

Reading (Thames Valley Park) – Henley, River Thames via St. Patricks Stream



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 2 locks - You miss out on Shiplake lock going this way. (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. It is marked by a small bridge and a notice declaring "it's not suitable for launches". The stream is not as wide at this all the way, but never the less it is a beautiful trip.

St Patrick's Stream can be paddled all year round but do be aware of anglers if paddling it out of the closed fishing season, mid March to mid June. The river level can drop dramatically in dry periods so watch out if you are using a boat with an under stern rudder especially at the start of the stream as you need to stay left as the small lip there on the right can remove rudders!

St Patrick's Stream bypasses a lock and drops about 5 feet over about two miles. The stream winds its way through countryside and about two thirds of the way down is another stream which comes in from the left. There is a small weir a few meters up this stream and although very small is fun to paddle in.

There is a lot of really interesting wildlife here so one can just enjoy the sheer beauty of it all. You pass a few large houses here ..please be considerate .. and just enjoy the waterway . The stream then joins the river Loddon and from there it's back on to the River Thames just below Shiplake Lock. Turn back to look at the exit as that is a scene worth enjoying too.

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 car parks in Henley are expensive and even more so during Henley Regatta time.