

Walton Bridge to Shepperton Ferry South

B50 11

Start	Walton Bridge — KT12 1BH
Finish	Shepperton Ferry South — KT13 8LU
Distance	1.91km
Duration	23 minutes
Ascent	6.8m
Access	Walton-upon-Thames station (South Western Railway) near start of section.
Facilities	All facilities in Walton-on-Thames near start of section.

11.1	Walton Bridge, opposite Reception Centre	0m
11.2	Follow riverside path to ferry landing.	1910m

11.1 This section starts on the riverside path opposite the reception centre on the south side of Walton Bridge.

Walton-on-Thames is one of the most ancient settlements in the area, and is a likely site for Julius Caesar's fording of the river. The place-name indicates that there was in Roman times an existing settlement of pre-Roman inhabitants, coming from the same root as 'Welsh'. Like many communities in this quarter, the railway brought the impetus for expansion, and today Walton has many commuters into London. It is also a popular location for corporate headquarters.

Just beyond the bridge, on the river bank, there is a post with a small notice-board, of the sort more usually associated with park by-laws. However, this could be of more than legalistic interest to the walker on the Brunel50 Path. The notice contains the schedule and other details of the Shepperton Ferry which lies ahead.

11.2 If it seems that the ferry is not running, or if you have a fear of crossing open water in anything smaller than a Channel ferry, or if you are simply too tight-fisted to pay the fare to the ferryman, you may simply follow the streets through Shepperton village to reach the ferry landing on the far bank — see the next section. But even if you have to wait ten minutes for the next ferry, it will still be faster and much more pleasant to take the clear path which goes straight ahead from the notice-board, hugging the south bank, and then to enjoy the short voyage across the river.

A short distance along the way, you will see the river split, with one branch wheeling away to your right. That is, in fact, the original course of the river. The straight-line course which you are following is the Desborough Channel, which was cut during the 1930s to give river craft faster progress between Walton and Shepperton, and to mitigate against local flood damage. You will pass beneath two identical bridges, one at each end of the cut: they give road access to Desborough Island. After passing under the second of these bridges, you will pass a steeply-arched footbridge (which is securely barred against unauthorised

access): this leads to a natural eyot in the stream known as D'Oyly Carte Island. It was bought by Richard D'Oyly Carte, the theatre impresario who brought Gilbert and Sullivan to the Savoy Theatre. He had his residence built on the island, but after his death, his widow sold the property and the island passed out of the family. The island still bears his name.

The ferry runs every 15 minutes as required, on the quarter-hours (timed from a north bank start). The first crossing is at 0900 on Mondays to Fridays, at 1000 on Saturdays, and at 1100 on

The bell to summon the Shepperton Ferry



Sundays. Ring the bell lustily, so as to be heard by the staff in the depths of the Nauticalia shop, but only ring it at the time for the next crossing, otherwise you risk incurring the wrath of the ferryman. The adult fare (in 2020) is £2.50 for a single journey, a small price to pay for a unique aspect of the route.

Shepperton is today known for its film studios, and for being the suburban home of JG Ballard, the author, until his death in 2009. Its historic but still tucked-away location, with a good rail link to central London and not too far from Heathrow airport, has made a reasonably large number of post-war celebrities (on lists running at least part of the way through the alphabet) choose to live here. But the town has a long history, as indeed does the ferry, which has plied this stretch of water for five centuries. The settlement is documented at least a hundred years before the Norman Conquest, and there are some fine Georgian houses a little bit back from the river.

At the end of the nineteenth century, though, there were reports of visitors who came to Shepperton from far, far away. They arrived across the meadows from Chertsey: they were the Martian invaders in *The War of the Worlds*, which was written by HG Wells (who lived in nearby Woking) and published in 1898. One of the invaders, having taken a direct hit from an artillery shell, landed, dead, in the water.

The river geography at this point is a jumble of channels, weirs, islands and lock: it is the point at which the River Wey enters the Thames. The Wey drains much of west Surrey; the northern branch rises at Alton in Hampshire, while the southern branch has its source on Gibbet Hill at the Devil's Punch Bowl near Hindhead.