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<p>This walk has been checked/updated most recently on the dates specified above. However the publisher cannot accept responsibility for any problems encountered by readers.</p>			

Reading to Henley

Length:	Reading to Henley	16.9km (10.5 miles)
	Reading to Shiplake	13.2km (8.2 miles)
	Shortcut to Shiplake	saves 1.7km (1.1 miles)

Toughness: 1 out of 10: entirely flat

Maps: OS Landranger 175, OS Explorer 171

Features

This is a simple walk along a pleasant section of the River Thames. You are on the riverside within 300 metres of leaving Reading station, and the way from there to lunch in the attractive village of Sonning is at first via waterside parks and walkways, and then through a wilder wooded section. After lunch you follow an unspoilt section of riverside between pasture fields to Shiplake Lock, and carry on around a pleasant loop of the river on a newly-opened section of the Thames Path to Shiplake village and station. After a section through suburban Shiplake, the walk returns to river's edge for the last section across a meadow to the dramatic weirs of Marsh Lock, and through a riverside park into Henley.

The path presents no technical difficulties, and for most of the year the paths will be dry underfoot. The one exception is in winter, when very heavy rains may cause the river to flood. Even in this season, the paths are firm for most of the way to Sonning, the exception being some grassy parkland mid morning which can sometimes be a bit soggy. After Sonning the path can be covered with slippery mud, but is never boggy.

Walk options

It is possible to **end the walk at Shiplake**, as the walk passes the station there. This cuts 3.7km (2.3 miles) off the walk, making a walk of **13.2km (8.2 miles)**, but you will miss a beautiful approach along the river to Henley, not to mention its excellent tea stops.

You can also do a **shortcut to Shiplake**, cutting out the last loop of the river before the village. This was the original route of this walk before a new section of Thames Path was opened. It saves 1.7km (1.1 miles), reducing the Reading to Henley walk to **15.2km (9.4 miles)** and Reading to Shiplake to **11.5km (7.1 miles)**.

Transport

Trains to Reading from **Paddington** are fast and numerous, the fastest being the non-stop Great Western express trains which can take as little as 23 minutes. Get a train that arrives at Reading between 10.30 and 11.00. Buy a **day return to Henley-on-Thames valid via Reading** (rather than the slightly cheaper return which is not valid via Reading). You can use a ticket starting from a London Transport zone boundary on these non-stop trains, despite what the occasional misinformed ticket inspector says.

Holders of London Transport **Freedom Passes** (though *not* 60+ Oyster Card holders) can travel to Reading for **free**, so long as they travel on TFL trains (destined in due course to be Crossrail/Elizabeth Line services), but these are stopping services taking 56 minutes from Paddington. In this case you only need to buy a single ticket from Henley to Twyford on the return journey. Contactless, though not Oyster beyond West Drayton, can be used on these services.

Trains back from **Henley** are every half hour (hourly after 7pm on Sundays), changing at Twyford.

Lunch

The Bull (0118 969 3901 www.bullinnsunning.co.uk) in the pretty village of Sonning, 5.4km (3.3 miles) into the walk, gets popular at lunchtimes, especially at weekends, so it is as well to get there early, or even book a table. However it does have a good number of outside tables too, both around its car park and in a well-hidden garden around its back. It serves food from 12pm to 3pm daily (all afternoon at weekends and daily for drinks).

An alternative, next to Sonning Bridge, is the **Coppa Club** (0118 921 9890 www.coppaclub.co.uk), which despite its name describes itself as "an all-day restaurant and social hub where everyone is welcome". I have not tried this establishment, but it seems to serve pub-like food in a modern pub-like environment, and has a beautiful garden on the river's edge. It is open all day and evening.

Tea

The **Baskerville Arms** by Shiplake station, 11.5km (7.1 miles) into the walk, is a possible early tea stop.

In Henley the best option is **The Chocolate Cafe** on the riverside near the town bridge, open till 5pm Monday to Friday and 6pm at weekends.

Another possible tea stop is the **Henley Rowing Museum** on the left in the riverside gardens as you approach Henley. Its cafe, open 10pm to 5pm, is accessible without paying to go into the museum. Further along in the gardens on the left there is a **tea kiosk**.

The centre of Henley (go to the town bridge and turn left) also has other tea options, and many **pubs**, the most obvious of which is **The Angel on the Bridge** by the bridge.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Reading station to Sonning Bridge (5.4km/3.3 miles)

1. From the platforms at **Reading station** go up the escalators onto the concourse overhead and head for the north exit, which is reached via an escalator on the right, 40 metres beyond the escalator down to platform 15.
2. Coming out of the station go straight ahead down a road lined with bus stops, with a multi-storey car park to the right.
3. In 100 metres you come to a junction with a dual carriageway road. Cross this and on its far side carry on up Norman Place (into an office complex, but signposted as a walking route to Christchurch Meadow and Caterham).
4. In 70 metres keep straight ahead towards a residential block. In 70 metres more take a path down the right-hand side of the residential block, and in 40 metres more turn right onto the riverside path.

5. In 130 metres pass under a road bridge.
6. You now follow the Thames Path for 4.5km (2.8 miles). For 3.3km (2.1 miles) you pass through riverside parks linked by footpaths, and then there is a 1.2km (0.7 mile) wooded section which brings you to **Sonning Lock**.
7. 250 metres after the lock and 150 metres before **Sonning Bridge** (a brick arched bridge over the Thames), there is a signposted footpath to the right.
 - For **The Bull**, turn right up this path to emerge in 100 metres in a churchyard. Cross this to find The Bull on its far side. After lunch, retrace your steps to the riverbank and turn right to come to Sonning Bridge in 150 metres.
 - For the **Coppa Club**, or to continue the walk without stopping for lunch, stay on the riverside footpath for another 150 metres to Sonning Bridge. Coppa Club is 60 metres to the right here, on the far side of the road.

Sonning Bridge to Shiplake Lock (4.8km/3 miles)

8. Cross Sonning Bridge, and at its far end turn right over a footbridge with black metal railings which crosses a major branch of the Thames (it splits just after Sonning Lock around Sonning Eye, an island)
9. At the far end of the footbridge turn right onto the Thames Path. Follow this along the river for 3.2km (2 miles).
10. After this distance you pass a boat dock with a boat house belonging to Shiplake College on your left-hand side, above which the houses of old village of Shiplake can be seen on an escarpment.
11. Keep to the river path, and in another kilometre you come to **Shiplake Lock**, the first lock since Sonning.
12. Here the path comes to a stone wall which blocks further progress: turn left along the wall away from the river
13. In 60 metres go right on a tarmac lane. **Here you have a choice:**
 - **For the main walk route**, refer to the next section.
 - **For the shortcut to Shiplake**, saving **1.7km (1.1 miles)** off the walk, refer to paragraph 23 on page 4.

Main walk route to Shiplake (3km/1.9 miles)

14. Carry on along the tarmac lane, with houses to your right.
15. In 350 metres you pass under a railway bridge. Immediately beyond this, turn right through a footpath gate marked with an acorn symbol, down a path alongside the railway line.
16. In 100 metres you come to the riverbank and turn left along it.
17. The path now follows the river in a big loop. The way is not in doubt for 1.4 kilometres.
18. After this distance the river path comes to an abrupt stop, with a house and weeping willow ahead and an information board about the **Lashbrook Ferry**, which explains why the Thames Path makes a diversion away from the river at this point. Here, turn left through a metal gate, onto a path along the right-hand edge of a field.
19. Follow this path for 250 metres across two fields (with a footbridge in between) to come to a low railway viaduct. Pass under this towards its **right-hand** end (**not** the left-hand end, which is initially more visible). You may actually have to duck to pass under the viaduct.
20. Beyond, a path turns left for 60 metres, then curves right with a fenced-off field to its left.
21. In another 60 metres you cross a footbridge and then follow a path between gardens and houses for 120 metres to a road.
22. Turn right the road. In 250 metres there is an easy to miss footpath to the right which takes you directly onto the platform of **Shiplake station** in about 100 metres, if you want to end the walk here without tea.
23. Otherwise, continue for another 130 metres to the centre of Shiplake - a five-way road junction with a post office on the corner. Turn right here to pass the **Baskerville Arms** on the right. Just beyond the pub is **Shiplake station**. To continue the walk to Henley, see paragraph 29 overleaf.

Shortcut to Shiplake **(1.3km/0.8 miles)**

24. After 30 metres on the road, **turn left** off it up a signposted footpath, with a tall conifer hedge right and a fence left.
25. In 70 metres, where the conifers end, keep straight on on a path between fields.
26. In 150 metres go left through a metal kissing gate and cross the corner of the next field to pass through another kissing gate in 60 metres.
27. Beyond, climb steps and turn left on a tarmac drive.
28. In 60 metres turn right at a T-junction onto a residential road.
29. After 550 metres on this road, there is an easy to miss footpath to the right which takes you directly onto the platform of **Shiplake station** in about 100 metres, if you want to end the walk here without tea.
30. Otherwise, continue for another 130 metres to the centre of Shiplake - a five-way road junction with a post office on the corner. Turn right here to pass the **Baskerville Arms** on the right. Just beyond the pub is **Shiplake station**.

Shiplake station to Henley **(3.7km/2.3 miles)**

31. To continue the walk, go over the level crossing and 20 metres beyond it turn left onto a footpath signposted as the Thames Path.
32. In 150 metres this path turns away from the railway line and comes eventually to a road. Go left on this, past increasingly grand houses.

33. In 600 metres follow the road around to the right. In 50 metres more ignore a fork to the left.
34. In another 150 metres the road ends at the stone-pillared gates of a private property. The Thames Path continues to the left of these gates, on a fenced footpath alongside the drive of the house, which has a miniature railway running around its grounds.
35. In 150 metres look out for the grand Swiss-style station of the miniature railway in the garden to your right.
36. In another 180 metres you emerge into a meadow. Keep down the right-hand edge of this for 80 metres and then curve left, once more on the riverbank.
37. In 700 metres you come to **Marsh Lock** which you cross on two long broadwalks out over the river, with the lock and weir gates in the middle of them.
38. At the end of the broadwalks turn right on the riverside path, ignoring a road ahead.
39. Follow this path, with riverside parks to your left for 1km. 600 metres into this the **Henley Rowing Museum**, whose cafe is a possible tea stop, is to the left.
40. In another 500 metres the park ends at a traffic-bearing road, with Henley's bridge over the Thames ahead.
 - **To go directly to Henley station** turn left as soon as you get to the road, and then take the second turning on the left to come to the station.
 - **For tea** carry on along the riverfront for 180 metres to find **The Chocolate Cafe** on the left and the **Angel on the Bridge** pub just beyond it on the right.