

Walking the Thames Path through 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'



How long do I need? One day

Where is it? From Pangbourne to Cholsey

Highlights

The Goring Gap is one of the most beautiful and dramatic stretches of the River Thames. The river forces its way through a channel here, carved out by the Ice Age between the slopes of the [Chilterns](#) and the North Wessex Downs – both Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The river is your guide on this nine and a half mile station-to-station walk from Pangbourne to Cholsey on the [Thames Path National Trail](#). The path is clearly signed, so you won't get lost. Allow two hours for the five miles from Pangbourne to Streatley and two hours for the four miles from Streatley to Cholsey. Add on extra time for any rest or refreshment breaks taken along the way. The return journey by train takes only ten minutes.

Start your day at Pangbourne and Whitchurch

Your walk starts where lovely Pangbourne and Whitchurch face each other across the River Thames. This is *Wind in the Willows* country, for Kenneth Grahame lived (and died) in Church Cottage in Pangbourne and these stretches of the river inspired E H Shepherd's much loved illustrations of Ratty, Mole and friends.

To reach the start: Pangbourne and Cholsey stations are on the [First Great Western](#) London Paddington – Reading – Tilehurst - Oxford line, with frequent trains also stopping at Goring & Streatley. Trains run every 30 minutes, Monday - Saturday and hourly on Sundays. Arriving at Pangbourne by train you will emerge close to The Swan pub at the top of the weir, where the *Three Men in the Boat* ended their epic journey.

To begin the walk: turn right leaving the station, cross the road and take the path which leads over the Pang and continue to the Toll Bridge on the River Thames.

Arriving by car: park in the long-term River Meadow Car Park, on the B471 just to the right of the bridge on the Pangbourne side. Pay and display charges apply 8.00 - 18.00, Monday to Saturday.

The walk begins at the Toll Bridge, where a booth collects a toll from motorists on the north side of the river. Stop on the bridge to look upstream to the lock and admire the views of the church, mill and cottages of Whitchurch, on the far side of the millpond. Repair work is scheduled for the bridge from October 2011 to April 2013, so be prepared to use a temporary footbridge in its place. Enjoy the village of Whitchurch as The Thames Path takes you through the churchyard and out amongst the cottages on the old High Street and past the Greyhound pub.

The beautiful Chilterns

From the top of the High Street, the path turns off down a lane on the left hand side and starts its climb away from the river, along the broad bridleway which leads eventually to Hartstock Farm. The walk now takes on a really Chiltern feel, as the hedged track drops down steps to a dry-bottomed valley then up into woods on the other side. The edge of the Chiltern Hills are to your right; the River Thames, now far below can be glimpsed occasionally through the trees. The Thames Path returns gradually to the waterside, descending a wooded bank to rejoin the river with Gatehampton Ferry Cottage and a railway bridge ahead.

The dramatic Goring Gap

With the dramatic slopes of the downs now high above you, walk on through meadows and into the start of the Goring Gap. There are some very desirable residences here: the landmark white house perched on the far bank was part of The Grotto, built in the 18th century by Viscount Fane of Basildon Park as a riverside retreat for his wife Mary, a Maid of Honour to Queen Anne. The attractive little town of Goring soon comes into view, separated from the village of Streatley by a wood island and a picturesque lock and weir. The Thames Path meets Britain's oldest path, The Ridgeway National Trail, on the bridge which spans the river here. Linger on the bridge to look out over the river and enjoy one of the most-photographed views along the whole length of the Thames. If time is short, you can turn right here for Goring & Streatley station (700m away) and return to Pangbourne by train – half hourly service takes five minutes.

Lunch at the [Swan at Streatley](#) restaurant

Set right on the banks of the Thames, the four-star Swan at Streatley hotel could not be more temptingly placed. It has an award winning-restaurant, a lovely terrace and a relaxed riverside bar. As well as serving lunch and dinner, the hotel is open to non-residents for morning coffee, light meals, bar snacks and afternoon tea. You can also hire a boat from the hotel together with a picnic to enjoy on the water.

The Swan at Streatley

Streatley-on-Thames, Berkshire RG8 9HR

Opening hours: All year round

Costs: Costs vary – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1491 878800

Web: www.swanatstreatley.co.uk

Walking from Streatley to Cholsey, via the [Beetle and Wedge](#) restaurant

Once across the bridge into Streatley, turn right towards the church and then follow the Thames Path down the lane past the church and back to the river, with views back to Goring Lock and to the River Thames ahead. A short stroll brings you to Cleeve Lock, the shallowest on the Thames. Set just half a mile from Goring Lock, this is also the shortest stretch between locks on the river. A series of weirs and islands lead to the lock and its picnic garden, where you might meet sheep wandering on the river bank. As you walk on through meadows, you will soon pass a renowned restaurant (The Leatherne Bottel) and the church and village of Stoke, all on the far bank. You arrive now in the garden of the Beetle & Wedge Boathouse, a riverside haven tucked well away from any intrusion. With its terrace, conservatory and beamed restaurant, here is yet another good reason to take a break and put your feet up for a while. The Beetle & Wedge also has three bedrooms overlooking the river, if you're tempted to make an overnight stay.

Beetle and Wedge

Ferry Lane, Moulsoford-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 9JF

Opening times: Seven days a week, lunch and dinner

Costs: Costs vary – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0) 1491 651381

Web: <http://www.beetleandwedge.co.uk/>

To walk on from the Beetle & Wedge, turn right onto Ferry lane into the village of Moulsoford, where The Thames Path takes a side path back down to the river and under the double Four Arches Bridge; the brick-built bridge with the 'skewed' arches is an engineering masterpiece by Brunel. On now through The Cholsey Marsh Nature Reserve, to where the Papist Way leads to Cholsey, where Agatha Christie is buried in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, in Church Road. On the Papist Way, keep straight ahead at the crossroads for a long half mile, turning left at the next crossroads by the Walnut Tree pub for the station.

Returning to Pangbourne

Return to Pangbourne by a First Great Western Line train. The journey time is ten minutes. [National Rail Enquiries](#) or call +44 (0)8457 484950 for more details.

Time to spare in Wallingford?

If you have made an early start – or are making an overnight stop - you can walk on for two and a half more miles to Wallingford on The Thames Path National Trail. Wallingford is the best preserved example of a Saxon town in England: Alfred The Great built the town for defence against Viking raiders and his 9th-century street layout remains largely unchanged. Browse around antique shops in the town centre and look for the clues showing that this is the setting for Causton, in *Midsomer Murders*. For example, the 1856 Corn Exchange in the market place, now a theatre and cinema, features prominently in the series.

[Wallingford Museum](#) explains the history of the town. It includes *The Wallingford Story*, a 'Sight & Sound' experience which takes a walk through time from the Romans and Saxons to the Civil War, including a miniature recreation of Wallingford's huge royal castle.

Wallingford Museum

52 High Street, Wallingford OX10 0DB

Opening times: 1 March – 30 November, Tuesday – Friday 14.00 – 17.00, Saturday 10.30 – 17.00, Sunday 14.00 – 17.00

Costs: Adults £4, children go free

Web: www.wallingford.org.uk

Visit the site of Wallingford Castle free of charge in the Castle Meadows, on the banks of the Thames. Two sections of the wall remain, together with the castle's bank and ditch earthworks. You can access the site at two points on The Thames Path, between Wallingford and Benson, or from Castle Lane which runs off the High Street between the Town Arms and Boathouse pubs.

Returning to Cholsey

There is no mainline station in Wallingford but a ten minute taxi ride will get you back to the station at Cholsey. Call Hills Taxis, in Wallingford: +44 (0)1491 837 022. Or go by train - enjoy a five mile round trip on The Cholsey and Wallingford Railway - a preserved former Great Western Railway branchline known as '[The Bunk](#)' which links Wallingford with the national railway network at Cholsey. Trains run on selected weekends and bank holidays throughout the year and, where available, are steam hauled. Wallingford Station is off Hithercroft Road, a ten minute walk from the town centre or 15 minutes from the marina on the River Thames. Call +44 (0)1491 835067 for detailed information.