



Northern Broads



These enchanting waterways have it all: lock-free navigation, riverside villages and pubs, plenty of moorings and an abundance of wildlife **REPORT BY RICHARD JOHNSTONE-BRYDEN**

Sheltered waters, combined with an idyllic rural scenery of windmills, pretty thatched cottages, marshes, meadows, riverside villages, and tree-lined rivers have attracted generations of holidaymakers to the northern rivers of

The entrance to the River Bure is spanned by Vauxhall Bridge

the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads.

These enchanting waterways were 'discovered' in the late 19th century by wealthy Victorians who were drawn to the area by the prospect of exchanging their hectic city lifestyle for the slower pace of the countryside. By the late

1970s these qualities had been overshadowed by large numbers of hireboats charging from one end of the network to the other at a rate of knots. However, due to the hire industry's dramatic contraction in recent years, the Broads are once more regaining much of the magic and tranquillity that attracted those original holidaymakers.

The 125 miles of lock-free navigable rivers and lakes that make up the Broadland network are essentially split into two halves. The northern zone comprises the rivers Bure, Thurne and Ant while the southern zone is made up of the rivers Yare, Chet, Wensum and Waveney. The two areas are linked by a four-mile stretch of open water known as Breydon Water.

Despite their natural appearance, the lakes, known as broads, are man-made,





The Broads are Britain's largest protected wetland and home to a wealth of wildlife

quays along the Bure. Equally, the construction of new facilities between Haven Bridge and Breydon Bridge would help to significantly boost the port's appeal to boaters. Mooring is forbidden at the Yacht Station when it is closed during the winter months.

Before leaving the vicinity of the yacht station it is a good idea to carefully consider your plans because there are no safe moorings between the entrance to the Bure and Stracey Arms Mill, which is eight miles and at least one and a half hours away under power.

When navigating the lower reaches of the Bure it is important not to get too close to the insides of bends especially on a falling tide because many of them have become increasingly shallow as a result of silting up. Some of the worst bends have painted stakes clearly marking the extent of projecting mud banks. Work is currently being carried out along these stretches to renew local flood defences. These activities involve the use of several large barges, which you are likely to encounter around the Broads as part of the 20-year Broadland Flood Alleviation Project. It is

Picturesque views on the lower Bure



A sign marks the tiny village of Belaugh on the Bure



Speed limits must be adhered to at all times

important to give the barges a wide berth, especially if under tow.

Flowing through open marshland, this section of the Bure can feel quite desolate at times, especially in winter. As Great Yarmouth fades into the distance the only landmarks on the horizon are a series of redundant wind pumps, some of which have been restored.

Those who want to take a closer look at a Broadland mill can visit the preserved Stracey Arms Drainage Mill during the summer months. However, if the thought of a pint is more tempting, keep going towards the pub at the nearby village of Stokesby. If these moorings are full there is another pub, The Bridge Inn, by Acle Bridge, as well as a shop selling provisions.

The reed-lined river between Acle bridge and Thurne Mouth is a popular place with anglers and you will see a number of small stagings which are only for the use of fishermen. In an attempt to reduce the tensions between boaters and anglers the BA created a fishing zone along this part of

the river that skippers are asked to avoid using before 10am on a Sunday morning from 16 June to 31 October. If a spot of fishing

sounds tempting don't forget to purchase a rod licence from the Environment Agency beforehand and note that angling is forbidden on the Broads during the close season from 15 March to 15 June inclusive.

Wroxham bound

If you continue on the Bure heading upstream towards Horning and Wroxham, the remnants of St Benet's Abbey will come into view a few bends later. For those who want a closer look there are good public moorings upriver of the abbey. It was founded by King Canute as a Benedictine Order in 1020 on the site of the original monastery which was destroyed by the Vikings in 870.

The abbey was progressively dismantled following the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII with the abbey's stones being used in the construction of many local buildings. Although little remains of the abbey, the Bishop of Norwich holds an open air service at the site on the first Sunday of August in his role as abbot.

The entrance to Fleet Dyke and South Walsham's inner and outer broads lies almost opposite the abbey. Even though you can cruise round the privately owned inner broad, mooring, landing and fishing are forbidden.

The next point of interest is the entrance to Ranworth Dam. The name is appropriate because it leads boats into Malthouse Broad and straight past the sealed off Ranworth Broad. Public moorings are available at the staithe where The Malsters pub, a Broads



There are a number of good moorings in Horning, including those at Horning Ferry Inn and the parish staithe

Distances

River Bure

- Great Yarmouth Yacht Station to Acle Bridge – 11.5 miles
- Acle Bridge to Horning – 9.5 miles
- Horning to Wroxham – 6 miles
- Wroxham to Coltishall Lock – 5.5 miles

River Thurne

- Thurne Mouth to Potter Heigham – 3 miles
- Potter Heigham to Hickling Staithe – 5 miles

River Ant

- Ant mouth to Ludham Bridge – 1 mile
- Ludham Bridge to Barton Broad – 3.5 miles
- Barton Broad to Stalham – 2 miles

Speed Limits

- Port of Great Yarmouth – 5 knots
- Breydon Water – no limit applies
- The Broads – various limits ranging from 6mph to 3mph

VHF Radio Channels

- Great Yarmouth VHF Ch 12
- Breydon Bridge VHF Ch 12

Charts & guides

- Admiralty Chart 1536 – Approaches to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft
- Geo Projects Map – The Broads
- The Green Book published annually by the Norfolk & Suffolk Yachting Association



A classic cruiser passes one of Horning's traditional thatched boathouses on the River Bure

Authority information centre, a public telephone, and toilets can be found. For the more adventurous, Ranworth Church's tower provides one of the best views of the Broads.

As you rejoin the Bure from Ranworth the trees become more numerous as you approach the village of Horning. With its large number of picturesque thatched cottages and boathouses it is easy to see why the BBC chose Horning as a key location for the filming of Arthur Ransome's Coot Cub and Big Six.

There are a number of good moorings including those by Horning Ferry Inn and the parish staithe. Perhaps the most unusual boat to be found cruising from Horning is the Mississippi-style paddle steamer Southern Comfort, which operates during the summer. The village's facilities include shops, telephones, toilets and a slipway.

The entrance to Black Horse Broad is

located on the edge of Horning. In March 1949 it became the scene of a confrontation between a local landowner and boaters over the rights of public access to private broads. Since time immemorial all Broadland waters have been considered as part of the King's River, thereby making them free and common to all men.

“A toll applies to all visiting boats”

However, several Norfolk landowners sealed off their broads from the main river network during the 19th century under the auspices of the Enclosures Acts and Awards. Disgusted by the direct challenge to these ancient rights, Norfolk boatbuilder and designer Herbert Woods led the public campaign to oppose this behaviour. When conventional measures failed, Herbert Woods, together with 30 local men,

used a former landing craft to dismantle the barrier of tree trunks and chains at the broad's entrance. This 'invasion' led to a settlement whereby the landowner agreed to open the waterway to the public each year between Easter and mid-September.

There are two broads between Black Horse Broad and Wroxham, which are open to the public. The first is Salhouse Broad with its grassy slopes, small sandy beach and public footpaths that lead into the adjacent woodland. The second is the much larger Wroxham Broad – home of the Norfolk Broads Yacht Club. Although visiting boats can motor across the broad you must keep clear whenever the members are racing. Equally, do not use any of the private mooring buoys.

The river from Wroxham Broad soon gives way to a series of waterside properties as you motor into the >>>



The Mississippi-style paddle steamer *Southern Comfort*



A gaggle of geese: holidaymakers feed the local wildlife in Wroxham Broad



The entrance to Upton Dyke

village of Wroxham itself. Moorings are difficult to find within Wroxham although there are 24-hour moorings upstream of the road bridge.

Wroxham is home to several boatyards and shops, including the chandler Norfolk Marine and Roys of Wroxham – once described as the world's largest village shop.

Beyond Wroxham, the remaining navigable waters flow through meadows, marshes and woodland, and the picturesque villages of Belaugh and Coltishall before terminating at the disused Coltishall Lock.

The River Thurne

On passing the entrance to Upton Dyke, the two mills that mark Thurne Mouth can be seen in the distance. The point at which the River Thurne flows into the Bure can often feel like a motorway junction at the height of the summer season. Nearby Thurne Dyke has plenty of moorings with public toilets, a telephone, post box, a small shop and a pub close to the staithe.

Alternatively, you could keep going and tie up at Womack Water. This

pleasant piece of water has good stern-to public moorings, toilets and a small chandler's. The pretty village of Ludham is only a short walk away and boasts a pub and a village store.

On rejoining the Thurne you will find the reed-lined banks soon give way to the various riverside bungalows of Potter Heigham. The large yacht marina built by Herbert Woods close to the bridge was probably the first marina of its type to be built when it was completed in 1931. The two-acre basin was literally dug out by hand to provide 1800ft of quay heading for hire fleets.

On the opposite side of the river lies the pilot station operated by Robin and Patrick Richardson. All hire boats must be taken through the bridge by a pilot and those unfamiliar with the notorious medieval bridge would be well advised to use their services. The Richardson brothers also operate a fleet of electric day launches as well as the Repps Staithe boatyard on the other side of the bridge. The village's facilities include Latham's general store, a small games arcade and perhaps the best fish and chip shop on the Broads.

Another of the Broads Authority's fishing zones is located upriver of Martham Ferry. This relatively narrow reed-lined part of river eventually opens up to reveal Martham Broad, although you must keep to the main channel. The river terminates at West Somerton's public staithe, which has good public moorings and the water is so clear here that you can actually see the riverbed.

Instead of heading towards West Somerton at Martham you could head



Thurne Mill marks the start of Thurne Mouth



The beautiful stone bridge at Potter Heigham

Limitations

Air draughts on the River Bure

- Upstream of Vauxhall Bridge 6ft 9in at HW
- Upstream of Acle Bridge 12ft at HW
- Wroxham Road Bridge 7ft 6in at HW

Air draughts on the River Thurne

- Upstream of Potter Heigham Old Bridge 6ft 9in

Air draughts on the River Ant

- Upstream of Ludham Bridge 8ft 6in at HW
- Upstream of Wayford Bridge 7ft at HW

Length and beam

A maximum length restriction of 46ft and a maximum beam restriction of 12ft 6in applies to the following stretches of water:

- River Bure – Upstream of The Rising Sun Public House Coltishall, Upton Dyke and Hermitage Dyke
- River Ant – The entire waterway and its navigable branches including Barton Broad
- River Thurne – Upstream of Dungeon Corner, Catfield Dyke and its branches, Waxham Cut, Meadow Dyke, Candle Dyke, Womack Dyke and Womack Water

NOTE: Vessels registered on the Broads before October 1991 are exempt from the beam restrictions while vessels first registered on the Broads before April 1992 are exempt from the length restrictions. Further restrictions apply to those vessels with a beam greater than 14ft with details available from the Broads Authority.

up Candle Dyke, which leads to Hickling Broad and Horsey Mere. The channel through Heigham Sound is clearly marked and you should keep to it at all times because it is quite shallow outside the channel. Despite the expanse of open water the same also applies on Hickling Broad.

At the top of Hickling Broad there are moorings by the Pleasure Boat pub. Alternatively, at the top of Heigham Sound you could cruise up the relatively narrow Meadow Dyke to Horsey Mere. The only moorings at Horsey Mere are at the end of the staithe, which is just over a mile away from the beach.

The River Ant

Good moorings can be found upstream of Ludham Bridge with an electric charging point, rubbish disposal facilities, water and a small convenience store. Those in search of tranquillity may wish to avoid these moorings on either a Friday or Saturday evening when several hireboats pass under the bridge on their way to or from the Richardsons' Stalham yard.

The River Ant between Ludham and Barton Broad is a pretty stretch of water running mostly through open marshland with reed-lined riverbanks. During the winter months these



The moorings at the Pleasure Boat pub on Hickling Broad

Hickling Broad is the largest broad in the network but it's only 1.5m deep

marshes are just one of the places where reed cutters can still be seen in action gathering a crop that is highly prized by local thatchers.

It was while cruising this part of the Ant at the turn of the 20th century that the Norfolk architect Edward Boardman and his wife fell in love with How Hill and decided to build a large thatched house for themselves.

Today, the house is owned by the How Hill Trust and used as a residential field studies centre. Although the house is closed to the public, there are some wonderful walks within the grounds and a large green where people can enjoy a

picnic overlooking the Ant.

The Broads Authority has established an information centre within the grounds of How Hill at the Toad Hall Cottage Museum, which provides a glimpse into the life of a marshman at the turn of the 20th century. Tickets can also be purchased at the centre for a trip along the shallow dykes of the How Hill nature reserve, aboard the electric launch Electric Eel.

Barton Broad could be described as the jewel in the crown of the northern zone following its extensive five-year restoration by the Broads Authority to increase the depth of water both inside and outside the marked channel.

At the top of Barton Broad you can either follow the Ant up to the fixed Wayford Bridge (7ft air draught) or cruise on to Sutton Broad and stop for the night at the 24-hour free moorings at Sutton Staithe. Alternatively, you could head north from Sutton Broad and motor up Stalham Dyke into the village of Stalham, which is home to various boatyards and the Museum of the Broads.

factfile

Hire Fleets

There is still plenty of choice for those wanting to hire a boat ranging from the large GRP motorcruisers to small electric day launches. The majority of the operators are represented by either Blakes Holidays or Hoseasons.

The Regatta Circuit

The annual Broadland regatta circuit is one of the area's greatest attractions. The largest yachting events to be held every year on the northern rivers include the Three Rivers Race, Wroxham Week, Horning Week, the three Barton Regattas and the Thurne Mouth Open Regatta.

Moorings

The quality of moorings varies around the northern rivers with a range of moorings outside pubs to free 24-hour moorings in the middle of nowhere. Most moorings are of the alongside type, although there are a few locations where boats are required to moor stern-to and drop a mud weight over the bow.

Slipways

Most riverside boatyards will launch boats for a reasonable charge. A list of launching facilities can be obtained from the Broads Authority and the Green Book.

Contacts

- Great Yarmouth Port Authority 01493 335500
- The Broads Authority 01692 678459
- River Inspectors Control at Carrow Bridge 01603 625091
- Great Yarmouth Yacht Station 01493 842794
- Blakes Holidays 0870 238 9703
- Hoseasons 0870 543 4434
- Norfolk & Suffolk Boating Association www.thegreenbook.org.uk

A Broads Authority patrol boat



Requirements for visiting craft

The Broads Authority (BA) charges a toll to all vessels on the Broads, which is determined by the boat's type, size and use. For those staying only a few days a short visit licence can be purchased to cover up to a total of 28 days within a single toll year. Licences are available either from the BA's Head Office in Norwich, from one of its information centres or the harbourmaster at Oulton Broad. If you decide to extend your visit beyond 28 days you will need to upgrade to a full licence and the fee you paid for the short visit licence will be credited providing it is within the same toll year.

The BA introduced the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) to the Broads on 1 April 2007. The BSS has been phased in over three years with the final group of craft having to conform to the standards after 1 April 2009. However, the BSS only applies to those boats spending more than 28 days on the Broads although visiting craft are still subject to boat checks.



Traditional reed cutters get to work