

Ottery Fly Fishing Club Angling Risk Assessment

Introduction

Fishing in and around rivers is, by its very nature, potentially dangerous.

It is an environment that is constantly subject to change. This may be due to changes in the river, in riparian land and in access routes to the beats.

These changes may be ,

1. season to season due, mainly, to winter spates and other weather events and natural flood plain processes.
2. during any one season due to weather events and natural river / flood plain processes.
3. land use activities and changes adjacent to the beats. Mostly, but not exclusively, farming practices.
4. one-off, unpredictable events, e.g. a section of bank collapsing or a tree falling and so creating a new hazard.

Some of the club's beats are quite private and the angler can expect to meet few, if any, members of the public. On other beats there is legitimate public access, (or sometimes trespass), and members can expect to interact with non-anglers.

It is the responsibility of the angler, when on OFFC waters, to be continually aware of their surroundings, and the condition of the river, and act accordingly to try to ensure the safety of themselves and others.

Anglers should fish within the limits of their capabilities and experience in any given situation. If in doubt then err on the side of caution.

Angler often fish alone, in which case the above principle becomes even more pertinent.

Below are tables of potential hazards along with issues to take into consideration regarding those hazards. Mitigations are suggested.

It is important to realise that this list of possible hazards / considerations & suggested mitigations may not (due to the nature of the natural environment & associated land uses) be exhaustive.

If any angler becomes aware of other issues or circumstances that need to be considered then please contact the Ottery Fly Fishing Club's Executive Committee via the Club's Honorary Secretary.

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	WADING IN RIVERS
HAZARDS	
Drowning, falls, injuries from minor to serious.	
CONSIDERATIONS	
<p>Strength of flowing water - do not underestimate this.</p> <p>Changes to the river from season to season and during varying flow levels.</p> <p>The R Otter is a spate river and it can change its features markedly from season to season and after in-season spates. Just because a beat was safely wadeable last time it was fished does not mean it still is.</p> <p>Pools. These can be very deep and may change in character from year to year and throughout the season.</p> <p>The edges of pools, leading into the deeper water, can be very steep with loose gravel and can lead to an angler sliding down into deeper water.</p> <p>Rising water level. eg. rain further up the catchment.</p> <p>Underwater obstacles eg tree branches, rocks etc can lead to falls.</p> <p>Be aware that the river banks may be undercut and have overhangs that can collapse when stood on.</p> <p>The river is often incised leading to the formation of steep banks. Be aware of this when planning entry and egress points.</p> <p>Very little of the OFFC water is accessible without, at least, the need to climb over a 5-bar gate, step over barbed wire fences or find ones way down, or up, uneven or steep banks.</p> <p>All of the structures found on OFFC beats, such as gates, stiles, fences, ditches etc, are outside the management / maintenance control of OFFC.</p>	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	WADING IN RIVERS
MITIGATION	
<p>Each angler - should assess their own level of experience and skill. Wade according to ones own level of experience and skill Use a wading stick - or at least have one to hand in case needed. Use a wading belt - this helps prevent water entering the waders in the event of being submerged. Submerged obstructions - polarising glasses will make underwater obstructions, such as rocks and branches, more visible. Deeper pools - asses whether to wade around / through the pool or get out of the river and go around along the bank. Get to know the relationship between particular river levels at gauging stations (eg at Fenny Bridges) and the suitability of the river for safe wading. Keep records of these for future reference. Read any beat guidance / beat maps. Wading may be safer if fishing with another angler. Before stepping into the river where the depth is unknown then test the depth first with a staff. Buoyancy aids - either self-inflating or manually inflated - should be considered. Wading boots - should be non-slip.</p>	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	POWER LINES
HAZARDS	
Electrocution	
CONSIDERATIONS	
Carbon fibre rods are an excellent conductor of electricity as is a fly line coated in water	
MITIGATION	
<p>Do not fish under or near power lines, electricity can arc over considerable distances. When in water you are ideally earthed to conduct electricity. Power lines which cross the river might be marked on the banks with a post and sign both upstream and downstream of the power line - but this is not always the case Power lines away from the river bank are unmarked.</p>	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE CASTING ACTIVITY	
HAZARDS	
Injury from hooks	
CONSIDERATIONS	
Be aware of passers-by, fishing partner, oneself	
MITIGATION	
Wear eye protection. Sunglasses work well in good light conditions. When the light fades then consider plain glasses. Wrap around cycling glasses work well.. Be particularly careful with the back cast.	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE TREES AND BRANCHES	
HAZARDS	
Injury / death from falling trees or branches.	
Injury from tripping etc on submerged branches	
CONSIDERATIONS	
Take especial care around trees that are in the river. Submerged trees can be trip hazards. Trees in the river can often have relatively deep (and steep sided) scour holes adjacent to them so approach with caution. Especially when stepping or climbing over one. Beavers can leave trees partially chewed through, so making them vulnerable to wind blow. Weather conditions and season - trees in full leaf are more prone to wind blow.	
MITIGATION	
Polarising glasses for spotting underwater branches. Avoid fishing near trees in strong winds, especially when they are in full leaf.	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	FISHING ALONE
HAZARDS	
Need help or assistance when alone.	
CONSIDERATIONS	
Generally few other people around, especially if fishing very early or late. Relatively isolated locations There may not be a phone signal.	
MITIGATION	
Carry mobile phone with waterproof cover. Inform someone of your whereabouts and likely return time. Activate location tracking on your phone so that someone else knows where you are.	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	DISEASES
HAZARDS	
Weils Disease. Aka leptospirosis.	
CONSIDERATIONS	
You can get leptospirosis if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> soil or freshwater (such as water from a river, canal or lake) that contains infected urine gets in your mouth, eyes or a cut, usually during activities like kayaking, outdoor swimming or fishing. <p>Also be aware of ticks as they can transmit Lymes Disease.</p>	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	DISEASES
MITIGATION	
<p>Never put wet lines in your mouth or any other items of tackle that has been in the water. Wear waterproof plasters on any cuts or abrasions.</p> <p>Use hand cleanser if eating. Any product with a proven antibacterial action (disinfectants, bleaches, alcohol-based solutions, etc.) will be effective against leptospires even if they are not mentioned on the label.</p> <p>Reference: Leptospirosis Information https://www.leptospirosis.org/disinfecting-surfaces-and-materials/</p> <p>See a GP if you have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a high temperature, or you feel hot and shivery • a headache • been feeling sick or being sick • diarrhoea • body aches and pains • red eyes • a loss of appetite 	

ACTIVITY / ISSUE	FARM LIVESTOCK
HAZARDS	
<p>Death, serious injury, damage to tackle.</p>	
CONSIDERATIONS	
<p>Livestock may be present in the fields that border the river banks as well as along the paths that provide access to the river. Livestock, especially cattle, (and particularly cattle with calves) can be unpredictable. Livestock is usually moved around a farm from field to field throughout the year.</p>	
MITIGATION	
<p>Due caution should be exercised when livestock are present. It is safer to walk around the edges of fields that contain livestock as this gives the walker more, and quicker, options for leaving the field. If in any doubt about at the temperament of livestock then avoid the area.</p>	

HAZARDS	Poachers
Assault	
CONSIDERATIONS	
<p>Some types of fishing method are obviously poaching because they are against club rules e.g. spinning or netting.</p> <p>If one comes across people who seem to be poaching then there is no expectation that Club Members or guests should approach them and speak to them. Especially if one is fishing alone.</p> <p>But it would be very useful to be able to give a good description at a later stage. Photos or video would be very useful if it can be done discretely.</p> <p>If an approach is made then be cordial and explain the situation. The person(s) may well be cooperative and leave the area. If they are not cooperative then just disengage and leave them.</p> <p>Report the incident to the OFFC Hon Secretary at your earliest convenience giving date, time, description and comments about any interactions with them.</p>	
MITIGATION	
<p>When fishing then be aware of what is up ahead. Don't just fish with your 'head down'! It is really useful to be able to see people before they see you. This gives one time to assess the situation and decide upon a course of action without the pressure of an unexpected interaction.</p> <p>There is absolutely no expectation that Club Members or guests should approach them and speak to them.</p>	

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