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Preface

This book arose from a happy coincidence of interests and enthusiasms. A number of researchers in the Department of Geography at Lancaster University have long-standing interests in both the physical and human aspects of rivers, and in changes to British landscape, environment, economy and society. In 2001 Tony Wilkinson contacted us and explained his ideas for a book on British rivers that would reflect his interest in and enthusiasm for this topic. Rather like a river, from this small beginning a substantial project grew! Although there are many books on particular aspects of rivers, especially their physical characteristics, and some volumes on specific major rivers, to our knowledge nothing has been published that provides an integrated account of the physical characteristics and human uses and associations of British rivers. We proposed such a volume and Tony Wilkinson agreed to fund the research needed to write the book. Sue Owen was appointed as research associate for the project and the book was researched and written during 2002 and 2003. A further fortunate coincidence led us to Carnegie Publishing Ltd, also based in Lancaster, where Alistair Hodge expressed enthusiasm for the manuscript we had produced and agreed to publish a volume that included the substantial illustrations that we had always envisaged.

The finished book is aimed at a number of audiences. Although it is written by academics and meets high standards of scholarship and research, it is written in an accessible style. Detailed and scientific explanations are avoided, though the interested reader is given references where these ideas can be followed up. The book aims to convey our collective knowledge of and enthusiasm for rivers in a way that will interest, entertain and stimulate further study both in the library and along the riverbank. We thus expect the book to be of interest to a wide range of general readers with an interest in landscape, environment, local history and popular science. It may also be useful as an introductory text for courses in Geography and related subjects in schools, colleges and universities. The book's holistic approach, combining physical and human studies of rivers with extensive illustrations and an appendix of factual information on a range of British rivers, ensures that every reader

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will find much of interest.

Many debts are incurred in the production of any volume. First, and most importantly, we must acknowledge the vision and generosity of Tony Wilkinson without whom this project would not have been initiated. Second, there are many colleagues at Lancaster who, though not formally associated with the project, contributed to it in various ways. In particular we thank Harriet Orr for comments on sections of text, Gemma Davies for assistance with GIS, Chris Beacock and Simon Chew for cartography, and numerous other colleagues with whom we have discussed ideas about the project. Detailed credits for pictures and other sources of information are given elsewhere, and we thank all those who have given permission to reproduce material. Finally, our thanks go to Alistair Hodge and his team at Carnegie Publishing for carefully seeing the book through its production process.

In many ways this has been an unusual and exciting project for a group of academic geographers. It has challenged us to move beyond our specialist areas of expertise, to think about the links between physical and human processes in a creative way, and to write for a non-academic audience. Although each chapter has its principal named author, the book has been a genuine collaboration. We have enjoyed the experience, and the sharing of knowledge about rivers that the project has required has led us to view the rivers of Britain in new ways. If, in reading the volume, others can be enthused to visit rivers and to see them with fresh eyes then the book will have served its purpose.

Sue Owen
Colin Pooley
Andy Folkard
Chris Park
Gordon Clark
Nigel Watson
Lancaster 2004

Foreword

The architecture of geology holds for us mere humans some of the greatest stimuli in our lives. Rivers and waterfalls, along with mountains, have the greatest impact. For those of us who are impressed with these things, and we are legion, it is a lifetime love affair. There is an irresistible urge to stop at any spot where there is moving water. Rivers, like people, are unique and hold in them depths of mystery about which we always wonder. Like human beings, they also have a life force which in their case, however, is much longer lived. If we knew all that there was to know about them, life would be less interesting. We are their pupils and they are the teachers. This book is intended to help to guide those interested through the earlier stages of what the writers hope will become a lifetime engagement.

Tony Wilkinson

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Thanks also to the many staff at Lancaster University, Department of Geography, who contributed to the production of the book, especially Chris Beacock, Simon Chew, Gemma Davies and Harriot Orr.

CHAPTER I Introduction to British rivers

Chris Park

Introduction

Rivers play a fundamental role in the economic, social and cultural life of most societies. They have provided power for industry; they may provide water for industrial use or human consumption; they can be a means of communication and transport of goods; and they are sites of leisure and pleasure. Most large towns are situated on a river; most people are attracted to water; and rivers feature prominently in literature and art. Rivers can also pose threats, particularly from flooding or pollution. They thus have to be managed and regulated, especially when there is urban and/or industrial development close to a river. Rivers are also a central feature of the natural landscape, providing a mechanism that shapes landforms as well as a range of habitats for flora and fauna. There are few aspects of contemporary life that do not interact in some way with rivers. Whereas there are many books which deal with specific aspects of rivers, this book is unusual in that it draws together all of these topics to provide an integrated account of rivers within the context of the British landscape.

In this volume we deal exclusively with British rivers. By Britain we mean Great Britain, which consists of England, Scotland and Wales. We have deliberately adopted a broad-brush approach, in seeking to describe and account for rivers in the British landscape. The scope is huge, and to avoid the risk of simply producing a tourist guide to British rivers and make our task manageable we have focused on specific themes in separate chapters. It will become clear that while landscape features such as lakes, canals and estuaries are often important elements of the 'river story', our primary focus in this book is on the rivers themselves. There are few entirely natural rivers left in Britain, so inevitably much of what we describe relates to modified or managed rivers. We have not attempted to mention or describe each of the major rivers in Britain,