

UK Canal Boating

Escape with a canal boating holiday!

Grand ring from Gayton part 2 Oxford to Gayton

Cruise this route from : Gayton

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Cruising Days : 15.00 to 22.00

Cruising Time : 114.00

Total Distance : 247.00

Number of Locks : 175

Number of Tunnels : 2

Number of Aqueducts : 0

The Grand Ring, also known as the Thames Ring offers an eclectic combination of narrow canal, broad canal, tidal and non-tidal river waters.

The Grand ring travels from the lower reaches of one of the world's best-known rivers, to the land of dreaming spires and academia of Oxford, continuing northwards along the Oxford Canal and returning via the Grand Union Canal.

Upstream from Brentford the tidal Thames passes the Royal Botanical Gardens and the first in a number of small islands. Teddington Locks are the largest locking system on the river and denote the transition from tidal to non-tidal. The weir is a gauging point for water flow and flood warnings are issued from its monitoring station. Past Hampton Court Palace the Desborough Cut is an artificial channel avoiding a twisting loop of river. The weir at Shepperton Lock is the most southerly point reached by the Thames and the journey now reads like pages from a gazetteer of famous places; Windsor Castle, the playing fields of Eton, Henley and its regattas.

At Isis Lock the Oxford Canal heads northwards and locks become few as the channel wends its way through the rolling Oxfordshire countryside. Because of the contour method of construction used by engineer James Brindley the canal traces a convoluted course as it follows the contours of the land and on the summit pound around Wormleighton a stretch of three miles loops back on itself to within less than 1,000 yards of its starting point.

Boaters' weddings

Tooley's Boatyard at Banbury, built in 1790, has been restored as a working exhibit and there has been much redevelopment of the surrounding area. At Napton-on-the Hill as the Oxford Canal skirts past Napton Junction, known locally as Wigram's Turn after a boating family that once lived here. Braunston Turn sees the broad-gauge Grand Union Canal continue past the historic village of Braunston and its church, noted for its traditional

boaters' weddings.

Blisworth Tunnel is one of the longest navigable tunnels in the country; the Stoke Bruerne Museum lies beyond its southern portal. The long pound through Milton Keynes is remarkable for its lack of locks. At Bull's Bridge Junction the Paddington Arm heads for its eventual meeting with the Thames at Limehouse whilst the main line locks back down to the Thames at Brentford.

Cruising Notes

See Part 1 route for the route from Gayton to Oxford

On your arrival in Oxford, there are moorings below Osney Bridge, above Sheepwash channel, or if you want out of town moorings- at Binsey and you can stroll back into Oxford. Or moor at East Street see link to moorings info here : <https://www.thamesvisitormoorings.co.uk/moorings/Osney-Lock/>
Access to the Oxford canal can be made along Sheepwash Channel above Osney Bridge, or via the weir stream above King's Lock and through Dukes/cut, although this brings you onto the Canal north of Oxford.
It is 3 hours to here from Abingdon and 10.25 hours from Goring.

Time to explore Oxford.

The city of Oxford was founded in the 10th century and has been a University city since the 13th century, and today is a lively cosmopolitan centre of learning, tourism and industry. There are excellent guided walks each day from the Tourist Information centre inc an Inspector Morse Tour and a Ghost Tour.

It is the 39 colleges that give Oxford its unique character, and some of these can be visited, but times vary so check with the TIC. The Sheldonian Theatre was built by Christopher Wren in 1669, its interior is delightful, it is open at various times to the public. The Old Bodleian houses a fine collection of old manuscripts dating from the 16th and 17th centuries and is open for guided tours. The University houses the Bodleian library which was opened in 1602, and it contains 9 million books on 176 km of shelving. The Bodleian Library is a working library which forms part of the University of Oxford. It is housed in a remarkable group of buildings which form the historic heart of the University, and you can explore the quadrangles of these magnificent structures at no charge. Different ticket options allow you to visit the interior of some of the buildings, such as the University's oldest teaching and examination room, The Divinity School (built 1427-88). Here you will discover more of the University's fascinating history.

Christ Church cathedral is mainly 12 century with later additions. The Ashmolean museum is one of the oldest public museums in Britain and one of the most rewarding outside of London. It opened in 1683 and has an outstanding collection of Eastern and European archaeology, also 17th and 18th century silver collection, and a vast display of coins, and also drawings by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Rubens. The University Museum's interior is a forest of columns and skeletons and houses the very rare head and claw of the extinct dodo.

Also worth seeing is the Saxon Tower, which is the oldest building in Oxford- The tower is the easiest climb in Oxford, with good solid stairs including a handrail. There are several places to stop and rest if you need to. From the top of the tower there is a marvellous view of the city of Oxford and its famous "dreaming spires".; also the 15th century pulpit where John Wesley, founder of Methodism, preached the Michaelmas Day sermon on 29th September 1726; 13th Century stained glass in the East Window; 14th Century font from St Martin's Church ; Reredos of the 14th century Lady Chapel, restored in 1941; The door of Archbishop Cranmer's prison

cell from Bocardo Prison is held in the tower. Archbishop Cranmer and his fellow bishops Latimer and Ridley were burned at stake in Broad Street in 1556; The church treasury, which includes a Elizabethan chalice dated 1562, and a Sheela-na-gig, dating back to late 11th or 12th century.

Blackwell's Bookstore is an institution in Oxford. It's not just a regular bookstore - it has the largest single room devoted to book sales in all of Europe (the 10,000 sq. ft. Norrington Room). In order to create such a large space in a small city, Blackwell's excavated underneath Trinity College's gardens. Blackwell's sells both new and second-hand books, and has a cafe.

The Botanic Gardens are located on the peaceful banks of the Cherwell River, the gardens were started in 1621 as the Physic Gardens, for the study of medicinal plants. These are the oldest botanic gardens in Britain. In addition to the lovely outdoor gardens, there are greenhouses which grow many varieties of exotic plants and flowers. Just next to the gardens, crossing over Rose Lane, there are rose gardens that are exquisite in July.

Hertford Bridge is often called the Bridge of Sighs because of the similarity to the famous bridge in Venice. Actually, it looks more like the Rialto Bridge, and this Oxford structure was never intended to be a replica of any existing bridge. It was completed in 1914 to connect two sections of Hertford College.

Oxford castle was originally built in 1071 for William the Conqueror, to enable the Normans to control the area. A prison was built within the castle, which continued to be in use until 1996.

The prison was mainly used to house prisoners from Oxfordshire and Berkshire, and also the University's 'rebellious scholars' (as recorded in 1236). From 1613 until 1785, the prison and castle were owned by Christ Church, who leased the jail (gaol) to prison keepers. In 1785 it was redeveloped into a prison and house of correction, with a tower on which they held public executions. The last execution was in 1863.

If you made your way to the Oxford canal via the Sheepwash channel, then cruise past Oxford on your right to continue along the Grand Ring.

Do not turn off the Oxford canal at Dukes Bridge but continue on the Oxford Canal, towards Banbury.

The canal skirts around Kidlington which is a suburb of Oxford until it reaches the tiny lovely canalside village of Thrupp. By bridge 221 is the the Boat Inn, and by bridge 223 is the Jolly Boatman which has a canalside patio.

Shipton-on-Cherwell is off to your left past Bridge 219, the church overlooks the canal. In 1874 the village was the scene of a railway disaster when 34 people were killed when the train fell into the frozen canal off Shipton bridge. In the 1860s the thighbones of a huge dinosaur were found in a nearby quarry & are on display in the University Museum in Oxford.

By Bridge 216 is the Rock of Gibraltar pub which has moorings.

The canal is very wooded around here, the woods becoming very thick, the overhanging trees making a tunnel through which the canal passes.

The Oxford Arms is a ½ mile from the canal in Kirtlington, the lane to it is to the left of Pigeon bridge 213.

Rousham House is to the left of Bridge 207 and the gardens are open to the public. The house dates from 1635 but is not open to the public.

The canal continues its rural path, through water meadows and open pastureland.

The village of Upper Heyford is close to the canal, and there are a couple of pubs here, the main street of thatched stone cottages falls steeply to the canal.

Lower Heyford also has a village pub- the Bell Inn an attractive 17th century pub just off the towpath.

This pleasant rural stretch of the canal is well punctuated by the characteristic wooden lift bridges that are usually left open.

It is well worth walking a mile east of Aynho Wharf by bridge 190 to visit the village of Aynho.

There is a pub canalside called the Great western. The village square has been untouched throughout the generations, and a 17th century mansion called Aynho Park is on the other side of the road.

Where the River Cherwell crosses the navigation at Aynho Weir lock there is a strong stream lock. Observe the water level reading on the coloured level indicator board, on the top side of the lock, before deciding to continue.

Once through Grant's Lock you are lock free until you reach Banbury. The journey is very rural until you reach Banbury. Once through Banbury Lock, moor at the visitor moorings along this stretch. Redevelopment has transformed the centre of Banbury, and there are now good visitor moorings and shops closeby.

The historic Tooley's Boatyard is worth a visit.

A nursery rhyme, 'Ride a Cock Horse', has made Banbury one of the best-known towns in England. It has been suggested that the 'Fine Lady' of the nursery rhyme may have been Lady Godiva or Elizabeth I. More likely it was a local girl who rode in a May Day procession. The original cross was pulled down at the end of the 16th century. The present cross was erected in 1859 to celebrate the wedding of the then Princess Royal to Prince Frederick of Prussia.

Banbury was originally a wool town.

The Mill Arts centre has plays theatre, dance & music. At Tooleys Boatyard you can have a guided tour and see boats being built and restored, it also has a working forge and a gift shop and chandlery.

Banbury Cakes, a special fruit and pastry cake, are still produced. At one time they were being sent as far afield as Australia, India and America.

Banbury has a massive indoor shopping centre called Castle Quay where almost 250000 people visit every week. All the majors stores are here, also restaurants and cafes.

Leaving Banbury behind you will encounter a couple of locks spaced apart each side of the Motorway. The surroundings return to those typical of the Oxford canal, and hills reappear to the west.

Continuing north along the Cherwell Valley the canal enters Cropedy, there are useful stores by bridge 153. The quiet village of Cropedy which bursts into life during the annual Folk Festival, now Europe's largest, which is held on the 2nd weekend in August. It originally started in 1979 when Fairport Convention held their farewell concert here.

Near Claydon 5 locks take the canal to the summit level. Light woods border the canal, which is shallow and narrow in places so watch out that you do not ground, keep to the middle channel.

Near the 2nd lock are the remains of the old stable block for the canal horses, and the old canal company's blacksmiths is a private residence.

The village of Claydon is worth a look approached to the left of Bridge 145 , because of the Bygones museum access from Bridge 145.-The museum houses a unique collection of antiques and memorabilia gathered together by the owners over a period of sixty years. And you are encouraged to peruse in a free and relaxed atmosphere. There is a replica of a 1920's kitchen,electricians workshop, blacksmith, wheelwright and a boat-builder, 1903

Traction Engine, 1912 Steam Roller, Six tractors, a Trailer Fire Pump and many smaller machines and equipment and steam engines.

After Claydon Locks the canal twists and turns, hills and trees close in, and the railway re-appears for a time.

Fenny Compton Tunnel is actually a cutting, with the village of Fenny Compton off to your left, about a mile from the canal, the Merrie Lion pub is in the village.

It is 6 hours to here from Banbury

Priors Hardwick is east of bridge 124 along the footpath, The Butchers Arms is a smart village restaurant. Most of the village was pulled down by the Cistercian Monks in the 14th C.

The canal continues north through rolling open farmland, the windmill on top of Napton Hill soon comes into view at Marston Doles.

The summit ends and the canal starts to fall towards Napton Junction.

At Bridge 113 there is a water point and The Folly pub is canalside at bridge 113, and there is a useful shop next door. The shops and pubs are at the bottom of the village, but if you want to climb over 400 feet to the top of the hill you can see the 13th century church, and seven counties can be seen from this vantage point.

Keep straight on at Napton Junction, you are now on the Grand Union Canal.

At Braunston Turn turn right to continue along the Grand Union Canal.

The village of Braunston is set up on a hill to the north of the canal, and is a very well known canal centre. Access is from Bridge 91. The Millhouse Hotel has moorings. There are a few shops, & pubs in the village.

Just after Braunston are the Braunston Lock Flight of 6 locks which precedes the very long Braunston Tunnel, which is 2042 yards long. The tunnel opened in 1796 and has a slight S bend. The Braunston Locks are open from 9-4pm daily with the last entry to the flight at 2.30pm. Continue along the Grand Union canal to Norton Junction and turn down towards London off to the right.

The Buckby flight of Locks is open from 10-3pm with last entry at 1.30pm.

There are 7 locks along this stretch with only the railway & the old Roman road- Watling Street (A5) to keep you company. The canal is 1800 years younger than the road, but looks more outdated!

There is also a canal craft shop in one of the red bricked cottages by the locks.

From Bridge 18 you can access the Heart of the Shires Shopping Village- Set around a Victorian Courtyard converted from a selection of Victorian stables and farm buildings, this shopping village offers over 20 individual shops with character ranging from Kitchenwear to Menswear, plus Gift shops and a first class restaurant and tea room. Open 10-5 daily.

The next stretch of canal begins to meander as it avoids the hills, but passes directly through Weedon a good place to moor. This charming village has good facilities like a store, PO, garage & takeaways. There are also a few pubs like the Narrowboat by Bridge 26, the Heart of England & the Globe by Bridge 24, and the Plume of Feathers at the aqueduct by the Church. There are good moorings above the church.

The next village close by is Nether Hyford, there is also a Pub & stores here.

Bugbrooke is a short walk away by bridge 36, the Wharf Inn is canalside by the Bridge, The Bakers Arms & The Five Bells Pubs are in the village. The village also has stores, PO and a garage.

The canal then reaches Gayton Junction where the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union goes away to the left, Gayton marina is just up here, and you have finished your very long journey and I am sure you have some stories to tell of the sights you have seen!

Useful Links

The information above is provided in good faith to assist you with planning your canal boat holiday. Information accuracy cannot be guaranteed, however, if you do see something that needs updating, please don't hesitate to [contact us](#).

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