

Magna Carta Centre to Colnbrook

B50 17

Start	Magna Carta Centre — TW19 5AE
Finish	Ye Olde George Inn, Colnbrook — SL3 0LX
Distance	9.84km
Duration	1 hour 59 minutes
Ascent	14.3m
Access	Bus near start of section. Bus at end of section. Wraysbury station (South Western Railway) <i>en route</i> .
Facilities	Café at start of section. Pubs and shops at end of section. Pub at Horton <i>en route</i> .

17.1	Magna Carta Centre	0m
17.2	Downstream with river on L past QEII statue, then R alongside car park; L to regain river; R past Bell Weir and Lock; beyond hotel, R through scrub to road.	2960m
17.3	L up L pvt of M25 slip road; across bridge; descend on path to L of road; L on Wraysbury Road; use service road, at far end of which cross main road; L, then R on footpath with Wraysbury Lake on R; cross rly; L on lineside path and R to road.	2950m
17.4	R along Coppermill Road to rbt; L on R pvt past Berkyn Manor (Milton plaques); R on Foundry Lane; ahead on track to houses (Colnbrook); ahead on Drift Way; pass Rayners Close; R on footpath to High Street; R on L pvt to Ye Olde George Inn.	3910m



Magna Carta Centre

17.1 This, the penultimate section of the Brunel50 Path route, begins at the former University boathouse on the Thames at Runnymede Meadows.

The Magna Carta Centre is a Brunel exhibition and event space: it uses the rescued Grade II* listed boathouse which was brought into the Brunel estate with the acquisition of Shoreditch College (which had occupied Runnymede campus since 1951). Following the departure, in 2007, of the University from Runnymede campus, the Victorian boathouse fell into a state of disrepair. With an eye to the upcoming Magna Carta 800 celebrations, the boathouse was renovated. It now hosts events and exhibitions for the University and for local organisations. The University is in partnership with the National Trust and local government in this enterprise. When the Magna Carta Centre is not open for an event or exhibition, there is normally no access to the building.

Note that no public transport serves the route between here and Colnbrook, with the exception of trains and very occasional buses from Wraysbury. The opportunities for sustenance are limited to a pub in Horton.

To the west of the beginning of the section are bus stops which are served by the 71 route between Heathrow Terminal 5 and Slough, via Egham, Englefield Green and Windsor. Oyster cards are not accepted

17.2 From the Magna Carta Centre, go down the path to reach the riverside.

From here, there is a commercial pleasure-boat concern: it is known as the Runnymede Boathouse. Neither the service nor the company running it has any link whatsoever with the University.

Turn to your right, and follow the path between the river and the car park. Keep to the main path, and after about 1.3km, you should veer (with the river) sharply away from the road. Once round the river bend, you should stray to the right slightly to reach a statue of HM The Queen.

This 4m tall statue has been erected to mark the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta in 1215 by King John. It was unveiled on 14 June 2015 by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt Hon John Bercow MP. The bronze statue, by James Butler, is inspired by the portraits of the Queen by Pietro Annigoni, and depicts her in full robes of the Order of the Garter. Plaques bearing an excerpt of Magna Carta and depicting the Royal Line of Succession are set in the ground by the statue.



Magna Carta octocentennial statue of HM The Queen, Runnymede meadows

The Thames Path national trail keeps to the riverside round the next bend, and constitutes an obvious and very pleasant alternative route. The Brunel50 Path, with the aim of getting as close to the magic 50-mile length as possible, makes a more direct crossing of the Runnymede Pleasure Ground instead.

Go behind the statue to the low rail which fences off the overflow car park: follow it to your left, turning right at the corner of the car park to keep the rail on your right. Keep on in a straight line to the far end (the main car park and toilets are off to your right), then turn left along a cinder path to reach the river again by a small car park for a boat club.

Turn right to follow the river downstream, past a boatyard, and on to Bell Weir, where the river drops 1.82m through Bell Weir Lock.

These are the third such structures: the present lock dates from 1877 and the weir from 1904.



Thames Water pumping station, Runnymede, from across the river

The large modern Runnymede-on-Thames Hotel (which was merely the Runnymede Hotel until the nearby town of Staines “upgraded” its name to Staines-upon-Thames) fronts the river below the lock. Walk past the hotel: you will see a footpath going down the side of the hotel at a white wooden bollard. This path will take you out onto the meadows near the Lutyens pepperpot kiosks, but the Brunel50 Path carries on past the bollard for about 10m to take another path to the right, smaller and rather more sinuous than the hotel-side one. This trends away from the hotel and climbs to its exit onto a tarmac pavement by a road.

Down to the right, you will see Egham Roundabout, where the roads from Staines-upon-Thames, Windsor and Bagshot converge under the shoulder of the M25 (whose Junction 13 is here, so there are motorway slip roads onto and off the roundabout).

If you do decide to take a look at the kiosks, with Cooper’s Hill behind, simply take the path along the side of the hotel. You may then walk back along the A308 to the roundabout, and follow the pavement to the left. Do not cross any of the roundabout roads.

17.3 You are now walking on what appears to motorists as the slip-road onto the M25 — indeed, concerned but uninformed passengers may try to dissuade you from your route, fearing that you are about to walk onto the motorway. But fear not, the footway is soon segregated safely behind a crash barrier.

You will reach the bridge over the Thames. From the centre of the bridge’s span, you have a fine view over the river, with Bell Weir centre stage. On the far side of the bridge, rise to the level of the motorway exit slip-road: at the summit, the footway veers slightly left and less slightly downwards to reach Wraysbury Road beneath the motorway.

Turn left along Wraysbury Road, taking advantage of the service road at Colne Way to avoid meeting the roundabout. At the blocked-off far end of the service road, cross to the other side of the main road, and continue along the footway. Opposite the garage, just before you reach a bridge

Bell Weir and Lock from the bridge over the Thames





over the Colne Brook, a signpost indicates a public footpath which descends into a green and watery landscape — Wraysbury Lakes Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Wraysbury Lake

For the next 1.2km, there is simply no alternative route: you walk through the trees on a narrow sliver of land with the brook on your left and the lake on your right. Birds abound on the lake, including the Great Crested Grebe (which, we are told in *Scoop*, by Evelyn Waugh, “does not hibernate”) and many different ducks.

Look out for a hybrid and entirely redundant footpath sign on your left; the path eventually reaches the end of the lake and bends right in a scrap of open ground to meet the railway.

Cross the railway tracks by a pedestrian level crossing. Stop, look both ways, and listen for the sound of a train coming, and if you hear anything or see any train lights, wait behind the gate, then repeat the process after the train has passed. Another train may be coming in the opposite direction.

Once across the tracks and through the far gate, turn to the left to walk parallel to the railway. Here, you will meet much punier cousins of the nettles of Lyne: these are really nothing to worry you. In season, you may become an honorary member of the Newton family as apples fall onto your head from the trees above your head. After about 400m, the path veers half-right to follow the bank of the Colne Brook once more. Climb up to road level at the side of a bridge, and turn right.

If you cross the bridge on your left, you will reach Wraysbury station on the line between Windsor and Waterloo — trains every half hour (but only hourly on Sundays). The string of bus stops on Coppermill Road are served by occasional buses towards Staines-upon-Thames.

The next 2km is possibly the duller section of the entire route: a mere ribbon of undifferentiable inter-war houses along a flat road (most of it all too visible stretching out before you), without horizon, without shops, but with the constant overflying of Heathrow air traffic. There is a

little interest generated by having to cross and re-cross Coppermill Road to follow the footway, but that's about it. See the final section below to find out how someone else from Brunel managed this section (albeit in the reverse direction).

Switch into neutral, let your mind loose on other things. Patrick Leigh Fermor would declaim poetry aloud in English, Latin or Greek in such situations as this while he crossed Europe (see *A Time of Gifts* and its sequels), while John Hillaby (in *Walking Through Britain*) writes of switching on his "skull cinema" to feed his need for entertainment on dull stretches of his walk from Land's End to John o'Groats. Here, quiet contemplation, the conjugation of Latvian verbs, or calculating whether or not a large number is prime may be a better bet: such silent meditations will not disturb the residents unduly — not nearly as much as great chunks of Euripides, Livy or Shakespeare would, when delivered at 70dB with arms flailing theatrically. Mind you, 70dB would probably be drowned here by the din from overflying aircraft.

17.4 Set out, therefore, away from the bridge, to the signs which divide Horton from Wraybury (if you clamour for interest, there's always the joint parish council notice-board to read). The road takes a bend to the left, and seems to vanish northwards to infinity. Eventually, though, the house numbers dribble down towards single figures, and at last, the junction with Stanwell Road is reached. Turn left here, and make your way along the road (using the right-hand pavement), crossing the Colne Brook.

Suddenly, there is an outbreak of blue plaques on a wall to the right, opposite a Dutch-style lodge building. This indicates that John Milton lived here, at Berkyn Manor Farm. A few metres on, Foundry Lane goes off to the right.

At this point (ignoring the Runnymede-on-Thames Hotel, as most walkers will have done), you have your first point of refreshment since the café in the National Trust lodge at Runnymede: just ahead is the Horton Inn. This hostelry seems to have resisted the march of tapas and Thai food, but serves simple fare and a decent range of beer.

Take Foundry Lane, and be prepared for mud. The land around Berkyn Manor Farm (which is now completely dilapidated — "Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour!") houses a waste company, and the lane is reduced to Caramac-toned sludge. Beyond the entrance to this sad shadow of a noble home, Foundry Lane becomes a fieldside path, which you will follow, always beneath the roar of Heathrow air traffic, to the outskirts of Colnbrook, at the bend in Drift Way.

Follow this road until Rayners Way comes in from the right at a bend, then look out on the right for one of the shortest public footpaths in the country: a 40m short-cut to Colnbrook High Street. Turn right along the High Street, past the Ostrich Inn, to the mini-roundabout by a bus stop.

This bus stop, named *Ye Olde George*, is served by the 81 bus which runs frequently between Slough and Hounslow. Take it to Pinglestone Close for the U3 (on Hatch Lane, just back a bit and round the corner) to Uxbridge. There are pubs and shops in Colnbrook for the replenishment of supplies.

Colnbrook was an important coaching stop on the Bath Road: indeed, it was the junction point for coaches to Windsor. This explains the coaching inns which are found along the High Street, including the Ostrich which, at just over 900 years old, is celebrated as “England’s third oldest inn”.

The existence (at one time) of a trapdoor device for murdering rich clients by dropping them from the best bedroom directly into a cauldron of boiling water in the kitchen below has led to the suggestion that the Ostrich Inn was the spark of inspiration which was developed to become the gruesome tale of Sweeney Todd, the demon barber of Fleet Street.



Ostrich Inn, Colnbrook