

SAFETY ALERT: Hazardous board-walks on River Usk between Aberbran and Brecon

We have received reports of hazardous fishing board-walk planks across the River Usk between Aberbran and Brecon at approximate Grid Reference SO012283 at the river-right 'gathering eddy' above the top of the Llanspyddid rapid (where the river turns left and drops several metres through a boulder-garden, with an island to the right). These planks extend more than halfway across the river, from the right bank. They are secured to the bedrock with steel bolts, leaving exposed bolt ends rising above the planks in places.

At low water, these planks are exposed and easily avoided. But at medium to high water levels they will be covered and form a lethal hazard, posing a significant risk of boat pinning, swimmer entrapment (by the strainer formed between the planks and the river bed) and laceration (by the exposed bolts).

Paddlers should therefore exercise extreme caution when approaching the Llanspyddid rapid (and the eddies above it on river-right) in anything other than low flows; and avoid directing capsized swimmers towards these planks. The left-hand, deep-water channel is unaffected.

During construction in July, these board-walks were inspected by Natural Resources Wales, who advised us that "NRW visited the site in June and determined that the intention of the landowner was to install board walks into the river. This work did not require a flood risk permit. However, we agreed that works to the remaining walkways should be completed as soon as possible. The wooden walkways should be fixed in line with the existing alignment of the rock outcrops and all fixing bolts cut flush to the walkways to minimise any health and safety risk. We also recommend that appropriate signage be put in place upstream to make users aware that there are obstructions ahead."

Now that winter paddlers are using the river regularly, it has become clear that these precautions have not been applied and that the completed boardwalks pose a significant threat to life. Following pressure from local paddlers this week, NRW has agreed to inform the landowner of the hazard that these boards pose and the importance of taking appropriate action to mitigate the imposed risk.

We will provide further information if the situation changes.

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