



Kennett and Avon Canal Aldermaston to Reading

Moderate Trail

Route Summary

This linear canal route passes through pleasant countryside, with many more water bodies such as lakes and former gravel pits, and the meanders of the River Kennet, which at one point joins the canal. Eventually, the town of Reading is obvious to the north, and the canal winds around the south side of the town, before going through almost the centre, and then east to the Thames. The canal gives views of many narrow boats, locks, bridges and landscapes, with a level towpath to either walk or cycle on. Many paddlers know the stretch from Devizes (west of this route), to London, through taking part in the annual Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race, run every year since the 1960s (www.dwrace.org).

Nearest Town - Reading

O.S. Sheets - Landranger No. 174 (Newbury and Wantage), and No. 175 (Reading and Windsor)

Start – Aldermaston Wharf – RG7 4JS

Finish – Wokingham Waterside Centre, Reading – RG6 1PQ

Waterways Travelled – Kennett and Avon Canal and River Thames

Type of Water - Canal and river

Distance – 9 miles

Licence Information - A licence to paddle the canal and the Thames is included in the [Canoe England membership fee](#). Otherwise licenses can be obtained from [Canal & River Trust](#). Take your Canoe England membership card with you as it is your licence as well.

Local Facilities – in both Aldermaston and Reading

Vehicle Shuttle Required - Yes

Portages and Locks- 12 portages – 11 locks and 1 bridge

Description

Launch and head towards London, away from the bridge. In 500 metres is the first lock, Padworth, and the portage is left on the towpath. After this is a very low road bridge and it is best to portage

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this too. The canal and the River Kennett share the valley, and constantly leave and re-join each other.

The remains of a lock, near to Towney lock, is Ufton, now only the sides there, no gates. Tyle Mill Lock follows, at 2.2 miles, a useful place because there is parking, so could be used for a vehicle shuttle. Portage right on to the towpath side, and either cross the road to put back in, or slip in before the road bridge. Then open countryside follows, and you are back on the river. Sulhamstead Lock is next, and then Shenfield Lock (SU 648706), with parking, and lots of green space for a picnic. After this point, there are large ponds or lakes on the right bank, and Reading comes into view.

Garston Lock is interesting, because it is one of only two 'turf' locks left on the canal. These did not have stone or brick sides, but earth, and grew vegetation. Although cheaper to build, they used more water to fill them, so the time taken for boats to lock in and out was uneconomic. Steel rails keep boats in the middle of the lock, to prevent them grounding on the sloping sides. The way back in to the canal is high, so care should be taken.

The river then passes under the M4, and after some meanders, a sign announces Burgfield Weir, site of a mill, now flats, and there is a left turn to take boats back on to the canal. Burgfield Lock is next, with a pub, 'The Cunning Man'.

Tall flats announce that Reading is near, and after Southcote Lock (7.5 miles), the river gives a flow nearly to Fobney Lock. Here, portage on the right side, and put back in under a bridge over a stream adjacent to the lock.

The canal heads into Reading, with terraced housing on the right bank, used for workers in Reading's factories, famous for Beer, Biscuits and Bulbs. It is a mile to County Lock, with a portage on the right, and a put-in near to the lock and weir, with a flow. There is now a traffic light system, requiring you to call for a green light, in order to navigate Brewery Gut, a narrow section with blind bends. This is the heart of Reading now, and both sides used to be brewery buildings. After passing the shopping centre, there is an alternative turn to the left for an optional short adventure. This channel passes Reading Gaol (of Oscar Wilde fame), Reading Abbey ruins, and returns via the original Huntley and Palmer biscuit factory site.

The canal heads now away from the centre of Reading, and the last lock is Blakes lock, and a portage on the left side, with a blue portage sign. This area was basically the port area, with many goods coming upriver from London. You pass under a footbridge and a railway bridge at the mouth of the Kennett next to a gas works, and in front is the Thames. Turn right and paddle a few hundred yards to the stopping point at the Wokingham Watersports centre.

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Useful Information

www.katrust.co.uk/index.html

www.aldermaston.co.uk

www.livingreading.co.uk/visit-reading

Recommended Next Trail

If you have enjoyed this trail why not try out one of the many trails available.

Safety Information

Spending an afternoon canoeing can be a fun way to experience nature, get a great work out and spend time with family and friends.. However, it can also be a dangerous journey, if safety guidelines are overlooked. Always follow these basic rules and comply with navigation rules- keep to the right of on-coming boats. Please be careful at points along the trail where there are sharp bends on the waterway and keep a look out at these points for oncoming traffic.

Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90per cent of all boating injuries are attributed to lack of proper footwear. Other canoe safe clothing includes hats, additional dry clothing towels, and layered items which can easily be removed.

Be sure to

- Know the weather forecast before you set out canoeing.
- Familiarise yourself with the local area, it's sensitive places and protected areas.
- Leave the environment as you found it. Please read [You, Your Canoe and the environment](#)
- Take your litter home with you.
- Follow the navigation rules for the waterway you are on.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing. (No Seal Launching)
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- Canoe a safe distance away from wildlife.
- Check your equipment.
- Observe the navigation rules for this waterway.
- Check to see if there are any events on the waterways when you wish to travel.

Use the checklist below to make sure you have everything you need.

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Checklist:

1. Boat
2. Paddle
3. Buoyancy Aid
4. Bailer/sponge
5. Small First Aid Kit
6. Penknife
7. Mobile telephone (in a waterproof bag....Please note that in some areas due to the location mobile telephone reception might be nonexistent)
8. Fresh drinking water
9. Sun cream, hat and sunglasses
10. Light waterproof jacket
11. Footwear
12. Licence

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

Specific Environmental Information:

Please 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.

Canoeists and kayakers take very seriously environmental concerns and already follow existing voluntary environmental codes of conduct, including Canoe England's own guidance notes outlined in the "You your canoe and the environment" publication.

By following the simple steps below you can ensure your presence is not detrimental to the freshwater environment, minimize and avoid accidentally disturbing wildlife and their habitats.

- Find out about the area before you go, noting its sensitive places, species and breeding seasons.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home with you.
- When clearing litter left by others, handle it with care.
- Leave the environment as you find it
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- 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.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing.
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- On rivers, avoid paddling over gravel banks in low water conditions – they may contain fish spawn.
- Constantly assess wildlife. If you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.

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Be the eyes and ears on the water; report pollution, wildlife problems, damage, incidents etc to the relevant authorities.

Canal & River Trust - Emergencies- Telephone 0800 47 999 47

RSPCA for wildlife and animals in distress – Telephone 0990 55 59 99 (24 hours)

Environment Agency - Telephone 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours)

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