

Southsea Rowing Club

FLAT WATER ROWING – PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR

Introduction – safety first

Seeking flat water by entering Portsmouth Harbour is not an option to be taken lightly and never to be undertaken alone or by unsupervised novice crews. In general, crews should not attempt to enter Portsmouth Harbour if it is too rough to row outside the club. This does not exclude boating from Old Portsmouth. There are seven potential dangers that must be considered before and during outings.

1. Weather

Check weather forecast before the outing – beware of deteriorating weather conditions, particularly increasing southerly or south easterly winds.

2. Tides

Ensure you know the state of the tide - be cautious in the two hours either side of high tide when the tide is running strongly. Never enter or leave Portsmouth Harbour through the harbour entrance unless you can see that you can do so safely – for emergency landing sites, see below.

3. Harbour entrance

Portsmouth Harbour entrance is the most dangerous part of any outing in Portsmouth Harbour. If the wind is south easterly or southerly, blowing into the harbour entrance, ten minutes spent cycling to Old Portsmouth to observe the water can be time well spent. Standing waves are very difficult to row in and can be compounded by a ferry wash. Do not attempt to row through the harbour entrance if there are standing waves more than one foot high.

4. Shipping

Portsmouth Harbour is a naval and commercial shipping port with many large (compared to rowing boats) ships entering and leaving the harbour each day. They enter the harbour through the deep channels in the centre of the harbour entrance. Small craft largely enter and leave the harbour through small boat channels on the Gosport side of the entrance.

5. Rights of way

Clearly, our boats are smaller, more manoeuvrable and more vulnerable than anything but a small sailing dingy. The rule is that we give way to other craft in Portsmouth Harbour at all times. Within any channel crews should keep to coxswain's right

6. Royal Naval Ships

There is an exclusion zone of 50 metres around Royal Naval (grey) ships or 150 metres around a submarine. This zone is extended to 250 metres if one of the above is underway entering or leaving the harbour. The exclusion zone is patrolled by Harbour Police at all times and must be observed.

7. Shortage of emergency landing sites

Naval/commercial areas of Portsmouth Harbour are surrounded by wharves designed for ships, not rowing boats, so emergency landing is severely restricted. It is important to be aware of potential emergency landing sites listed below.

Preventing an Emergency

General guidance concerning warm clothing in winter applies (see SRC website). Each crew member should have a waterproof top with some money for the Gosport Ferry.

The shortage of emergency landing sites and presence of commercial/naval shipping are the main reasons for not allowing scullers or crews (crews) to enter Portsmouth Harbour entrance alone. Crews should make a point of entering, crossing or leaving the harbour as a group. It is good practice to wait by the Hot Walls beach outside the harbour entrance before entering or by the Ballast Beacon (Red Post) before crossing over and leaving the harbour. In a mixed group of novice and experienced crews, the experienced crew should lead the way through the harbour entrance and the novice crews should follow at a safe distance, taking exactly the same course unless instructed to do otherwise. Please do not leave other crews behind, coming out of the harbour, regardless of experience. Remember, it may be you that need their assistance!

Having entered and crossed the harbour please follow guidance below depending upon your destination, staying in the channel.

Crews should keep a look out at all times, particularly when entering the harbour or crossing over. Remember, even experienced coxswains don't have eyes in the back of their heads!

In an Emergency

General safety rules apply, namely: stay with the boat unless instructed to do otherwise.

If a boat capsizes or hits an obstruction the accompanying crew should stand by, keep a look out for danger and offer assistance. This may vary from a visual damage assessment to rescue of the crew members.

If weather/tide conditions permit crews should always attempt to right and re-enter a capsized boat. Accompanying crews can assist in this process, especially for small boats by giving clear instructions and or forming a "bridge" between boats to enable the person to climb into the boat without it capsizing.

Do not attempt to row through the harbour entrance with a holed or water logged boat – use an emergency landing point instead (see below)

Emergency landing sites

There will be occasions when crews will enter the harbour relatively safely, only for the wind/tide to increase and the harbour entrance to be impassable or the sea to be "heaving" outside. In these events there are three emergency landing sites:

Camber Dock

This is next to the IOW car ferry. A sloping concrete hard very sheltered and accessible, provided you avoid the odd fishing boat. Nearby parking ensures that this is a good place to land, collect the trailer and drive the boats home.

Still and West

This is similar to and just to the south of the Camber. This has a shingle beach rather than a concrete hard but accessible across some wooden sea defences. Restricted parking but good enough in an emergency.

Hot Walls beach

A safe spot to land if you take on water going through the harbour entrance and the sea is too rough to return safely to the club. It is easy enough to carry boats back from here, provided you have sufficient numbers.

Other sites

Beyond the commercial port there are numerous sites for landing for repairs etc. These include mooring pontoons, gravel beach areas or public hard (Fareham, Haslar Creek). Care is needed to avoid under water obstructions close to shore.

Entering Portsmouth Harbour

The decision to enter Portsmouth Harbour should be preceded by a risk assessment taking account of; weather, tides and experience of crews involved. The decision to consider entering the harbour must be made by a senior member of the club with experience of rowing in Portsmouth Harbour. The final decision is the responsibility of the crew or coach actually planning to enter the harbour.

Under normal circumstances rowing boats enter and leave Portsmouth Harbour on the Portsmouth side. The only exception to this being when crews elect to row past Haslar towards Gillkicker Point (see below).

Regardless of conditions or state of tide crews should pass through the harbour entrance in single file as close as practical towards the shore/harbour wall. Do not pass inside the green post at the entrance but stay close to it. If progressing against the tide stay in very tight to the shore, particularly if there are standing waves further out. If you find that you are in standing waves row short and light to avoid catching crabs and making mistakes, this will work even against the tide. Always stay close to the shore between the round tower and the Still and West public house. Do not attempt to overtake or race through the harbour entrance.

Crossing the harbour

The crossing point on entering or leaving the harbour is much the same. On entering, proceed to the mooring pontoon for the Isle of Wight ferries and proceed directly across the harbour towards the marina to north of the Gosport Ferry terminal on the Gosport side of the harbour. In very flat conditions crews can cross directly from the IOW ferry pontoons to the "Ballast Beacon" or "The Red Post:" a red post to the south of the Gosport Ferry terminal (by

the green lightship moored in Gosport Marina). Under no circumstances should crews cross to the south of the red post.

In rough conditions or in strong tides it may be necessary to proceed to HMS Warrior or beyond before making a crossing.

Always be aware of harbour traffic when crossing the harbour, including the Gosport Ferries, not forgetting that two ferries may be operating at one time.

Destinations

Four destinations are covered in this guidance. Fountain Lake (the cross channel ferry port) is not covered because of the exclusion zone around grey ships. This is a real shame because it use to afford a very flat and relatively even racing course, sheltered in south easterly wind conditions. It should definitely be reconsidered if current restrictions are lifted.

Fareham Creek

This is the most frequently used steady state training route. Having crossed towards the marina to the north of the Gosport ferry, proceed north close to the RNFA terminal then keeping to the east of the moored yachts. After approx 800metres pick up and follow a line of large yellow mooring buoys and turn north west into Fareham Creek. After a further 400metres follow a long row of moored yachts. In a rising tide keep them approximately 50 metres to coxswain's left. In a falling tide stay closer to the yachts (out of the tide but a longer route). Head for a moored RNA transport, which is approximately 20 minutes row from the red post at the harbour entrance. There are often decommissioned grey ships moored to the right and left of the main channel. Sometimes those to the north east of the channel are having equipment removed and there will normally be a tug in attendance for safety reasons. Be careful to avoid this area. To proceed further please refer to the second page of "Flat Water Rowing – boating from Fareham" also on the SRC website.

Returning from Fareham creek is the reverse of the above, stay in the stream on a falling tide but do not stray into the centre of the harbour at any time other than at the crossing point. The usual finish point of any rowing pieces will be the red post, just to the south of the normal crossing point.

Gosport side of Portsmouth Harbour

This is a shortened version of the Fareham Creek row above but can be valuable to get crews side by side in flat water for interval training etc. It is probably best to avoid the Gosport Ferry crossing and start at the marina or RNFA Terminal, rowing for up to five minutes each way. Crews will be well away from cross channel ferries etc. The only danger will be small pleasure craft, remember to keep right in the small boat channel.

Haslar Creek

This is a very sheltered area available two hours either side of high tide (below Haslar Bridge) one hour either side of high tide (above Haslar Bridge). Rowing from the red post head south east, keeping Gosport marina to coxswain's right. After approximately 300 metres turn sharply to coxswain's right (this is a tricky turn so make sure you have the right one before taking it at firm pressure) and head towards Haslar Bridge 150metres ahead. In most states of the tide crews should turn below Haslar Bridge. If the tide is high crews may proceed under Haslar Bridge and around a left hand and right hand bend (tricky turns) towards a relatively straight, but difficult to steer stretch of sheltered water. This has a very shallow "pinch point" after approx 600metres, and thereafter a number of small moored pleasure craft, scattered across the channel. Beyond these boats is a small weir, not always

visible at high tide, which should never be crossed. The “pinch point” above can be tricky after high tide, so don't race over it and be prepared to get your feet wet.

Steering in Haslar Creek is tricky so proceed with caution until you have the exact lie of the water, moorings etc. Once you have them it can be a good place to train.

Haslar and Gillkicker

This is a neglected but useful place to row in a westerly or north westerly wind. The reason it is included here has been alluded to above. Crews are not allowed to cross directly outside the harbour entrance. They have to enter the harbour, cross at the normal crossing point to the red post and leave the harbour through the small boat channel on the Gosport side. This can be quite tricky with stronger currents than the Portsmouth side. Once out of the harbour turn south westerly along the shore in the same way as you would outside the club. There are one or two old sea defences but this stretch to the old fort offers approximately 3000metres of rowing in a straight line. Return to the club involves entering the harbour and crossing after the red post. Do not cross outside the harbour.

Boating from Camber Dock

This is an option in most weather conditions but observation of the waves by the car ferry terminal is recommended before boating. The main dangers are from fishing boats and the car ferries. The latter may cause sudden lateral washes when manoeuvring and should be given a wide berth

JJW
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