

UK Canal Boating

Escape with a canal boating holiday!

Reading and return from Hilperton

Cruise this route from : Hilperton

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Reading and return from Hilperton

Cruising Days : 15.00 to 0.00

Cruising Time : 85.00

Total Distance : 125.00

Number of Locks : 182

Number of Tunnels : 2

Number of Aqueducts : 0

Cruise almost the whole length of the Kennet & Avon canal following its picturesque course virtually the entire way to Reading, the number and variety of towns and villages that are visited will give full entertainment for a fortnight return cruise. Make sure that the River levels are not high when proceeding beyond Hungerford.

You are on the outskirts of the delightful town of Trowbridge, the county town of Wiltshire, it is one of the three largest towns in Wiltshire.

The town's lengthy history is recorded in the museum, which tells the fascinating story of Trowbridge's people and past. The museum has also won the Association of Industrial Archaeologists award for 'best site visited' in 2008 & it is located in the last woollen mill in Trowbridge, which closed its doors as a mill in 1982. The fascinating collections in the Trowbridge Museum are accessed via The Shires Shopping Centre - built on the site of part of the woollen mill and home to a diverse selection of more than 50 shops all on one level and undercover

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Day 1

Pass Hilperton Wharf on your right and the marina on your left, then you know you are going in the right direction to Devizes!

The canal sweeps through undulating woodland and arable farmland past the rural village of Semington through a series of swing bridges which are something of a hallmark of this section of canal.

There are 2 locks at Semington and a swing bridge, it is a very pretty village & best access is just before the lock.

Moor up here for the night it is 1 hour cruising from the marina.

Day 2

36 locks today which includes the fantastic Caen Hill flight of 29 locks in just 2.25 miles.

As well as the many swing bridges around Seend there are 5 locks to navigate, luckily there are plentiful moorings at the ever-popular Seend Cleeve and close by pubs and quiet countryside to please the eye and fill the stomach. There is the Brewery Inn 200 yds south of Lock 19 and the Barge Inn by Lock 19. The Three magpies pub in Seend Cleeve has good quality food, nice beer garden and good ales- it is 200 yds south of Sells green bridge

The hills to the south climb steeply up to the village of Seend and to the north flat pasture land stretches away. At Lower Foxhangers the first of 7 locks is reached which takes you to the bottom of the flight of 16 Caen Locks.

It is worth mooring up near here & take some photos of these fantastic locks as they really are quite a sight.

At the top of the locks is a cafe if you are in need of refreshment after the climb up the hill through the locks. The views from the top are well worth the effort, with views over Salisbury Plain to the south and the Avon Valley to the west charting the route taken from Bath.

You soon reach Devizes & there are moorings by Devizes Wharf. Stock up on supplies here as there are no towns until you get to Pewsey & Hungerford.
It is 9.5 hours to here

Devizes itself has the atmosphere of an old country market town. Handsome 18th century buildings now surround the square.

Devizes museum has one of the finest prehistoric collections in Europe including the Stourhead collection of relics excavated from burial mounds on Salisbury Plain.

Devizes visitor centre is home to an interactive exhibition introducing visitors to the medieval origins of the town.

Wharf Theatre is canalside and hosts a variety of performances throughout the year. There are the usual pubs, restaurants, take-aways. Shops and a cinema in the town.

The battle of Roundway was fought near here in 1643 between the Roundheads and the Royalists and the Roundheads were all killed or captures. The battlefield is largely intact & can be explored on foot.

Day 3

From Devizes wharf you set off again, with not such an energetic day as yesterday!

As you leave Devizes the route is lock free as you cruise through rural surroundings, the village of Bishops Cannings is accessed from Bridge 133 with a pub in the village, and All Cannings from bridge 128 where there is a small shop & pub. More small villages are passed but there is hardly any habitation canalside as you pass through the Vale of Pewsey. A miniature suspension bridge carries a private footpath from Stowell Park across the canal, as is the only surviving example of its kind. Stowell park House was built in the early 19 century, and can be clearly seen from the canal.

The Barge Inn is canalside in Honeystreet before bridge 124. Beyond the village to the north can be seen the white horse cut into the hill in 1812.

At Wilcot bridge 117 you can get to the small village of Wilcot where the Golden Swan Pub stands beyond the green at the far end of the village. A one handed ghost is said to haunt this pub. Pewsey Wharf is a mile from the town centre but has a pub canalside. There are shops in the town which can be accessed to the north of Bridge 114. To the north, hills descend to the waters edge and to the south the land opens out, giving fine views over the Vale of Pewsey. Beyond Pewsey the 15 mile lock free stretch finishes at Wootton Rivers.

The pretty thatched timber framed houses in the village of Wootton Rivers lie to the north of Wootton Rivers Bottom Lock. The Royal oak is in the village.
Moor here for the night.

It is 4.5 hours to here

Day 4

Before Bruce Tunnel the banks rise steeply on both banks, the tunnel has chains which were used to pull the boats through in the days of horse drawn boats.

The scenery is to be enjoyed for the laid back uneventful nature of the area, this section on the run to Hungerford still provides villages to stock up on essentials and occasional pubs to relax in, and rural farming and the woodland scenery of Savernake Forests to the north over low rises keeps the eyes busy.

You now have 7 more locks to keep you busy, but the end is nearly in sight, because you can moor just after Lock 61 at the end of the flight, the canal has risen 61 feet through the Crofton Locks .

There is a footpath south of lock 60 for ½ mile beside Wilton Water, leading to the village of Wilton. The Swan Inn is in the village. A bit further on along the footpath is Wilton Windmill which is the only working windmill in Wessex and still produces wholemeal, stone-ground flour. They are open every year from Easter to the end of September on Sundays and Bank Holidays from 2pm to 5pm when the windmill building is open for guided tours. The shepherd's hut shop, serving refreshments and gifts and providing a seating area, is also open at this time, as are the toilets.

You can also access the village from the track to the south of the bridge 100 just after Lock 61.

Crofton Pumping station is a Grade 1 building built in 1807 to provide water to the summit of the canal. It houses 2 magnificent Cornish steam-driven engines, one of which is 200 years old, and is the oldest beam engine in the world. It is open every day 10.30 to 5 between March 10 to October 7 for a charge. There is also a cafe here. Their website is www.croftonbeamengines.org

The village of Great Bedwyn is to the north of Bedwyn Wharf bridge, the main street climbs gently away from the canal, the pubs are at the top. There are small stores here for supplies. Also here was the Bedwyn Stone museum which housed a collection of stone work showing the work of 7 generations of stone masons but it sadly closed in 2009, but examples can still be found on the walls of the Post office stores next door.

Moor here for the night

It is 5 hours cruising to here.

Day 5

Just before Hungerford is the small village of Froxfield by bridge 90 , the Pelican Inn is a few minutes walk from the canal.

On reaching Hungerford turn just after bridge 84 and moor up for the night.

Hungerford is a clean and character rich market town and a welcome opportunity to relax in an urban environment thanks to superb mooring facilities in the centre of town, enjoy the many family run shops and nice food and ale at the many pubs or tearooms on offer here. As you would expect from a popular Wiltshire town there is a variety of different types of pubs and restaurants.

The handsome Hungerford Town Bridge gives easy access to the centre of the town which is set out along a

wide main street.

It is 4.25 hours to here.

Day 6

The River Kennet can make a considerable impact on the navigation when water levels are high, and you should consider this before proceeding to Newbury. If it is OK to proceed you should be aware of strong pulls at the top of all weirs, and powerful side currents at the bottom of locks. Many of the winding holes between Hungerford & Reading should not be used to turn when the river is flowing strongly as they lead directly to weirs.

Pretty woods accompany the canal as it leaves Hungerford, and to the north the River keeps the canal company.

Kintbury is the first stretch of canal that was officially opened in 1797. The village itself is a pristine rambling settlement with a church that dates back to the 12th century. There are attractive buildings by the canal, including a waterwheel. There are facilities here to shop for essentials or to stop to eat a spot of lunch in the pub. The Dundas Arms has the canal on one side & the river on the other. The Blue ball is 500 yds south of Kintbury Bridge, and the Prince of Wales are 300yds south east.

Leaving the wharf the canal steadily descends the locks towards Newbury, making this an attractive stretch. Wooded rolling hills flank the waterway.

Allow for river current when approaching Copse Lock especially after heavy rain.

The village of Marsh Benham lies just to the outskirts of Newbury in this fantastic area, The Red House Pub lies just to the north of the Canal here and offers a great venue to sit and unwind before heading into the bustling centre of Newbury. Just before Higgs Lock to the south lies Hamstead Park and it's immaculately well manicured grounds provides us with an artificial lake to navigate named Benham Broad. In much the same vein as the Tixall Wide on the Staffs and Worcester Canal near Stafford, the Benham Broad was created as the local Landowner didn't want an 'unsightly' canal bordering his grounds at Hamstead Park, because of his particular nature and deep pockets we all now get to enjoy this beautifully wide and idyllic stretch of water.

The canal continues through extensive water meadows to the town of Newbury. Above Newbury Lock is the quiet West mills area, and there are extensive moorings. The canal cuts right through the town. Below Newbury lock there are strong cross flows from both sides when river levels are high.

It is 5.5 hours to here from Hungerford

Newbury developed in the Middle Ages as an important cloth town, and the town has managed to retain much of its period charm. The District Museum is one of the most interesting buildings in Newbury built in 1626 as a cloth weaving workshop. The town centre has many shops, pubs and restaurants to choose from. A short bus or taxi ride away is the Living rainforest, which gives you the opportunity to experience rainforest life under glass. Newbury Racecourse has midweek and weekend racing.

Day 7

Leaving Newbury behind heading past the adjoining town of Thatcham, the nature reserve at Greenham Common comes into sight to the south, between Bull's Lock and Widmead Lock it comes ever closer. The centre of Thatcham is about a twenty minute walk from the canal from the Monkey Marsh Lock, it has a bustling market on a Friday as well as some shops to stock up at. There is a row of shops nearer to the canal avoiding the long walk into Thatcham, but choice is limited here.

The Kennet continues due east through abundant woodland, occasional single locks and swing bridges to reach Woolhampton. There is a very easy to operate electric swing bridge and places to eat, drink and re-stock here in pleasantly wooded semi-rural surroundings.

Beyond Woolhampton the Kennet begins to take a more north-easterly course towards the wharf and lock at Aldermaston. The village is a mile long walk away but will reward with a place to eat and drink. The wharf at Aldermaston is the location for possibly the busiest lift bridge on the British waterways network to accommodate the crossing of the A340 road.

We have a marina at Aldermaston, also the Butt Inn is 100 yds from Aldermaston lift bridge.

It is 6 hours cruising from Newbury to here

Day 8

From this point the Kennet fast approaches Reading and its seemingly endless outlying regions, heading eastbound keeping the A4 on the left and more or less rural scenery to the south all the way to Bridge 9.

The scattered village of Sulhamstead lies .25 miles south east of Tyle Mill & there is a restaurant in the village. The nature reserves of Cumber Lake to the north, and Woolwich green lake to the south can be reached by a short walk from Sulhamstead Lock.

Beyond Tyle Mill are a series of gravel pits all now flooded lakes, which offer an undisturbed habitat for all sorts of wildlife.

Theale is .75 miles north of the Theale swing bridge and has shops & takeaways.

Right by the M4 crossing is the unique Garston Lock, the last remaining example of a turf sided lock in current use. The lock is a wonderful experience, particularly navigating up the way as the timber walled chamber gives way a metre above the lower water level of the lock and the chamber then fills a funnel shaped, 45 degree angled upper wall which as the name suggests is a turf bank on either side, not the most efficient use of water due to high wastage, hence it is no longer a viable method of working locks.

The centre of Reading is within easy reach of the canal, for those who enjoy cosmopolitan pursuits, high end dining and large shopping centres, there is plenty to do here. There are quieter areas of the city at the abbey ruins or Forbury Gardens as well as quieter side streets with family run shops and restaurants with more traditional dining and ales.

High Bridge is the most central access point and you can turn the boat just after here.

It is 6 hours cruising to here

Days 9-14

It is 42.5 hours back to Hilperton, so about 7-8 hours cruising per day should bring you back to the marina

Useful Links

Description : The Living Rain Forest

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

Telephone : 01635 202444

Description : The Devizes Museum

Website : <http://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/>

Telephone : 01380 727369

Description : Hungerford Tourist Information

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

Telephone : n/a

Description : Devizes Tourist Information

Website : <http://devizes.org.uk>

Telephone : 01380 500276

Description : Wadworth Brewery Devizes Visitor Centre

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

Telephone : 01380 732277

Description : The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust

Website : <http://www.katrust.org.uk>

Telephone : 01380 721279

Description : Wharf Theatre Devizes

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

Telephone : 01380 725944

Description : Crofton Beam Engines

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

Telephone : 01672 870300

Description : Reading Museum

Website : <http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Wilton Windmill

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

Telephone : 01672 870266

Description : Reading Tourist Information

Website : www.reading.gov.uk

Telephone : 0118 937 3400

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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