

# An introduction to rivers

All rivers start at the highest point in an area. As the river **flows** down, it gains more water from other streams, rivers, springs, added rainfall, and other water sources.

What is a river?

A river is **freshwater** flowing across the surface of the land, usually to the sea.



The River Channel

Rivers flow in channels. The bottom of the channel is called the **bed** and the sides of the channel are called the **banks**.

Where do rivers begin?

Rivers begin at their **source** in higher ground such as mountains or hills, where rain water or melting snow collects and forms small streams.

How are rivers formed?

When one stream meets another and they **merge** together, the smaller stream is known as a **tributary**. Many tributary streams form a river.



## How do rivers grow?

A river grows larger as it collects water from more tributaries along its **course**.

## Where do rivers end?

The great majority of rivers eventually flow into a larger body of water, like an ocean, sea, or large lake. The end of the river is called the **mouth**.



## What do rivers provide?

Most settlements were built along major rivers. Rivers provide us with food, energy, recreation, transportation routes, and of course water for irrigation and for drinking.

# The River Thames in England

The Thames is England's longest river and the second longest river in the [United Kingdom](#). Long ago, before Britain was separated from continental Europe, the Thames was a tributary of the [Rhine](#). The English Channel was formed about 7,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age.

The River Thames rises in the Cotswold Hills in Gloucestershire, and flows roughly eastwards passed Oxford (where it is known as the River Isis), until the Chilterns and on through London to the North Sea.



## Did you know...?

- Length 346 km (215 miles)
- Source is about a mile north of the village of Kemble, near Cirencester.
- Mouth in the North Sea.
- There are in all 47 locks,
- The Thames has been frozen over at various times, the earliest recorded occasion being AD 1150.
- The Thames is navigable by barges is navigable for 306 km (191 miles) from Lechlade
- The country alongside the Thames is mostly rolling hills with farming and grazing being the main uses of the land until London when it becomes urbanised.
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The Thames flows through London, the capital city, and has played a central role in British history for some 2000 years. From the Roman invasions of 43 BC to the turn of the millennium in AD 2000, some of the most famous events in British history have taken place on or near the Thames. These include the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, the plot to blow up the houses of Parliament in 1605 and the Great Fire of London in 1666.

