

WeyDays with TLC

LOCKING PROCEDURES

GENERAL. To many people, locks are mysterious things. They are simply there to enable boats to pass from one water level to another, a bit like a lift. Think of them as baths with taps at one end and plug-holes at the other. You can't fill a bath with the plug out, or empty it with the taps running. Clearly all gates must be closed before carrying out any fill/empty procedure.

IN PRINCIPLE . .

FILLING A LOCK. Close all gates, close the paddles (the plug-holes) at the bottom, fill using the paddles at the top (the taps)

EMPTYING A LOCK. Close all gates, close the top paddles (the taps), open the bottom paddles (the plug-holes)

WINDLASSES (lock handles). **Never** leave them on the paddle gear unattended. The paddle may drop suddenly and without warning. The windlass will then spin round and cause injury to anyone within range.

IN REALITY . .

GOING UPHILL. Pull in at the lay-by below the lock. Wait for anyone else using it to finish. If required, empty the lock. Open the bottom gates by pushing evenly on the balance beams. Do not jerk them, they will fight back! Close the paddles once you have opened the gates! Leave a crew member on the lockside with the boat hook. They must be careful at the lock edge as some are quite deep, and all are definitely wet. Be particularly careful in damp conditions as many lockside can be slippery. Bring the boat in to the lock, preferably the side with the ladder where your crew member will be waiting with the hook. The crew member can then use the hook to pick up the front rope, which should then be tied off securely to a bollard on the lockside. Repeat for the stern rope, which should also be tied off. Once the boat is secured stop the engine and close the bottom gates (having checked for other boats wishing to come up).

The boat must be tied fore and aft before filling. Do not rely on a crew member to hold it on ropes.

FILLING THE LOCK. If you are the only boat in the lock, open the paddle on the SAME side as the boat, but only a little bit. Observe the flow of water in to the lock, it should reflect off the opposite wall, hold the boat against the side and pull it forward slightly. Once the flow is established and the boat is stable, you may increase the flow rate a little at a time, constantly checking that the boat is not being bashed about. At the same time the paddle on the opposite side from the boat may be gradually opened, but always ensuring it is lower than the first one. Check that the boat is not running forward on to the top gates, or back on to the bottom gates, either of which could have dire consequences.

If you are sharing a lock, the paddle priority would usually be in favour of the heavier boat, but it is probably best practice to open the paddles evenly, whilst constantly checking that there is no excessive turbulence bashing either boat.

Once the lock is full, the gates can be opened and the paddles lowered with the windlass. Ensure all crew and equipment are on board, start the engine, cast off and sail on. If you have shared a lock, the etiquette is for the boat that arrived first to leave first. In some circumstances the other boater may indicate to you to move out first. On the River Wey navigations, we leave the gates open behind us.

GOING DOWNHILL. If the lock is with you, sail on in, otherwise pull in at the layby, wait for anyone else using it to finish and fill it if required. Enter the lock. Stop preferably on the same side as the ladder. Close top gates and paddles, checking that non-one else is coming up behind that could share the lock. The steerer should stay on the boat. Crew members should take the fore and aft ropes and take them ONE turn round a bollard. Stop the engine. **DO NOT TIE THEM OFF—THE BOAT WILL BE LEFT HANGING IN MID AIR AND POSSIBLY DROP SUDDENLY WHEN YOU LET THE WATER OUT!** Open bottom paddles to empty the lock. Stop any forward movement of the boat by holding on the ropes with their one turn round the bollard. Do not let the boat run forward on to the bottom gates, or back on to the cill. Open the gates when ready, then close the paddles. If it is a shallow lock, or the ladder is safely negotiable, the crew may get back on board ready to sail off. **DO NOT JUMP FROM THE LOCKSIDE DOWN TO THE BOAT!** Ensure ropes are and windlasses are safely on board before sailing off. Pick up crew members from the lower layby if required.

