

## River Thames Reading to Henley Easy Trail Grading

### 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!

**Nearest Town** - Reading

**O.S. Sheets** - Landranger No. 175 – Reading and Windsor

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

The 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). Public toilets. All other facilities in Reading itself.

**Finish** – Mill Lane car park, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. GR SU 772817

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.

**Waterways Travelled** – River. Thames

**Type of Water** - River navigation mainly rural

**Distance** – 6 miles, about 3 – 4 hours

**Licence Information** – A licence to paddle the river is included in the Canoe England membership fee. Otherwise licenses can be obtained from (<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/recreation/boating/31605.aspx> ) Take your Canoe England membership card with you as it is your licence as well

**Local Facilities** – In Reading and Henley

**Vehicle Shuttle Required** - Yes.

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

### Description

The first section of river is a 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,

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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 one can see Shiplake College. Before Shiplake lock is the College Rowing Club. The canoeist's route is past the weir, and water run-offs, and 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. The apparent 'tents' have fabulous contents.

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

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

[www.sonning.net/](http://www.sonning.net/)

[www.wargraveboatingclub.co.uk/](http://www.wargraveboatingclub.co.uk/)

[www.henley-on-thames.org/](http://www.henley-on-thames.org/)

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### 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 workout 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.

### 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

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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.

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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