

Description:

From Reading this walk will take you downstream walking towards Sonning, and on to Shiplake on a section of the Thames Path that takes us through some lush woodlands and beautiful rural countryside. Along the way you will pass Horseshoe Bridge which crosses the mouth of the Kennet and Avon Canal as it joins the River Thames - The horseshoe bridge dates back to 1892 and is attached to Brunel's adjoining brick railway bridge, which opened in 1839.

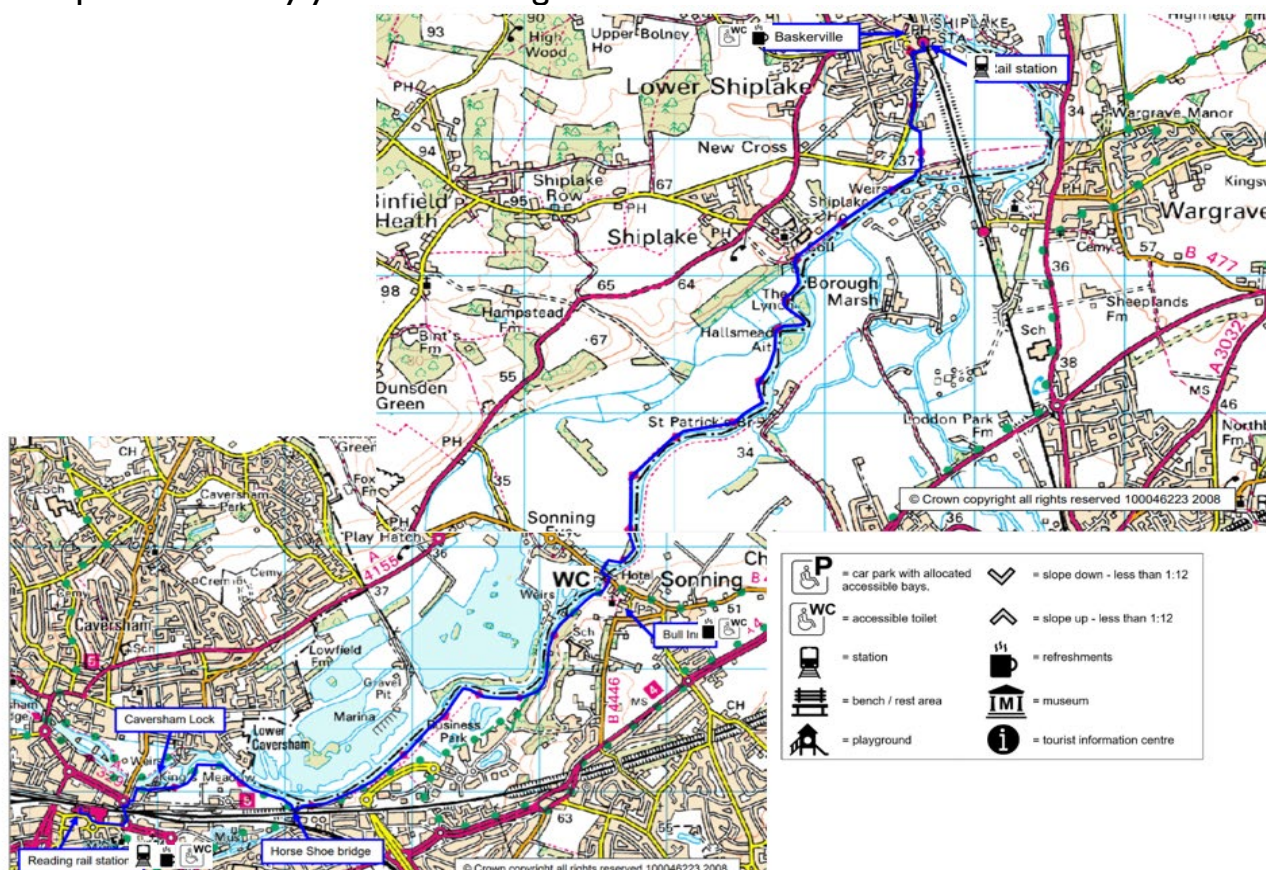
Distance: 7.5miles (11.5 km) **Duration:** 3.5 hours **Difficulty:** Moderate

This walk is relatively flat for its entirety but has been given the 'moderate' rating due to length.

Stations: Reading and Shiplake

The River Thames at Sonning

Refreshments, and toilets: This walk has plenty of options for toilets and refreshments at the start and end points, however the central section is rural, with limited options, so be sure to plan ahead. The Bull Inn in Sonning (marked on map) is roughly halfway, and makes for a lovely stop, but be sure to call ahead and make sure they are open on the day you are walking.



Full Route Description:

Start at Reading Train Station. The best starting point is the rear of the station (the North/Caversham exit). The what3words address for the start point is [///vital.stays.hunt](#)

From here we use the station road (Trooper Potts Road, named after a Reading man who was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery during WWI) to walk a short distance to the Vastern Road (the large main road). Make use of the pedestrian crossing point to cross the road, and then slightly to your right you will see a small side road called Norman Place.

Turn onto Norman Place and follow it for a short distance until you see a cut through to the River Thames.

As we emerge onto the bank of the river you can look left and see Christchurch Bridge – this is a pedestrian and cycle bridge built in 2015.

Turn right and start walking. Shortly after joining the Thames Path, you will pass under a large concrete bridge – Reading Bridge. This is the first bridge to be built on the site, built in 1923 – when it was claimed that it was the longest span of its type. Before being opened for traffic, it was tested by driving 27 steam traction engines, rollers & wagons onto it!

Keep walking, past the Thames Lido on the right, and you will come to Caversham Lock. This is a lock and weir on the River Thames, first built in 1778. Shortly after the lock you can look left across the river and see the twin spiral turbines of an Archimedes Screw – part of the Reading Hydrology system, which has been generating electricity for Reading since 2021.

After Caversham Lock you will walk through some playing fields and eventually get to a large Tesco, visible through the trees on your right. This is the last supermarket you will encounter on the walk. Note on the opposite bank some boatyards, the last remnants of Caversham's large boatbuilding industry which thrived until the latter half of the 20th century.

Keep walking along the Thames Path and as you leave Reading you will cross over the mouth of the River Kennet using the Horseshoe Bridge. This marks the end of the Kennet and Avon Canal which facilitates boat navigation from here to the Bristol Channel.

After seeing the entrance to a marina and the Redgrave Pinsent Rowing Lake on the opposite bank you pass the disused Dreadnought pub, formerly a celebrated watering hole for Reading University's rowers. Now, after a large boathouse, you enter the Thames Valley Park and make your way towards Sonning, about 2 miles of lovely riverside walking away. The park is 80 acres of tranquil beauty and wetland habitat. It had formerly been Earley Power Station, which was operational from the early 1940s until the early 1970s.

When the open fields give way to a wooded pathway you will notice a number of paths leading off to your right. For a short diversion you might like to take one of these to explore the wetland habitats, which support a wide variety of local wildlife, before returning to the tow path.

After passing through a gate and seeing the Reading Blue Coat School boathouses on your right, Sonning Lock comes into view. The first pound lock here was built by the Thames Navigation Commission in 1773 and it has been rebuilt three times since then. If you can spot the lock keeper, you can request to use the public toilet in the lock keeper's cottage. If there is no lock keeper on duty the toilet will be unavailable.

Shortly after the lock you will need to go up onto the bridge to follow the Thames Path. You have two choices here: If you want to stop for refreshments in Sonning turn right – the Bull Inn is located just near the church, and the Coppa Club is right by the bridge. Or, to continue your walk, turn left across the bridge and then cross the road, following signs to continue on the Thames Path. Take the footbridge over a branch of the river. The former Sonning Mill, nearby, is now a popular theatre and restaurant.

This next section of the Thames Path has a lovely feeling of remoteness about it. You may see the odd boat moored up at the banks as you walk, but your main company will be the sounds of the birds and insects.

Walk about 2 miles through idyllic countryside until you reach civilisation again, when you pass Shiplake rugby club and Shiplake College Boat Houses. Phillimore island is named after the Phillimore family, former owners of Shiplake House, now Shiplake College. Be careful where you tread on the next section of path, as it is very uneven due to tree roots.

After a short distance you will see Shiplake Lock. At the lock the Thames Path turns left and briefly diverts from the river's edge. Follow the signs which will take you along a Restricted By-way underneath the railway bridge where you then turn right onto the Wargrave bend – where the Thames Path follows the large curve in the river. You will note some fine riverside properties on the Wargrave bank.

Shortly before you arrive in Shiplake, at the information board about the old Lashbrook Ferry, the Thames Path again leaves the river's edge, turning you left across two fields. There are signs here, so keep your eye out for them. After ducking under the railway line you'll end up popping out onto Mill Road in Lower Shiplake. Turn right onto this road and after a short distance you'll reach a junction with Station Road. On your right here is The Baskerville Arms, a lovely pub for a well-earned stop!

If you want to head straight for the station for your return trip, turn right onto Station Road and after several hundred meters the station will be on your right-hand side. Alternatively turn left on Station Road and walk until you arrive at the A4155 where you can catch a bus to Caversham and Reading (left) or Henley (right).

Below: Sonning Lock, photo credit Nigel Smith

