

UK Canal Boating

Escape with a canal boating holiday!

Oxford and return from Market Harborough

Cruise this route from : Market Harborough

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Oxford and return from Market Harborough

Cruising Days : 15.00 to 0.00

Cruising Time : 93.00

Total Distance : 175.00

Number of Locks : 124

Number of Tunnels : 6

Number of Aqueducts : 0

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Market Harborough – A market town mid way between Leicester and Northampton. Visit Welland Park, the town's museum and the old grammar school, a 17th school built on stilts. Visit nearby Rockingham Castle built by William the Conqueror. If you need to entertain the children then visit Wicksteed Park, one of the biggest and best playgrounds in Europe.

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Also worth seeing is the Saxon Tower, which is the oldest building in Oxford- 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; 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

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Cruising Notes

Take a leisurely cruise down the Grand Union Canal, through the flights of locks at Foxton and Watford, through the lovely Canal village at Braunston, down the Oxford Canal to the University town of Oxford- the city of Dreaming spires.

The marina at Union Wharf has been redeveloped by British Waterways over the last two years. The marina is located at the northern end of Market Harborough - a quaint, traditional English market town that dates from 1203. You can enjoy delicious food and fine ales in the town's historic coaching inns or just potter around the market and the fine selection of family owned shops. From Union Wharf it's just two hours cruising to the 'Leicester Line' of the Grand Union Canal.

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The town has many nice pubs, and shops. there is an antique and collectors market every Sunday in the market hall. Eat at the Italian Restaurant based at Union Wharf Marina. Open 12-14.15 & 18.00 til late.

The Old Union Canal Society gives guided walks along the canal during summer months and follow the historic town trail.

You are welcome to stay moored up in the Marina and use the car or public transport to visit the many local attractions.

The Grand Union canal boasts an extraordinary variety of wildlife, from feeding herons, and hunting owls, to water voles. A number of diverse species thrive in this tranquil and often unique environment.

Day 1

The base at Union Wharf Marina is at the end of the Market Harborough Arm, & you need to cruise for about 2 hours (5 ½ miles) to get back on the the main Grand Union Canal.

It is a lovely rural cruise to Foxton which is at the base of the lovely Foxton flight of locks.

Foxton is the site of a steam powered Inclined Plane, which replaced ten locks and lifted narrow boats 75 feet. It was opened in 1900 but suffered from mechanical and structural problems. The locks were reopened in 1908 and now work beautifully. Whilst here visit the Foxton Museum and gift shop. The well stocked canal side shop offers you groceries, hardware as well as the traditional "roses and Castles" canalware, made and hand-painted on site.

Stop for a cream tea in the canal side cafe or a well deserved pint in the Foxton Locks Inn. Spend a couple of hours watching the colourful narrow boats passing through the staircase locks. British Waterways organise events based on Foxton Locks.

Cruising time from Market Harborough to here- 2 hours

Day 2

On the 2nd morning walk along the tow path until you find the friendly British waterways lock-keepers by the Locks. They will take a note of your boat name & tell you roughly how long the wait will be to go through the locks, but there is plenty to do whilst you wait.

The Canal weaves its way through an remote but attractive stretch. There are no villages on the canal here, Husband Bosworth being hidden by the tunnel.

Look out over the vale of Welland and to the nearby Laughton Hills. Slow down, cruise on and watch mile after mile beautiful and unspoilt countryside unfold .

Enjoy an easy cruise as the canal meanders through unspoilt surroundings passing through the Husband Bosworth Tunnel. The Tunnel is 1166 yards long and was opened in 1813. Stop and moor for a while, stroll into Husband Bosworth for a pub, newsagents and general store. The Bell Inn here serves Real Ale & food daily.

North Kilworth is off to your right, with a couple of pubs- The White Lion & the Swan Inn Kilworth Wharf Marina – overnight mooring maps & gifts

The Battle of Naesy 1645 was fought 2 miles east of Welford. Here Fairfax's New Model Army routed the Royalists under King Charles I, ensuring the end of the Civil War.

Gently continue your journey passing the Hemplow Hills to your left, and open fields of grazing sheep.

2 Miles east of Bridge 31 is Stanford Hall, a William & Mary brick mansion built in the late 17th Century. On display also here is a replica on an experimental flying machine built in 1898. Teas, shop & craft centre. Open pm Easter -Sept.

The next stretch of the canal wanders southwards in a series of loops through wonderful rural scenery with not much signs of habitation.

Yelvertoft is a delightful village to stop for a while and there are moorings between bridges 19 and 20. The local is the Knightly Arms which serves real ales & home cooked food. You can stock up on supplies here as there is a stores, off licence & butcher.

Before you pass through the Crick Tunnel, you can moor up at bridge 12 & visit Edwards of Crick, a restaurant & coffee house offering a wide ranging menu. Stroll into the village of Crick, home of one of Britain's largest annual boat show held each year in May and have a pint and a meal at one of the local pubs . There is an intriguing second hand shop here open Wed Fri & Sat that is worth a visit (14.00-18.00) it is a good place to moor up for the night as it is 8 hours cruising to here.

Day 3

Crick Tunnel is 1528 yards long, & has no tow path so if you wish to walk it you will have to go over the top.

Meet the lock-keepers at the Watford Locks and they will cheerfully help you on your way through their complex set of locks. Watford Locks raise the canal to it summit level of 412 feet. Four of these locks form a staircase, with a 'one up one down' procedure.

The new Inn is Canalside at Buckby Top lock & has moorings.

The small village of Watford is not to be confused with the large town of Watford in Hertfordshire. Moor up at Bridge number 6 for a true taste of the Orient at the Thai Garden, Restaurant in Station Road.

Once through the Watford Locks continue towards the Norton Junction where we meet the Oxford Canal.

(You soon will find that the M1 motorway swings away from you, but if you want 24 hr provisions you can moor up by Bridge 6 which is right beside The Watford Gap motorway services.)

At Norton Junction you can then go down the Grand Union towards London, or we recommend that you head west towards Braunston.

From Norton Junction to Braunston the canal runs westward through hills and wooded country, then into a wooded cutting which leads to Braunston Tunnel.

Off to the north on your right you will pass the small village of Welton on a hill. At Bridge 6 ¾ mile from the Canal you can find a 400 yr old pub – The White Horse Inn.

Braunston Tunnel was opened in 1796 & is 2042 yards long.

Long rows of moored craft flank the canal, but there is usually plenty of places to moor, as it is worth strolling into Braunston as there are a fine selection of old buildings here. The British Waterways office in the Stop House, was originally the Toll office between the Oxford and the Grand Union canal.

At Braunston Turn turn left at the junction, the canal now passes open countryside with a backdrop of hills, there are no locks or villages and you continue on until you reach Napton Junction. You will be travelling north at this junction, but if you want a nice pub to stop at for the night, it is worth continuing left down the Oxford canal to bridge 111, as the haunted pub The Bridge at Napton is by the Bridge. Best access to the hilltop village is by Bridge 110, the village is scattered all over the hill, but the pubs and shops are at the bottom.

The windmill on top of Napton hill can be seen from Napton Junction, if you cruise on to 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.

It is 7 hours cruising to here

Day 4

The flight of 8 locks at Napton start first thing this morning, so make sure you all have a good breakfast.

The Oxford canal continues a very twisting path through countryside with occasional villages dotted around. The village of Priors Hardwick is east of Bridge 124 by footpath, there is a smart village restaurant called the Butchers Arms here. Wormleighton is about a mile east of Bridge 135, but has no pubs, and Fenny Compton is 1 mile west of bridge 136, or bridge 137 by footpath. There are 2 pubs in Fenny Compton, and a small shop.

It is 6 hours cruising to here

Day 5

The Bygones museum is found in the village of Claydon, just west of bridge 145, and is a fascinating museum of local relics which children love to handle. Outside there are tractors, a traction engine, and a steam roller and steam engines. There is a restaurant and gift shop on site too.

There are another 4 locks before you reach 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.

In 2012 it is being held from 9th to 11th August.

Cromwell's forces came under attack at the battle of Cropedy in 1644, and the Royalist cavalry managed to defeat the Roundheads despite being outnumbered, and thus protected Oxford.

Banbury is soon reached after another 3 locks which should take just under 3 hours.

It is 6 hours cruising to here.

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 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 250,000 people visit every week. All the major stores are here, also restaurants and cafes.

Day 6

Beyond Banbury there are a series of lift bridges that are normally left open.

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.

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. 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.

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

It is worth mooring up near here, as you have done 7 hours cruising.

Day 7

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.

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

Shipton-On-Cherwell is off to your right 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 221 in the lovely canalside village of Thrupp is the the Boat Inn, and by bridge 223 is the Jolly Boatman which has a canalside patio.

The canal skirts around Kidlington which is a suburb of Oxford until it reaches Dukes Cut where you can join the Thames (Licence required), or continue into Oxford, although be aware that there are limited Visitor moorings due to designated conservation areas and private moorings.

It is 9 hours cruising to here.

The city of Oxford was founded in the 10th century and has been a University city since the 13th century.

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.

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.

The Sheldonian Theatre was built in 1668 from a design created by Christopher Wren. It was named after Gilbert Sheldon, who was Chancellor of the University at the time the construction was funded. The theatre is used for music recitals.

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.

Days 8-15

It is 46 hours back to Market harborough, and time to take in the delights you didn't have time to explore on the way!!

Useful Links

Description : Bygones Museum

Website : www.daytripfinder.co.uk/attractions/bygones-museum

Telephone : 01295 690258

Description : Castle Quay Shopping Centre, Banbury

Website : <http://www.castlequay.co.uk>

Telephone : 01295 256296

Description : Sheldonian Theatre Oxford

Website : <http://www.ox.ac.uk/sheldonian>

Telephone : 01865 277299

Description : Visit Oxfordshire

Website : <http://www.visitoxfordandoxfordshire.com/>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Bodleian Library Oxford

Website : <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/>

Telephone : 01865 277162

Description : Ashmolean Museum Oxford

Website : <http://www.ashmolean.org/>

Telephone : 01865 278000

Description : Inspector Morse Walking Tours of Oxford

Website : <http://www.visitoxfordandoxfordshire.com/oxford-inspector-morse-tour/details/?dms=13&venue=2925527&feature=1024>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Botanic Gardens Oxford

Website : <http://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/>

Telephone : 01865 286690

Description : Sightseeing in Oxford

Website : <http://www.oxfordcityguide.com/ee2/index.php?/Touristinfo/sightseeing>

Telephone : n/a

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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