

Loch Katrine

The Land Reform Act has resulted in a number of byelaws that previously restricted access being dissolved since the introduction of the Act in 2005. One such byelaw existed on Loch Katrine, but the deletion of this restriction means that the statutory rights of access to inland water do now extend to paddling on this beautiful loch.

Loch Katrine is a public water supply and Scottish Water has an interest in protecting the quality of water in the loch. The usual advice about taking positive action to avoid polluting the water is even more important here. Please follow our advice on Wild Camping and Human Sanitation as described on the Scottish Canoe Association website. Go to www.canoescotland.com, click on Where to Go and then Protecting the Environment. The links to Wild Camping and Human Sanitation are on that page.

Loch Katrine does hold a number of dangers that kayakers and canoeists planning to paddle on the loch should be aware of, as well as having some physical difficulties that it would also be useful to think about in advance.

The two obvious access and egress points are located at the Trossachs Pier at the south east end of the loch and at Stronachlachar, situated near the north west end.

Specific dangers for paddlers to be aware of on Loch Katrine include the Steamship "Sir Walter Scott", which is quiet and not very manoeuvrable, a water intake plus a weir and sluices. Knowledge of these hazards prior to paddling on the loch would be useful and in many cases should enable you to make the right decision in terms of which access point to use.

Access Points

For a lot of the time the easiest place to take access onto the loch is at Stronachlachar, because in comparison to the Trossachs Pier it is easier to park there and to physically get a boat onto the water. Stronachlachar is also a much better place for anyone who is not fully competent at handling their craft, or conversant with the collision avoidance rules for confined waters, making it the better of the two places for taking novice paddlers.

At the Stronachlachar end, the best launching point is 100 yards to the right of the pier as you look towards the loch. At the end of the wall there is a gap before some rhododendrons where a boat can be launched. Compared to the Trossachs Pier end of the loch, the Steamship Sir Walter Scott has a much less restricted approach to Stronachlachar Pier, and she only berths here between 11.15 and 11.45 daily and 15.15 and 15.45 on weekends and Wednesdays (unless on a special charter) so it is easier to see her coming and to keep out of

the way. . Another alternative at Stronachlachar is that you can always trolley your boat for half a mile along the cycle track to launch at a beach at NN403107.

The SCA strongly recommend that during the tourist season (April to October) paddlers launch at the Stronachlachar end of the loch. If visiting the Trossachs Pier end we recommend you land at the Emergency Services Rendezvous Point at NN491078, leaving boats well clear of the roadway, and walk the half mile to the pier. Advice on launching is included below but the Trossachs Pier end should only be used outside the tourist season and with the permission of the Sir Walter Scott Trust.

Trossachs Pier is not recommended for launching in the tourist season for the following reasons:-

- It is a busy working harbour (up to 10 arrivals or departures for the Sir Walter Scott and 16 for the Ellen's Isle per day).
- The launch facilities are intrusive and kayaks and canoes could be a Health and Safety risk in the car park area to tourists using the tour boats and other facilities.
- As this is a working pier there are no launch rights under the Access Legislation and you need to ask for permission.
- The loch in the vicinity of Trossachs Pier is narrow for 1 kilometre and there is a danger of collision between the Sir Walter Scott or Ellen's Isle and kayaks and canoes.

At Trossachs Pier there is a limited Access Point through a pedestrian sized gate between the shop and the start of the walkway along the pier to the berth used by the SS Sir Walter Scott. Be aware that this is a working pier so you can only use this after receiving permission from the Sir Walter Scott Trust on 01877 376 315. It is unlikely this will be given at busy times in the tourist season and it is important that we do not cause Health & Safety issues by blocking tourist traffic in the pedestrian area. At this gate there are steps down to the water and if the loch is low there is a small beach. The pontoons for boarding the Ellen's Isle should not be used for gaining access to the water. Note that it is difficult to launch elsewhere from the car park as there is a fair drop to the water level of the loch. The alternative is to trolley your boat for half a mile along the cycle track to the emergency services rendezvous point at NN491078.

Some paddlers will plan to launch at one access point and take out at the other, or paddle from one to the other, have lunch, then paddle back again. If planning to take a lunch stop at Trossachs Pier, it is possible, if the water level isn't too high, to land about 5 or 6 kayaks, or 3 or 4 open canoes, on the beach whilst you go to the café and toilets. However, this beach is completely underwater at high water levels, and at such times it is impractical to leave boats in this area.

Steamship “Sir Walter Scott”

The “Sir Walter Scott” is the famous steamship that has provided tourist trips on the loch since Victorian times. Whilst it is a graceful vessel we are assured it is not the easiest boat in the world to steer. Its manoeuvrability is particularly difficult at slow speeds, and it requires to do that at the narrowest part of the loch around Trossachs Pier. Anyone on the loch in a canoe or kayak, particularly in the vicinity of Trossachs Pier, needs to keep a constant lookout for the vessel.

If it is alongside the pier you need to be aware of its likely departure and the water turbulence that its propellers can create as it leaves. If it is not in sight you need to be aware of the possibility of it suddenly appearing. A timetable for the steamship can be obtained from the café, or in advance of your trip at: <http://www.lochkatrine.com/>.

If you are setting off from Trossachs Pier and the steamship is not in sight, and there is a possibility of it arriving back at the pier, then your position on the water as you negotiate the narrow entrance to the pier is important. Heading away from the pier the advice is to keep close in to the left, south side, of the loch. If the steamship suddenly appears you will be in the best position there to keep out of its way. It should be noted that this is contrary to the normal rules for prevention of collision. Whilst these rules would normally apply, this local deviation offers the best solution in this particular situation.

Due to its poor manoeuvrability it is important, if you find yourself at any time in front of the ship, to get away to a side as quickly as possible. This is why the area around Trossachs Pier is not recommended for novice paddlers who might freeze if confronted with the steamship. **Another reason why an awareness of the steamship is so important when paddling on Loch Katrine is because it is so quiet. The chances are you will not hear the ship approaching, so it is extra important to keep a good lookout, particularly astern.**

When the ship comes into the pier it turns around to face out before mooring. This process causes a lot of turbulence in the water and could confuse anyone on the water in a canoe or kayak. If you are in the vicinity when the ship comes in it would be best to sit well back out of the way. There is a cove on the left hand side (facing out from the pier) that could be used to wait in, or you can sit well back near the café until it is safe to proceed.

The loch narrows again about a kilometre out from Trossachs Pier and the steamship can appear suddenly as paddlers negotiate this stretch of water. The best advice here is to keep close to the right hand side, relative to the direction of travel of the paddler, and to avoid paddling along the centre of the channel.

If you stay close to the shore of the loch you should be out of the way of the Sir Walter Scott and not caught out with her silent approach. If you are paddling across the loch keep a sharp lookout for the steamship, stay together as a group

and avoid spreading out. Be aware that the Sir Walter Scott sometimes sails from end to end and at other times sails a shorter figure of eight course.

Water Hazards

There is a water intake at Royal Cottage, about 2 miles east of Stronachlachar. Paddling too close to the masonry walls of this intake could result in a small craft like a canoe or kayak being drawn under the water. Experienced paddlers should keep at least 30 metres away from the walls and inexperienced paddlers should give it a much wider berth.

There are sluices and a weir in the south east corner of the loch at the head of the Achray Water. Once again, it is wise to treat this hazard with caution and keep well clear. Inexperienced paddlers who may not have the skills to paddle away from the weir should not go near this structure as a capsize in this area could have severe consequences.

This article was written by Mike Dales, while Access & Environment Officer for the SCA.

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<http://www.lochkatrine.com/>