

River Thames, Reading to Henley

Easy Trail: Please be aware that the grading of this trail was set according to normal water levels and conditions. Weather and water level/conditions can change the nature of trail within a short space of time so please ensure you check both of these before heading out.

Route Summary

This is a trip down a particularly pretty part of the Thames, passing some famous places, small villages, large old houses, and finishing near to Henley-on-Thames, home to rowing, and a very busy part of the river. Many boats will be encountered; some of them ancient, some modern, and the finish is at Marsh Lock, for many years a famous canoe slalom site. The site had to be given up mainly due to the pressure on space, with not enough room for several hundred campers and their vehicles, all squashed down a narrow lane in the height of summer!

Start Directions

Wokingham Waterside Centre is at the Reading end of the A329M. Huge field for picnics and parking on the road (height restriction at the Centre car park).

Finish Directions

Mill Lane is off the A4156 Reading Road. From the start, follow the A4 sign for Maidenhead, and after 2 miles, turn off towards Sonning. Cross the river bridge over the Thames, and turn right for Henley. After Shiplake, at a round-a-bout with a Tesco on the right, go straight on, and Mill Lane is just after a small garage, on the right side, after 100m.

Distance: 6 Miles

Approximate Time: 2-3 Hours

The time has been estimated based on you travelling 3 – 5mph (a leisurely pace using a recreational type of boat).

Type of Trail: One Way

Waterways Travelled: River Thames

Type of Water: River navigation mainly rural

Portages and Locks: 3 locks, all can be accessed by paddlers

Nearest Town: Reading

Start: Wokingham Waterside Centre, Thames Valley Park Drive, Reading, Berkshire, RG6 1PQ

Finish: Mill Lane car park, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. RG9 4HB GR SU 772817

Vehicle shuttle is required

O.S. Sheets: Landranger No. 175 Reading and Windsor

Licence Information: A licence is required to paddle on this waterway. See full details in Useful Information below.

Local Facilities: Public toilets. All other facilities in Reading and Henley.

Description

The first section of river is straight down to [Sonning lock](#), and on the left side is an enormous stretch of water, the Caversham Rowing Lakes, known as the Redgrave-Pinsent Rowing Lakes, former gravel extraction pits. The straight is Dreadnought Reach, and the river soon becomes a bit more mellow and pleasant. The river leaves to the right at the end of the section, and Sonning Lock is especially pretty, with snacks sold here in the summer. The portage route for canoes is on the right side near to the lock gates, as is the way back below.

Sonning Bridge is then paddled under, a 1775 brick arch bridge which replaced a wooden structure. It is narrow, with traffic lights, and on the left of the bridge is the Mill Theatre, producing all its electricity from the mill stream. The village is to the right side, and has a few good restaurants.

After Sonning, the river becomes more rural, and after 1.5 miles, St. Patrick's Stream is the large channel joining – don't go here, stay on the main river. The river meanders interestingly, and on the hill ahead you can see Shiplake College. Before Shiplake lock is the College Rowing Club.

The canoeist's route is past the weir, and water run-off. Keep on the left side of the river. The portage is just before the gates, on the right side, taking you alongside the campsite, and across the end of the site on to a pontoon.

The camping here is special, and this is a highly-prized site, inhabited throughout each summer.

Back on the river, the stream joining from the right is the River Loddon that has already met St. Patrick's Stream. A long bend to the left, with a railway bridge and boatyards, brings the paddler alongside Wargrave village on the right side, with Wargrave Boat Club on the right before the village. Here, the George and Dragon pub and restaurant allows re-fuelling and has mooring places.

There are then some beautiful houses on the run-in to Henley, many very old. Marsh Lock, the next lock and weir is unusual in that the lock is on the opposite bank to the towpath, so a long wooden bridge joins them right across the river.

Approaching Marsh Lock, the paddler needs to move to the right-hand side of a line of wooden posts, as the portage route is in this side channel. You cross the lock gates, and then carry your boat across Monkey Marsh Bridge to the left side of the river. At the end of the bridge, it is 150 yds up Mill Lane to the car park, or take the Thames path, and cross a field.

Whilst in Henley, it is worth (due to parking difficulties) walking down the tow path to the town to see the sights, the shops, and cream teas.

Useful Information

The waterways in this trail are managed by The Environment Agency and require paddlers to hold a licence. If you are an existing British Canoeing member the good news is that your membership includes an annual licence for the waterways covered within this trail – please ensure you take your membership card with you on the water as this acts as your licence, if stopped with no licence, you will be at risk of being fined.



You can buy a licence directly from [The Environment Agency](#) for this waterway or by becoming a British Canoeing member you'll have a licence to cover you for a whole year. A British Canoeing membership gives you a whole range of benefits including licenses to paddle on 4500km of Britain's waterways and Civil Liability Insurance, worth up to £10 Million. If you are planning to paddle regularly this will save you great deal of money and hassle alongside having peace of mind. For more information on British Canoeing membership please [click here](#)

Further useful information can be found on the following websites:

River Levels <http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

www.wargraveboatingclub.co.uk/

<http://www.visitoxfordandoxfordshire.com/oxfordshire/towns/henley-on-thames.aspx>

CANOEING SAFETY ADVICE

Spending an afternoon or day canoeing on a Canoe Trail can be a fun way to experience nature, help you to stay fit and healthy and enjoy spending time with friends and family. It can also be a dangerous journey, if appropriate safety guidelines are overlooked. To help make sure you remain safe at all times, read on to see our canoeing safety advice guidelines.

Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90% of all boating injuries are attributed to lack of proper footwear. Other canoe safe clothing includes hats, gloves, additional dry clothing, and layered items which can easily be removed. Take or wear a windproof top and course always wear a buoyancy aid - for children make sure the crotch straps are used.

Be sure to:

- Know the weather forecast and check the water conditions before you set out canoeing. There is an [Environment Agency](#) website where information concerning river levels can be found. We recommend checking this before heading out as the river levels can rise and fall quite quickly in wet or dry conditions.
- Observe navigation rules for this waterway.
- Check to see if there are any events on the waterways when you wish to travel.
- Check that your equipment is well maintained and ready for the water.
- Check that your boat has the required buoyancy to keep it afloat in the event of a capsized



Photo by James Carnegie

ALWAYS be certain to let others know where you're going and when you're expected to return.

MAKE SURE that the journey you plan is within your capabilities.

MAKE SURE you never paddle alone.

Equipment Checklist

Use the canoeing safety advice checklist below to make sure you have everything you need:

- Boat
- Paddle
- Buoyancy Aid
- Bailer/sponge
- Small First Aid Kit
- Phone (in a waterproof bag)
- Drinking water and snacks
- Suitable clothing for the weather

Environmental Good Practice

One of the great things about paddling a canoe trail is enjoying the journey and different environments that you paddle through. So when you are out on the water please consider the following things to help keep the wonderful waterways and environment as you found them and to avoid accidentally disturbing wildlife and their habitats.

- Take your **litter** home with you
- Keep **noise** to a minimum
- Where possible keep to any **designated paths or launching points**.
- **Do not “seal” launch** or drag boats to avoid wearing away natural banks. Float your canoe for launching, lift out when landing and carry it to and from the water.
- Canoe a **safe distance away from wildlife**. If you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.
- Familiarise yourself with the local area, its **sensitive places and protected areas**
- On rivers, **avoid paddling over gravel banks** in low water conditions – they may contain fish spawn.
- Ensure you **don’t remove or damage any plants or animals** from the waterway as they may be protected or harmful if transferred to other catchments
- When clearing litter left by others, **handle it with care**.
- **Be the eyes and ears on the water**. Report pollution, wildlife problems, damage, incidents etc to the relevant authorities: **Canal & River Trust**, Emergencies: 0800 47 999 47

RSPCA for wildlife and animals in distress: 0300 1234 999 (24 hours)

Environment Agency: 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours)





CHECK, CLEAN, DRY

Help minimise the spread of invasive aquatic species and disease by following the campaign advice before putting your canoe and equipment in and out of the water (some invasive species can survive in damp or wet conditions for five or six days on water recreation clothing and equipment).

- **CHECK** all your equipment and clothing for living organisms and plants fragments. Pay particular attention to areas that are damp and hard to inspect.
- **CLEAN** and wash all equipment, clothing and footwear thoroughly away from water source. If you do come across any organisms, leave them at the water body where you found them. When practical, completely dry out all equipment and clothing before going to a new site.
- **DRY** all equipment and clothing - some species can live for many days in moist conditions. Dry your kit with towels. Make sure you don't transfer water elsewhere.

Canoeists and kayakers take environmental concerns very seriously and already follow existing voluntary environmental codes of conduct. You can find more information about canoeing and the environment in British Canoeing's two publications covering inland and coastal paddling 'You and Your Canoe'. Both are available on the [British Canoeing website](#).

*We have taken great care to ensure the currency, accuracy and reliability of this information. We cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions but where such are brought to our attention, the information will be amended accordingly. Users should be aware that environmental conditions outside of our control can change the nature of the Trail within a short space of time. It is recommended that weather and water conditions are checked beforehand, and tide timetables where applicable. **This trail was last reviewed in January 2013***

© British Canoeing copyright 2015

This material may be freely reproduced except for sale or advertising purposes provided it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as British Canoeing copyright and the title of the publication specified.