water & Environmental Management claimed 2,500,000 canoeists had signed a manifesto calling for greater access to the UK's waterways. A set of postcards of views of the Ribble pilot scheme to support Environmental Stewardship by a Defra official and presented to an EU conference on the Water Framework Directive did not show a single human being.
- * The Flyak, a Nelo K1 fitted with hydrofoils by Norwegian Peter Ribe, was found to be faster than a K4.
- * The BCU's talent identity scheme was attempting to identify future winners by their size. Bulgarian Krassimir Ivanov was taken on as a BCU sprint coach, having been sacked by Belgium's cyclists because of his enthusiasm for drug use.