

Rowbarge Canal and River Trail, Woolhampton, Berkshire



Moderate Terrain

5.5 miles
Circular
2.5 to 3 hrs

160615



Access Notes



1. The walk is relatively flat with just a few gentle inclines.
2. The surfaces are a mixture of stone and grass towpaths, stone lanes and field paths, many of which can be quite muddy in winter and after periods of rain. Some of the paths can also be overgrown in the summer so shorts are not recommended unless you are immune to nettles!
3. There are several kissing gates on route but no stiles. Some of the fields you cross are likely to be holding cattle so take care with dogs.
4. There is one short section of road walking along the edge of an A-road so beware of the traffic and take particular care with children.

The Rowbarge enjoys a lovely position right on the canal with a large garden giving you chance to enjoy all the canal activity while you savour great ales and food.

A 5.5 mile circular pub walk from the Rowbarge in Woolhampton. The walking route follows a long stretch of the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath along to Aldermaston Wharf with chance to enjoy plenty of wildlife and canal boats messing about on the water. The return leg loops south, crossing branches of the River Kennet and its reed beds, following quiet lanes and crossing grazing pastures.

Getting there

Woolhampton is situated on the A4 between Reading and Newbury. The walk starts and finishes from the Rowbarge pub which is situated on Station Road immediately alongside the canal swing bridge. If you are arriving by train, the pub is just a few hundred yards south of Midgham Station. If you are arriving by car there is a large car park which is on the south side of the pub.

Approximate post code **RG7 5SH**.

Walk Sections



Start to Froud's Lane



Standing in the pub garden, with your back to the pub and facing the canal, turn right to cross the road and join the canal towpath signed as the Kennet and Avon cycle route to Aldermaston and Reading.

Continue along the stone towpath for some distance, with the canal on the left. The Kennet and Avon canal is 87 miles long, linking London and the Bristol Channel. It is England's most southerly cross-country broad-beam canal. From the late 1800s the canal, like many, began to fall into disrepair but from the 1960s a voluntary trust began its restoration. The canal was fully reopened in 1990 and

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is today a haven of tourism. You're likely to see plenty of walkers, cyclists and narrow boats along your journey.

You will eventually reach a large footbridge (Number 30) across the canal marked with a three-way signpost. Fork left up the long slope to cross the bridge. You'll notice the intricate brickwork within the abutments. Continue along the canal towpath on the opposite side, with the canal now on the right. Some distance further pass through a wooden gate ahead and climb a wide gravel slope to reach a T-junction with Froud's Lane.

1 → 2 Froud's Lane to Aldermaston Wharf



Turn right along the pavement and then cross over to turn left through a gate onto the towpath with the canal now once again on your left. On the right you'll see a tall metal fence, behind which are the old gravel pits. The flooded gravel workings are surrounded by dense vegetation providing important habitats for wildfowl and other birds.

Further along pass under a black and white footbridge and then you'll reach Aldermaston Lock on the left, marking the start of Aldermaston Wharf. When the canal was first completed there were wharfs at either end of this section (Newbury and Reading) as well as one here in the middle. Aldermaston Wharf was used to export large quantities of hewed timber as well as malt and flour. The barges used on the Kennet Navigation were much larger than normal canal narrow boats, being similar widths to those used on the Thames. As such the locks are much larger than on some canals and most of the bridges are swing or lift bridges. You'll notice the scalloped brick edges of this lock, a form introduced in the 1760s to give the locks greater strength.

A few yards further along pass through the gate and you'll come to a T-junction with the road, alongside the lift bridge (installed 1984 and typical of the bridges on the canal that accommodate larger vessels).

2 → 3 Aldermaston Wharf to Fisherman's Lane



Do not cross the canal here, instead simply cross the road and take Mill Lane directly opposite, a dead end gravel driveway. With

the small school ahead, swing right to follow the stone lane passing between lots of cottages. When the properties end, continue on Mill Lane along an impressive avenue of Horse Chestnut trees whose branches create a pretty arch of shelter. On the right you'll pass a fishery, which was originally Padworth Mill.

Where the fence on the right ends, you'll see a three-way signpost. Fork right here to join a narrow enclosed footpath between tall fences. Keep ahead to cross two concrete footbridges over branches of the River Kennet. Alongside the second you'll see a small hydro-electric power generator. As you swing right look to your left and you'll see a slope set with intricate metal plates – this forms a salmon ladder to help the fish migrate upstream for the breeding season. Swing left over a third footbridge crossing a sluice gate and keep ahead on the footpath.

A fourth footbridge, a large concrete one, takes you over a large weir. Beyond this, pass through a wooden kissing gate to join a fenced path between grazing areas. A final wooden footbridge leads you through a gate to reach a four-way signpost at the edge of a pasture (note this field may be holding cattle).

3 → 4 Fisherman's Lane to Basingstoke Road



Turn right following the right hand hedge and at the end of the field keep ahead to join the wide stone track passing along the right hand edge of the next field. This is the start of the lane known as Fisherman's Lane. Beyond this field follow the stone track as it becomes enclosed with fences both sides.

Some distance in you'll pass a lone cottage on the right. Further along, ignore the footpath over a stile to the left. Soon afterwards keep a look out for a small gap in the hedge on the right, which conceals a footpath through a gate. Pass through this gate into a field (this and the next two fields are also likely to be holding cattle).

Cross the centre of the field at about 11 o'clock and then cross the footbridge via a pair of gates into the next pasture. Cross this second field at about 1 o'clock and then cross the next gated footbridge into a third field. Cross this third field straight ahead to reach a metal kissing gate. Pass through this and keep ahead for a few paces to reach a gate out onto a surfaced cycle track. Turn right for a few yards to reach the T-junction with Basingstoke Road.

4 → 5 Basingstoke Road to End

Cross over Basingstoke Road (this is a busy road so take particular care here) and turn left along the narrow verge for just 300 yards, until you reach a gravel pull-in with metal gates. Turn right here alongside a disused stile signed as a footpath. Turn right again over a footbridge and immediately left along the left-hand edge of an open field.

At the field corner, keep ahead over a footbridge across the River



Kennet and continue on the footpath ahead which crosses diagonally over the next field. Soon the path will be running directly alongside the main branch of the River Kennet on the right. Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife here as this section of river is home to a range of rare species supported by the chalk watercourse.

On the right you'll pass Froud's Bridge marina. As you reach the junction of the river meeting the canal, fork left onto the footpath heading into a pretty section of Poplar trees. Keep straight ahead through the woodland and you will soon emerge once again onto a grass towpath with the canal on the right.

Further along you'll reach the large footbridge you crossed earlier. Pass alongside this and keep ahead to join the stone towpath. From this point simply keep ahead, retracing your steps alongside the canal, to reach the Rowbarge for some well earned hospitality.

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.

