

HSOBC Safety and Boating Plan

Rowing and sculling are by their nature, outdoor activities and as such are subject to weather in all its forms. It is therefore important to recognise that contending with difficult weather conditions is part of the sport. Safe enjoyment is the aim, not foolhardiness. Even though accidents are rare in the sport, it is important that one not become complacent and adhere to the British Rowing's Water Safety Code.

The Water Safety Code places emphasis on the individual's and club's responsibility for their actions and is a guide to the minimum standard of safe practice. It does not prevent a club or individual from taking further measures they may deem necessary to ensure safe rowing.

The code is used as the basis for Headington School Oxford Boat Club to reflect upon when making decisions on their own local safety rules and practices for members to follow. Water Safety is a permanent agenda item for the clubs coaches meetings.

Headington School Oxford Boat club follows and supports British Rowing's Water Safety Code. The Head of Rowing and all coaches will ensure that Headington School Oxford Boat Club follows the BR Safety Code and they will encourage and enforce these rules.

All members and coaches of Headington School Oxford Boat Club must comply with the Safety Code at all times. Copies of the HSOBC Safety Code are available on the HSOBC web site, the Coaches HSOBC team Drive, the Boat House, in the rowing office, and a copy is held in the Bursary. A copy of the BR Water Safety Code has been used as a guideline when writing up this code however emphasis has been placed on our local knowledge of the river and the surrounding area when writing this Safety Code as it is specific to HSOBC rather than a general guideline for all clubs.

Every club member must assist in improving safety practice by adhering to these safety instructions.

YOU MUST

1. Be able to swim 50m in light clothing.
2. Be in good health and wear suitable clothing.
3. Wear buoyancy aid for coxing, coaching and launch driving.
4. Know the local navigation rules.
5. Record any accident in the log provided ([BR and Rowing Moodle Page](#))
6. If coaching, be aware of overall responsibility for the crew.

All members should directly challenge any member or water user who is seen to be non-compliant with the Code or the above guidelines.

The Headington School Oxford Boat Club Head of Rowing will delegate periodic safety inspections/audits of the Club's fleet and equipment, and will arrange for necessary repair/rectification work to be carried out promptly.

All members should similarly report any unsafe, damaged or missing equipment to the Head of Rowing and to the Boatman or Water Safety Adviser a.s.a.p. so that it may be rectified.

DO NOT REMOVE EQUIPMENT FROM ONE BOAT TO REMEDY A DEFICIENCY OR DAMAGE IN ANOTHER!!

This causes more problems long-term than it solves short-term.

All accidents on the water, whether involving personal injury or damage to equipment or not, and involving either club or private boats should be recorded via the British Rowing incident reporting system.

Give as much detail as you can in your report - this will be needed if a report has to go to the British Rowing Regional Safety Adviser and/or the fleet insurers - when, where, how, types of boats, clubs involved, weather conditions, any injury/damage, and medical treatment received, etc. Furthermore, contact details of individuals involved must be recorded.

Members are reminded that the Head of Rowing will not hesitate to take disciplinary action against any members who act in an irresponsible or unsafe manner on the water, whether in HSOBC boats OR their own.

Equipment Safety

Before using HSOBC or private boats please check the following items to make sure the equipment is safe to use:

- **bow ball –**
 - Securely fitted, no cracks or splits
- **heel restraints –**
 - In good condition and not frayed
 - Heels only come up so far above the stretcher to allow full movement.
- **bungs or corks -**
 - Check these are in place and secure
- **steering equipment**
 - Check rudder cables are free and have full movement.
 - Check for frayed cable.
- **rudders & Fins**
 - Check rudder and fin are not bent.
 - Free and full movement of rudder.

As above, please report any defects to the Boatman (1st) and the Head of Rowing (2nd). Any such defects in a private boat should be rectified by the owner before the boat is used.

Launches

Coaches and coaching launch drivers shall wear life jackets or buoyancy aids when accompanying crews and at other times whilst afloat.

All coaching launches and safety boats shall carry the following safety aids:

1. A sound signalling warning device, capable of attracting attention over at least 200 metres.
2. A throw line at least 15m (50ft) long with a large knot tied in one end to assist throwing (ideally a purpose made rescue/heaving line - 'throw bag') when coaching new rowers.
3. Thermal exposure blankets.
4. A basic first aid kit (contents recorded and checked as before).
5. A sharp knife in carrying sheath.
6. A paddle.

SPECIFIC SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR THE RIVER

Before boating the Head of Rowing, Boatman, and coaches have all had an inset where water safety conditions and the suitability of rowing for crews have been covered.

When Red or Amber Flag, the Head of Rowing, and coaches will make a decision as to the competence of crews boating. Ultimately the ownership must fall on the coach as to the suitability of their crews to row on

the river conditions of the day but the Head of Rowing can overturn any such decision if they deem the conditions to be hazardous for certain crews.

REMEMBER: IF IN DOUBT - DON'T GO OUT!

STREAM

A recorded risk assessment must be completed before going afloat in Amber or Red board conditions. The river conditions are categorised as follows:

Green Boards – All crews can boat. In the winter, risk assessment is taken.

Amber Board – Restricted access to river. Risk assessment to be taken by coaches.

It could include any or all of the following

- Crews can only row once a risk assessment has been completed and if the coach, together with other coaches have discussed the suitability of the conditions.
- No rowing below rainbow bridge unless it is the first eight with a competent cox.

Red Board – No rowing by any crew unless:

- 1) [A risk assessment](#) has been done. A discussion has been had with the Head or Rowing or a senior coach.
- 2) Coaches are confident in their crews ability to handle the conditions.
- 3) See River Thames Navigation Warnings and HSOBC Procedures. Plus see Safety in Strong Stream Conditions.

If the stream appears to be fast flowing and/or there are significant floating objects moving down the river (tree trunks, dead livestock, etc.), crews should seriously consider not boating - you should be able to make progress against the prevailing stream without rowing at firm pressure & be able to spin the boat without moving a significant distance along the river - if this is not possible, you should not go out.

Flow rates: 100 CMtr/secs = No access to river.
75 – 100 CMtr/secs = Restricted Access.
<75 CMtr/secs = Full Access to all crews.
CMtr/secs = Cubic Metre per second.

PLEASE NOTE: Flag status doesn't always truly reflect the water speed. To this end, greater vigilance needs to be taken when boating under Amber Flag or when conditions are different to normal boating conditions.

TEMPERATURE

A recorded risk assessment must be completed before going afloat in very low or high temperature conditions. Crews are reminded that, especially during the winter months, the risk of hypothermia from wearing insufficient clothing or with inexperienced crews not moving vigorously enough to generate sufficient body heat is a REAL DANGER. Rowers should wear several thin layers of appropriate clothing, preferably with a waterproof garment on top. Coxes, especially, should be well protected, including hats and gloves (preferably waterproof).

It is negligent to allow crews to boat if they are not dressed appropriately. Any rower not attired appropriately for the weather conditions will not be allowed on the water.

ROWING ACCIDENTS:

- Hypothermia and Drowning

If you capsize, it is VITAL that the following is adhered to:

STAY WITH YOUR BOAT!! Your boat is a floatation devise and you must stay with it.

The choices you make are vital. As you realise you are about to capsize, it is important that you remain calm. As you fall into the water you will immediately shudder from a Cold Shock Response. You may feel dizzy, have shortened sharp breathing, and a rapid rise in your heart rate. This can result in panic.

If you are in a single, free your feet from the clogs/ shoes in the boat (you should have heel restraints and this will allow your feet to slip out.

If you are in a crew boat, check that everyone in the crew is accounted for.

You must now do the following: to retain buoyancy, by climbing up on your boat. It floats. This will also allow you to retain your body's warmth. Help will be at hand shortly. **Do not attempt to swim for the bank.**

EXPERIENCE

No beginners crews should go out unaccompanied AT ANY TIME. They should ALWAYS be accompanied by a coach, preferably in the launch.

NIGHT/AFTER DARK ROWING/ FOG

If you must go out at night, make sure that you carry appropriate lights on the boat so you can be clearly seen by other boats/crews.

Carry WHITE lights at the bow and stern of rowing and sculling boats and a WHITE light in launches. Single scullers will not go out at night unaccompanied.

Crews should not be coxed by novice/inexperienced coxes at night. Beginner crews should preferably not go out after dark - if unavoidable, they MUST be accompanied by a coach, again preferably in the launch.

If there is reduced visibility, due to fog, a risk assessment will be done before crews are allowed to go out. ONLY IF THERE IS SUFFICIENT VISIBILITY for crews to row safely will crews be allowed out.

FOG:

If there is fog, we will often wait to see if it lifts. During this time, the whole group will do a circuit or game of some description. These circuits and games are important so please do not feel that it is a waist of time if your daughter does not get onto the water.

RIVER NAVIGATION

Boats travelling in a direction from the boat club (boat houses) towards the Lock should be on the Godstow Meadow side of the river Approx 1 – 2 ½ Blade Lengths from the bank. There is a sand bank in the middle of the river. Boats travelling from upstream (from the lock towards the boat club (boat houses)) must give way to crews travelling downstream. In both cases, crews should stop and then manoeuvre around the other crew (with respect to navigation rules (crews to stay on BOWSIDE BANK).

When rowing on the river, crews must stay on the **bow side bank** at all times. Take corners as close to the bow side bank as possible to avoid collision.

Particular care should be taken to remain on the correct side around bends and resist the temptation to cut any corners, as this is potentially extremely dangerous.

Particular danger areas include:

- ***Departing from Aeroplane reach (the Boat house area) in front of the lock.***
- ***The Weir. Fast flowing water and debris.***
- ***The lock area itself. Fast flowing water, boats, barges and debris can prove to be hazardous.***
- ***The turning areas and bends in river. These are often a problem as crews cut corners.***
- ***College crews (they are often inexperienced and often have absolutely no regard for other crews).***
- ***Debris in the river (Branches etc).***
- ***Undercurrents especially when the stream is up.***
- ***The fallen tree half way down the course stretches into the river. There are other such obstacles that need to be watch out for.***
- ***Medley Boat Yard. Pleasure boats are often seen coming out of this area.***
- ***No junior crews are to row below Rainbow Bridge.***
- ***No development crews are to row below Rainbow Bridge in Single sculls or double sculls / pairs.***
- ***All crews that go below Rainbow Bridge are only to do so if there is a coach present (Coaches need to use common sense when going below rainbow bridge (now when it is red or amber flag).***

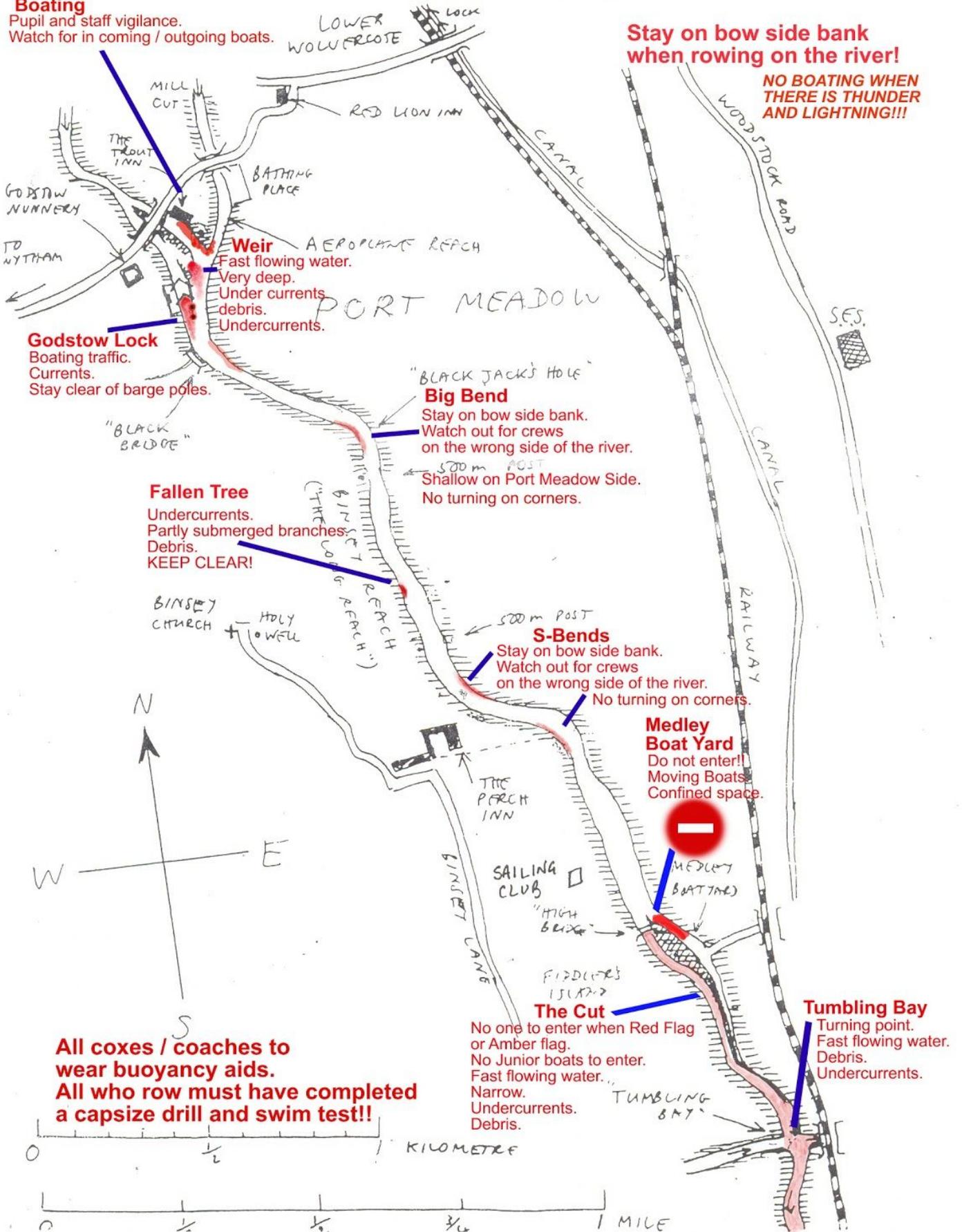
Headington School Oxford: The Thames: Godstow to Oxford.

Boating

Pupil and staff vigilance.
Watch for in coming / outgoing boats.

Stay on bow side bank when rowing on the river!

NO BOATING WHEN THERE IS THUNDER AND LIGHTNING!!!



**All coxes / coaches to wear buoyancy aids.
All who row must have completed a capsiz drill and swim test!!**

If there is any doubt to the above, please consult the Head of Rowing.

Water Borne Diseases

The water we row upon is not always as clean as we would choose and certainly is not pure enough to be swallowed without giving more than a passing thought to the possible effects it will have upon our internal systems.

The BR Water Safety Code has as its primary concern, the prevention of accidents involving physical injury, damage to equipment and at the worst, drowning.

There are other risks to health associated with water based activities which arise from the micro biological or chemical quality of the water itself and of its immediate environs. The use of inland waters can never be risk free and it is essential that as users, we are aware of the risks present.

Weill's Disease - Leptospirosis

The risk of contracting Leptospirosis from recreational water is small, however the serious nature of the disease is such that we must be aware of the dangers and should take simple precautions to reduce the risk of infection.

- Cuts and abrasions (including blisters) should be covered with waterproof dressings.
- Wear footwear to avoid cuts and protect feet when paddling in the water (launching a boat).
- Shower after contact with the water.
- Wash hands thoroughly before eating and drinking.

If 'flu like symptoms develop shortly after contact with the water (1-3 weeks) then your doctor should be contacted and advised of the circumstances of exposure.

Blue-Green Algae – Cynobacteria

Cynobacteria are commonly found in fresh and brackish water during mid to late summer. In Favourable, stable conditions, blooms may form. Algal scums accumulate downwind on the surface of lakes and slow moving water. Toxins produced by large blooms have caused the death of sheep and dogs and skin and other disorders in humans, although no particular illness has been identified that can be linked with Blue-Green Algae.

By way of precaution:

- Avoid immersion or contact with water affected by algal scum.
- Minimise contact with water by wearing close fitting clothing.
- After any contact hose down all equipment to avoid contact with residual scum.
- All clothing should be washed and thoroughly dried on returning home.
- Shower after contact with the water.

Gastro-intestinal illness

There are currently no micro-biological standards for recreational water and at present only the powers provided under the Public Health Act 1936 – Section 259 to deal with “any pond, pool, ditch, gutter or water course which is so foul or in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance” provide us with protection.

Assessing the risks posed by water quality is difficult as conditions can vary substantially in a very short space of time. In general, the health risk will depend on the number and proximity of sewage effluent discharges in any particular body of water.

The use of inland water will never be risk free and it is essential that users are aware of the risks involved in using a particular stretch of water. By way of precaution after immersion or contact with water of uncertain quality –

- Do not eat or drink before washing hands.
- If 'foul' water has been swallowed refer to your doctor with full details of the incident.

The possible conditions are listed according to the nature of the hazard. No such list can be exhaustive, or cover every eventuality, but they provide a clear framework with which to judge if the conditions are suitable for boating. Bear in mind that the river conditions/weather can change rapidly - crews must be prepared to abandon an outing at any time if the conditions deteriorate once they are on the water.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, before the EA's Thames Navigation's system of Red and Yellow status warnings (http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/navigation/150319/155649/151700/?lang=_e) was introduced, when the river was running fast and when in flood, local conditions were assessed by the Senior Coaches and Director of Rowing, and any restrictions were applied by them, and coaches and coxswains briefed accordingly.

No serious accidents ever occurred with HSOBC. In fact, the boat club from which we boat from (St Edwards) uses the same principles applied henceforth and has found that from 1965 to present, there has been no incidents.

Under the present system, when a Red or Yellow status are in force, there are often occasions when, although the stream is fairly fast, the level of risk is perfectly acceptable for certain experienced crews, in the judgement of experienced rowing coaches.

In such conditions it seems unreasonable that a total ban should be imposed on river usage.

A number of local schools and clubs have successfully satisfied the demands of their insurers and made provision for risk assessments enabling continuance of the sport under "red" conditions.

Further more, the Thames River (Tideway) between Richmond Lock and Putney Bridge experiences stream flows on a daily basis that exceed that of Godstow in even the most severe stream flows. There for it is important that HSOBC trains in such conditions to ensure that they are ready to row / race on the Tideway.

A PROPOSED PROCEDURE

When red or yellow alert is in force, a decision on which crews, if any, should be allowed to use the river shall be made by a minimum of two from a committee of three: Head of Rowing, Senior Coaches and Water Safety Officer.

The river will be inspected, the prevailing weather noted, and the relevant regional weather forecast considered. A decision will then be made, which must be unanimous if rowing is to go ahead. Each member has the right of veto preventing use of the river by some or all.

If the committee decides that certain crews may be allowed to use the river, then the relevant coaches must be informed about:

- 1) the river conditions
- 2) the weather at present, and the forecast for the relevant period
- 3) any new hazards on the part of the river to be used
- 4) any restrictions or special precautions to be observed

In the light of this information, if the coach feels that he/she would rather not take the crew out, then his/her decision will be final.

COACHES AND COXSWAINS: BRIEFING

If a system incorporating the proposals above is adopted, then it will be vital that all coaches and coxswains who may be permitted to use the river when on Red Alert status, and Yellow status, shall have previously (probably at the start of the Spring Term) been given a specific briefing about the hazards and the extra safety procedures and precautions to be observed.

RECORDING

A log will be kept comprising a checklist of issues critical to the safe use of the river.

HAZARDS: A CHECK LIST OF PRINCIPAL ONES

1) The Trout Weir.

If this is fully drawn so that the speed of stream passing the boating rafts is fast, there are particular dangers for crews launching and landing. It may be that these are manageable by experienced crews, but not by less experienced ones.

2) Godstow Weir.

Fast flow from this weir produces particular dangers:

a) A 'jet effect' can force a crew towards the Meadow and cause it to spin and/or to run aground. This effect will be aggravated by the wind in certain directions: mainly the prevailing W and SW winds.

b) The water immediately below the weir can be turbulent and choppy, causing danger especially to small boats: singles and doubles/pairs.

3) Trees, bushes, etc.

In certain places, in fast stream conditions, there are particular danger spots near overhanging or fallen trees and branches, on the towpath bank. Coxswains, crews and coaches must be especially aware of these if they are permitted to go afloat. New hazards of this kind are most likely to appear in the winter months.

4) Flood.

a) When the river has burst its banks, and is flooding over Port Meadow, it may still be judged to be reasonably safe for experienced crews to go out, provided coxswain and coach are confidently aware of where the river bank is, so that they do not risk running the boat aground.

b) In these conditions, perhaps the most dangerous area is that just downstream of the Boat Club, where the river bends to the left. In past years, Geoff Beesley used to place two or more marker buoys to indicate where the riverbank was.

5) Floating debris

After heavy rains, tree branches, old fence-posts and other debris is often brought downstream.

6) Wind

Any dangers and difficulties caused by strong stream may be enhanced by the wind. For example, 'wind against stream' produces high, breaking waves and sinking conditions.

Coaches must brief coxswains about the present state of wind, and the forecast, and what special dangers may result from this. This hazard can equally arise in 'normal' stream conditions with strong winds.

7) Turning places

In strong stream conditions it becomes especially important that crews turn around only in certain areas where it is safe to do so, and that they follow the correct procedures, which will be described in briefings to coaches and coxswains.