

Safety Guidance

for Narrowboats & Small Craft

navigating the Caledonian Canal

Narrowboats, and other small craft, are designed to operate in sheltered, often shallow, waters where there is some protection from the effects of wind and weather. The open waters to be found on the lochs of the Caledonian Canal experience weather and wave conditions normally considered unsuitable for these craft; however with suitable planning and preparation it is possible to carry out a safe passage. This guidance sets down the things you should do and check for in order to make a safe passage. Please also refer to the **Caledonian Canal Skipper's Guide**. The checklists below are to guide you in preparing for your passage. They show the items we recommend for a safe passage. Although the list has been prepared in conjunction with the Coastguard and mariners experienced in navigating the Caledonian Canal, it is not deemed to be an exhaustive list and you must satisfy yourself that all reasonable precautions are in place before you set off. Scottish Canals is the navigation authority for the Caledonian Canal (including Loch Lochy, Loch Oich, Loch Ness and Loch Dochfour) and has powers under ports and harbours legislation. We therefore reserve the right to deny passage to vessels or crews we have reason to believe are unsafe.

Checklists

Passage Planning

1	Confirm weather conditions. Do not proceed if so advised or if winds of Force 3 or greater are forecast.	
2	Can passage be carried out in company with other vessels?	
3	An up to date Skipper's Guide is available for use.	
4	Boat Safety Scheme certificate available? (Over 28 days only)	
5	Are points of shelter identified?	
6	Form CG66 lodged with Coastguard? (See Maritime and Coastguard Agency website for details, www.mcga.gov.uk). Copy to Scottish Canals.	
7	The local Coastguard Officers based at Fort William and Inverness may be able to help with any queries you have when planning your trip: Inverness: T: 01463 220577 email: hamish.young@mcga.gov.uk Fort William: T: 01397 772122 email: phil.wren@mcga.gov.uk . Remember these contacts are not for emergency use. (In an emergency dial 999 or call on VHF Ch. 16)	
8	Is passage insurance available?	
9	Is third party insurance available?	



Crewing

1	Is the skipper competent and experienced for the passage?	
2	Is there more than one crew member available to navigate the craft?	

The Craft

1	Is an anchor with chain and rope (minimum length of 30 metres recommended) available?	
2	Does the engine have sufficient power to cope with tidal and wave conditions?	
3	Is the engine serviced to prevent fuel blockage overheating, or power loss?	
4	Does the fuel tank need purging? Ensure tanks carry sufficient fuel for transit.	
5	Is an engine room toolkit available? This should include, but not be restricted to, tools to facilitate the changing of filters and testing and repairing minor electrical faults.	
6	Is the bilge pump capable of discharging shipped water and has it been tested and found to be operating satisfactorily?	
7	Is there a hand bailer and water resistant torch available?	
8	Are navigation lights fitted? (Skippers should note that vessels underway or at anchor must be able to display navigation lights in restricted visibility.)	
9	Are loose objects secured?	
10	Is serviceable sound signalling equipment available?	

Communications

1	Marine band radio fitted (Channels 16 & 74) or mobile phone.	
2	Information to hand prior to calling the Emergency Services should include: Name of vessel, location, number of people on board, and nature of distress.	

Emergency and Life Saving Equipment

1	Is a lifejacket (with light) worn by every person on board?	
2	Rescue throw line or lifebuoy and line available?	
3	Two red hand flares & 2 Orange Smoke Floats available?	
4	Two orange smoke signals available?	
5	Fire fighting equipment of sufficient capacity, serviceable and in date.	
6	Boarding Ladder	



Guidance specific to Narrowboats

Due to the unique construction features which are characteristic of narrowboats, Scottish Canals firmly believe that it would not be prudent for unmodified narrowboats to navigate on the exposed lochs of the Caledonian Canal.

In recognition of these hazards, the following **modifications and procedures are strongly recommended for the safe passage of narrowboats.**

1	Forward cockpit covered and tested for watertight integrity	
2	Forward cockpit scuppers checked and found to be clear	
3	Deadlights fitted for use on forward facing windows or ports	
4	Ensure adequate freeboard for forecast conditions, including engine room vents. Any engine room vents or air intakes near the waterline should be made watertight and suitable alternative ventilation arranged.	
5	Appropriate fenders and warps of sufficient length with sufficient adult members of crew to tend bow and stern ropes.	
6	VHF marine band equipment fitted, tested and found to be operating satisfactorily. At least one member of VHF competent crew on board.	
7	Overnight berthing to be arranged in advance with Scottish Canals – this may be limited in choice due to length and weight of vessel. <i>For this reason Scottish Canals consider it essential that a passage plan be submitted prior to transit</i>	

When planning your passage please take note of the following:

Sea Locks: At low tide, when locks are being flooded, white water and strong turbulence can be experienced. Adequate bow, stern cleats and fair leads are essential to enable warp control.

Channel Navigation: The waterway accepts large vessels on transit and may require traffic management in some of the man-made sections; it is therefore vital to communicate and up-date your passage plan to Scottish Canals staff.

It is not advisable to continue navigation on lochs in times of poor visibility or when light is fading, therefore please secure your overnight mooring before the Canal closes for the day.

Scottish Canals
July 2012

