

**Below:** The ruins of Reading Abbey, founded in 1121  
**Bottom:** The peaceful Grand Union Canal towpath



**Blazing more trails**  
 Cycling UK's 2026 route fundraising appeal is coming soon

**Day one: a slow start in the sun**

We set off from Reading on the deceptively gentle start to the route, which goes along the Thames towpath. Pretty soon, though, we zipped off up the first of the route's many hills. Although none of those hills is higher than 250 metres, the accumulation of climbing over each day is more of a challenge than we expected. We ambled up and down pleasant, forested tracks that took us to our first coffee stop in Henley-on-Thames, where a baker's dozen of eateries selling sourdough bread encouraged us to stop and take in the bunting-clad town.

The whole route offers an abundance of opportunities to buy fresh coffee, sandwiches, lunchtime shandies and emergency ice creams. There were, in fact, so many excellent places to stop, we found ourselves pausing every few miles. We joked that this wasn't quite so much a cycling tour of the Chilterns as an eating tour. Which was why, after a dairy-heavy lunch at The Cheese Shed in Nettlebed, we were shocked to realise we'd only managed 17 miles that morning. We would have to

knuckle down and ride hard to reach our destination that evening.

Going north, we followed the Icknield Way and the Ridgeway along gentle rises, marvelling at how many beautiful trails there are across the landscape here. I loved this part of the route: the trails were easy to ride, well maintained and quiet, with green views over Oxfordshire. There was then a climb over Stokenchurch Gap, followed by our last of the day:

**“The view from the top was worth the slog: a golden patchwork of fields and villages stretching to the horizon”**

Whiteleaf Hill. It is surprisingly steep. We ended up having to push because it was so rooty. The view from the top was worth the slog: a golden patchwork of fields and villages stretching away to the horizon.

We spent the night in Great Missenden, staying at the beautiful abbey that's been

converted into a hotel. There's a great pizza restaurant in town, and a Roald Dahl Museum to visit. We opted to watch the sunset in the walled gardens of the abbey, eating our pizzas and massaging sore legs.

**Day two: bike repairs and big skies**

On the second day we suffered a series of mechanicals. We should