

Reading (Thames Valley Park) – Henley River Thames



Start – Wokingham Waterside Centre, Thames valley Park Drive, Thames Valley Park RG6 1PQ. This is at the Reading end of the A329M.....

Length - 6 miles and 3 locks - (It is possible to use the locks instead of getting out to portage them therefore this route is suitable for those with ambulant problems).

Licence – A Thames Licence is required (<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/recreation/boating/31605.aspx>)
Canoe England Membership includes a Thames licence (take your membership card and sticker with you)

Duration – ½ day

Start at Wokingham Waterside Centre, Thames valley Park Drive, Thames Valley Park RG6 1PQ. This is at the Reading end of the A329M. There is a huge field for picnics here too and an easy put in. There are public toilets behind the centre. There is a height restriction on the car park but one can easily park on the road so it's not a problem.

Paddle downstream towards Sonning lock. This section is known as Dreadnought Reach. As you go down stream to your left is the Caversham Rowing Lakes otherwise known as the Redgrave-Pinsent Rowing Lake. It was created by the selective dredging and reclamation of part of the Caversham Lakes, a string of lakes that adjoin the River Thames, which were originally created as a result of gravel extraction.

Sonning Lock is a particularly pretty lock and as you enter the lock area the canoe portage is on the right hand side near the lock gates. In the summer months there is the opportunity to buy snacks here.

The entry point for canoes (if you are not going through the lock) is just the other side of the lock but do take care as the steps there are not only steep but very small.

Once back on the water you paddle under the Sonning Bridge. It is a brick arch bridge completed in 1775, to replace an earlier wooden bridge. It is only the width of one car so the traffic is controlled by traffic lights. To the left of the bridge is the Mill Theatre (<http://www.millatsonning.com/>). This Dinner Theatre produces all its own electricity from the old mill stream. To the right is the village of Sonning (<http://www.sonning.net/>) and it has a few good restaurants.

As you leave Sonning you are once again out in the countryside with the occasional house on the bank. About 1.5 miles downstream after Sonning you will see a largish turning off to the right and this is the entrance to St Patrick's Stream. Do not turn down here but continue on the main river.

The river has some interesting meanders here but up on the hill you can see Shiplake College and on the final bend before Shiplake Lock is Shiplake College Rowing Club.

To get to the lock you have to pass a weir and water run offs. It is best to keep to the left hand side of the river (depending on river traffic) if the river is flowing fast. The canoe portage is almost at the lock gates on the right hand side. This takes you up alongside the campsite. The portage is across the end of the campsite to a pontoon below. The camping here is of a more traditional variety and the site is inhabited with campers throughout the warmer months. The traditional camping here is much sort after and it can take years to obtain a plot. If coming through here in the summer months have a look at the "tents" and their fabulous contents.

Once back on the river the stream that joins from the right is the river Loddon (leading on to St Patrick's Stream).

Continue down stream under the railway bridge and past some boat yards. On the right before the bend is Wargrave Boat Club (<http://www.wargraveboatingclub.co.uk/>). Just after the bend is the George and Dragon Public House and restaurant. There are mooring places alongside the pub so if you desire you can stop and "refuel" here.

Continue on downstream keeping to the main channel. You pass some really beautiful houses many of which are extremely old. Because the next lock is unusually situated on the opposite side of the river to the towpath, a long wooden bridge is how one crosses from the lock back to the towpath. This feature is unique on the River Thames.

Upon approaching the next lock (Marsh Lock) you need to move to the right hand side of the wooden posts which mark the lock as the canoe portage is on the right hand side of these in the side channel. You cross the lock gates and climb over the chain and then carry your boat across Monkey Marsh Bridge. This is the end of the journey. At the end of the bridge you can carry your boat up the road (Mill Lane) to the car park (150 metres) or continue along the Thames path to the field and cross in to the car park from there.

Finish at the car park in Mill Lane Henley. Mill Lane is off the A4156 Reading Road. If you are doing a car shuffle you need to cross the River Thames at Sonning so after leaving Thames Valley Park follow the A4 sign to Maidenhead but turn off towards

Sonning after about 2 miles... Cross Sonning Bridge (you will canoe under it later) follow the road to the main Reading road A4156 and then turn right following the signs to Henley. After a few miles, having gone through Shiplake, you come across a roundabout right is to Tesco but go straight on and Mill Lane is just past a small garage one the right a hundred metres or so past this roundabout.

Before leaving Henley (<http://www.henley-on-thames.org/>) why not wander in to the town. Follow the towpath downstream and its not far to the town.. via a few places which sell tea and ice creams. There is the River and Rowing museum (<http://www.rrm.co.uk/>) to visit as well.

Use the car park in Mill Lane (just check it has not changed to Pay and Display) as the carparks in Henley are expensive and even more so during Henley Regatta time.