

# Milkmaid's Bridge and Holy Brook

**T**his easy stroll starts near the centre of Reading (a sign says '4 mins. walk from the Oracle'!) The low-lying Kennet River meadows have kept the builders at bay, leaving a wedge of almost hidden countryside on the town's doorstep, known mainly to fishermen and wildlife.

**NB SOME PATHS CAN GET MUDDY**

**Distance:** 4 miles

**Os Map:** Explorer 159 Reading

**Start:** Bus-stop on bridge in Berkeley Avenue just west of Elgar Road traffic lights.\* Easy access by bus on routes 24 & 44/45. (Grid ref: 714 726)

**Note:** Motorists can start from Reading Link Retail Park in Rose Kiln Lane – see map – beginning walk at last paragraph.

From lay-by at bus-stop cross over Berkeley Avenue, turning right. Then cross Lower Brook Street and immediately turn left down steps to bank of River Kennet. Here turn right along riverside, signed to Fobney Lock. This part of the river forms a section of the Kennet & Avon Canal, opened in 1723, spanning the 18½ miles between Reading and Newbury. Parts of the canal follow the original course of the river while some stretches were specially built, to carry the

20,000 tons of goods being transported annually at the end of the 18th century.

**1** After nearly a mile along the towpath, pass under one modern road bridge (Rose Kiln Lane) and then shortly another (A33). Notice the fine brickwork of these bridges, a tangible reminder of the brickworks that once stood hereabouts. Soon on the right, pass the distinctive modern Thames Water control building in Fobney Meadow, a design in metal and glass by prominent architect Nicholas Grimshaw. Reaching old pumping station buildings, turn left over bridge and then right, to pass Fobney Lock. Continue along broad gravel track, now on left bank of canal.

**2** Here the Kennet parts company with the canal for a stretch but soon reunites where our route goes over an unusual 'labyrinth' weir and turns right along the bank. Pass under railway arch shortly ahead, continuing along riverbank to reach and turn right over white-railed footbridge. Go ahead to view the pleasantly situated Southcote Lock. *The Victorians built a pumping station here in 1850 to provide a much needed fresh-water supply for the fast-growing population of Reading.* From the lock retrace your steps a few yards and cross the narrow iron-railed footbridge – Milkmaid's Bridge – then bear right

along the drive, away from the lock.

**3** Go under railway, turn right and follow path at foot of embankment. Then turn right again under railway and immediately left, up narrow rising path, soon between railings. Cross footbridge over dismantled railway to emerge at Wensley Road. Turn left and shortly, just beyond North Lodge Mews, left again, up tarmac path to follow hedged track leading to road by entrance lodges (Coley Park). Here go straight on, through swing-gate, to reach Wensley Road again. Now turn right and shortly cross over to bear left into The Old Lane. Reaching road junction bear right along Brookmill.

**4** Just beyond Brookmill go ahead over bridge across Holy Brook. (By turning right here, a delightful detour is possible through this unspoilt river scenery – see map.) To continue our circuit, however, turn left after bridge and follow bank with stream on left. Eventually this leaves the water-meadow area and leads on, with

what might be called the 'hanging gardens of Coley' on the opposite bank.

**5** At end of parking area, cross stream over broad footbridge, left again for a few paces, then turn right across a courtyard leading to footway through distinctive modern development, Admirals Court. Reaching Rose Kiln Lane continue ahead, turning right at traffic lights, back into Berkeley Avenue.

\* Reputed to be the only crossing point in the country where a road meets a street, a lane and an avenue. Not a lot of people know that!

DATE WALKED

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Brookmill Bridge

