

Safety on the River Severn in Ironbridge

Safety is very important to us at the Ironbridge Coracle Trust.

We're urging everyone to remember that although you may be fit and strong on land, you can't train your body for the shocks of unseen dangers under the water, at any time of year.

- Beware of the dangerous and fast flowing undercurrents in the river
- Look out for submerged trees or branches that may trap you underwater
- Beware of undercut banks, rock ledges and old wharf walls that can trap you
- Cold water can cause cold shock, hypothermia and drowning even in hot weather
- Rubbish like shopping trolleys and slippery rocks can trap/injure your feet
- It may be much shallower than you think, so don't jump in from a height!



**Ironbridge
Coracle Trust**

Water safety FAQs

I can swim, why shouldn't I get in the water? Even the strongest swimmers may face difficulties in the water. The water will be cold, even in the summer; which will take your breath away and leave you gasping for air. The shock of the cold water will also mean that your blood will rush away from your muscles to protect your vital organs, leaving your muscle and limbs without energy to keep you afloat. There may be unseen objects which could cause you injury. Open water is often murky so you won't be able to tell the depth. It could be much deeper than you expect or much shallower than you expect, making it very dangerous if you jump in.

I get in the swimming pool and I'm fine with it, what's different about open water swimming?

In a swimming pool, there are no obstacles in the water and life guards are on hand all the time. Typical swimming pool temperatures are 25 – 28 degrees centigrade and you can easily get out using the access ladders.

The open river is very different. The average outdoor water temperature in the UK is 11 degrees centigrade. There are no life guards on the Severn to rescue you if you get into difficulties. There are no ladders to get out. If you fall in the water, it is likely you will be wearing clothes which will become heavy when wet making it much harder to stay afloat or lift yourself out of the water. In 2014, 186 people drowned in inland waters. You won't be able to see any obstacles in the water which could cause you injury.

My friends all swim in the water and it's really fun. I don't want to miss out. Why shouldn't I get in the water?

Even if your friends think it's a good idea to get in the water, please don't do the same. There are too many unseen dangers and it's just too risky. Find other ways to cool down and to have fun – find your nearest swimming pool, eat an ice cream, go to the park, go to the cinema. Don't get in the water.

What do I do if my dog gets into the water?

If your dog gets into the water, don't jump in after it. Although it will be distressing to see your pet in the water if he/she starts to have difficulties, do not put

yourself in danger to rescue them. Encourage your dog to swim over to you. If they are unable to do this, try to reach him/her with a long branch. Please try to keep your dog on a short lead when walking near the river so they don't run off and risk jumping into the water. This will also help other footpath users who might be scared of dogs or risk being tripped up if unsteady on their feet.

What do I do if I see someone struggling in the water?

Do not get into the water, you may get into difficulties as well. Call the emergency services as soon as you can. Keep an eye on the person, keep talking to them, and stay near them. If you are able to, get something to help them, like a throw line if available or a tree branch to reach out to them. Do not put yourself into the same position to help someone in difficulties.

If I can't get in the water and I think I can help, am I just supposed to leave them to drown?

We advise not to get into the water as you may get into difficulties yourself. You may feel that you are able to help them but please do not get into the water. - The shock of the water can take your breath away and cause your muscles to cramp, making it very difficult for you to stay above the surface; - There may be objects hidden under the water which could cause you harm; - The water may be deeper than you can see. It isn't easy to get out of the river wearing wet clothes and assisting someone else; - The weight of the person you want to assist will make staying above the surface much harder, particularly if you are not able to get out straight away; - Boaters might not be able to see you in or under the water and won't know to stop causing serious harm to you and the other person.

What should I do if I see children playing in the water?

Check if the children are with their parents or adults. If they are, approach the parents/adults and respectfully tell them of the risks of swimming in open water. Ultimately it is the parent/adults decision if they are happy for their child to be in the water. Be mindful about approaching children who are on their own – make sure you don't put them or yourselves in a difficult situation.