

Royal Chilterns Way

Tour Organiser: John Upton

Sunday 07th to Friday 12th June 2026

Launched in August 2025, the Royal Chilterns Way is Cycling UK's newest trail/gravel route in the 'Adventure Series' around the Chilterns in England.

At the time of writing, this is the first and only fully organised tour including accommodation that we can find online!

Starting in Reading, we will zig-zag our way north east to the Dunstable Downs and back again in 3 loops over a period of 6 days, staying in bike-friendly hotels along the way.

For more information about the route, see: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/routes/long-distance/royal-chilterns-way> or just google 'Royal Chilterns Way'.

Itinerary

Sunday 07th June 2026 Reading to Ewelme

There are 2 start points: * Holiday Inn Reading-South M4, Jct.11 - Meet at 09:30am to leave by 09:50am (contact me RE parking) * The Pantry Café & Kitchen at Reading Town Hall - Meet at 10:15am for a 10:30am start. The idea is that those who are driving can meet at the Holiday Inn from where we will set off, then stop off at the Pantry Cafe to pick up any others, it being a short distance from both Reading Train Station and Forbury Gardens, the start of the actual route. For any that arrive early, the Medieval Abbey ruins next to Forbury Gardens are worth a visit. Leaving Forbury Gardens, we quickly pick up the River Kennet which then leads to The Thames, taking us the first few miles and out of Reading. We then take roads and trails, with the big climb of the day landing us in Henley on Thames, our lunch spot. The afternoon is mainly flat/downhill and finds us on lanes and tracks. In Nettlebed (where we'll stay later in the week), we'll see what is apparently the only preserved bottle kiln in the country and have the opportunity to buy water/snacks if needed. Near the end of the day, there is a lovely section of single track through woodland down to Ewelme.

- Route distance: 47.0km

- Route altitude gain: 400m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: Self-Catering

Monday 08th June 2026 Ewelme to Amersham

Having possibly stopped to take a quick look at the picturesque Ewelme church, we head up and onto a ridgeway for a few miles, followed by a steep climb into Aston Rowant Nature Reserve. Dipping down to cross the M40, we'll then face another steep (likely pushing) climb up to the top of Chinnor Hill. By the time we reach The Lions of Bedlow we will probably deserve a hearty pub lunch. Alternatively there are cafes a few miles further in Princes Risborough after a short section of the Phoenix Trail. Leaving Princes Risborough, yet another climb up Whiteleaf Hill rewards us with fine panoramic views. Then a nice long gentle descent for a few miles along Grim's Ditch, past Hampden House and into Great Missenden and a possible afternoon coffee. Leaving the village on yet another steep (but thankfully short) climb, we again descend gently down into Chesham and then Amersham where we find our hotel for the night.

- Route distance: 67.0km
- Route altitude gain: 900m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Tuesday 09th June 2026 Amersham to Tring

Leaving Amersham we pass Little Chalfont and the historic Chenies Manor House - at over 500 years old this is one of the earliest examples of brick domestic buildings in Buckinghamshire. The route then veers north to a series of quiet roads and tracks taking us to Berkhamsted along the Grand Union canal, where we'll grab either an early lunch or a quick coffee. Climbing out of the town past the castle, we go through Ashridge Park. Winding through the countryside past Whipsnade Tree Cathedral and Whipsnade zoo, we'll approach the Dunstable Downs with fine views and (more importantly?) a visitor centre where we'll stop to bolster our energies. Heading down off the ridge we go through Edlesborough, after which the White Lion cut into the chalk hillside can be seen. Then onwards and upwards to the Bridgewater Monument, which hopefully we can climb (couldn't when I visited in September 2025) followed by a lovely wooded descent and then climb over the last mile to take us to our hotel near Tring.

- Route distance: 58.0km
- Route altitude gain: 850m
- Accommodation: None
- Meals: (B)

Wednesday 10th June 2026 Tring to High Wycombe

Leaving the hotel near Tring, we will quickly find ourselves back on the Grand Union Canal, this time for a good few miles, though it looks a bit sorry for itself as much of this section is dried up and/or broken. Then a climb up to Wendover Woods, one of my favourite sections of the whole route for a nice coffee break and beautiful run through the woods. Then on to Wendover itself and a detour from the 'proper' route (until end 2028! for HS2) and our lunch stop. Another climb to start the afternoon, this time up Combe Hill for some beautiful views near the obelisk. From then on, it's mainly off-road with an overall descent for the whole afternoon and a possible afternoon coffee break in Prestwood.

- Route distance: 47.0km
- Route altitude gain: 700m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Thursday 11th June 2026 High Wycombe to Nettlebed

Leaving High Wycombe, we launch into a rollercoaster of a day, with a lot of off-road thrown in for good measure. We start by retracing our tracks back to find the route, then a protracted detour of High Wycombe, through West Wycombe (above which can be seen the Dashwood mausoleum) with its coffee opportunities and down to the beautiful town of Marlow for lunch. The afternoon is more 'rolling countryside', but a little easier as much is on tarmac, albeit mainly quiet lanes. Our hotel is in the village of Nettlebed.

- Route distance: 47.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1000m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Friday 12th June 2026 Nettlebed to Reading

The day starts with some glorious riding through beech woodland that covers so much of the area. The first (and only!) chance for a morning coffee break is in Stoke Row after 11km, where we can also look in on Maharajah's Well. We then follow parts of the Ridgeway Trail down to the Thames near Wallingford, where we turn south and (more or less) follow the path of the river all the way to Reading. We'll stop for lunch in Goring, aiming to be back in Reading at the train station by 5pm (say 6pm to be on the safe side if you are catching a train), then carrying on back to the Holiday Inn, hopefully arriving by 5:30pm.

- Route distance: 49.0km
- Route altitude gain: 500m
- Accommodation: None
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £900

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £200 per person is required as soon as possible once the Tour Organiser has confirmed your booking, with the final balance to be paid by 01-Apr-2026

Price includes:

- 5 Nights hotel accommodation
- Breakfast
- Bike storage (mainly hotel storage room, 1 night in hotel room)
- Luggage transfer and mechanical support vehicle

Price does not include:

- Travel to the start or from the finish
- Any food/meals except Breakfast
- Travel or bike insurance - you leave bikes at your own risk
- Single room supplement - £400

Cancellations

Written Notice Received	Cancellation Charge
01/042026	£200 (deposit)
02/042026 onwards	Full price of tour

The price of £900 (land only) is based on a minimum number of 4 people taking part in the holiday. If there are insufficient bookings by Wednesday 01st April 2026, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

Grade and Area Covered by the Holiday

This Holiday is classed as Energetic.

It's a 'moving on' tour, covering an area of the Chiltern Hills on a route recently well publicised by Cycling UK.



The terrain varies a great deal - sections of the route are flat e.g. along canal tow paths or old rail lines, other parts are downright hilly! It is almost entirely non-technical, and slightly technical sections can be easily walked.

Travel and Communication

The tour starts at the Holiday Inn on the south side of Reading near junction 11 of the M4, with a pickup point at the Pantry Cafe And Kitchen at the Town Hall in Reading centre.

Travel to the start and from the finish is not included in this holiday. It is very important that you note that neither your Tour Organiser nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements, you should ensure that the tour is definitely going ahead.

Should there be insufficient bookings or pandemic travel restrictions are re-imposed, we reserve the right to cancel the tour at any time. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation or wait until you have been told the tour will go ahead. In the event of the tour being cancelled we will not be responsible for any losses incurred outside what you pay us.

We will use WhatsApp to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any emergencies on route. Ideally everyone will bring a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group.

If you are unable to join the WhatsApp group I can only communicate with you in an emergency.

At the end of the tour, there will be a 'drop-off' point at Reading train station before continuing on to the Holiday Inn where we started.

If you live in South East or towards the Midlands, we may be able to offer a pick up and/or drop of service, for you and/or your bike. Please contact me to discuss.

Accommodation

The maximum number of participants will be 9 including the Tour Organiser.

We will stay at a variety of different hotels along the way, staying at a different one each night.

Each hotel has different room configurations. I will do my best to meet your requirements depending on your request for single supplement - first come, first served.

Prices are based on two people sharing a room.





There is a storage room for bikes in all hotels bar one. In that one, we are allowed to take our bikes into our hotel rooms. I can help take bikes to rooms if necessary.

If you wish to stay the night before the start (Saturday night), then I would recommend the Holiday Inn junction 11 of the M4 on the southern side of Reading, as that is where we will be starting the tour from and finishing.

Meals, Health and Diet

Breakfasts are included in the price of the tour, provided by each of the hotels that we will stay at.

Lunches will be at cafes en route wherever possible, occasionally at restaurants if no cafe is available. They are not included in the price of the tour. Or you can source your own lunch as you like.

Dinners will be in a restaurant in the vicinity of where we stay each night, often in the hotel where we stay. They are not included in the price of the tour. Or you can source your own dinner as you like.

Snacks, drinks (as well as non-lunch cafe stops) are not included in the price. I aim to have one cafe stop per day, but sometimes there may be opportunity for two.

You should buy and carry sufficient food and drink in case of emergencies.

Check that you have informed me of any dietary requirements in your Booking Form. If in doubt, let me know again!

Please remember to pack any medications that you need to take regularly.

Cycles and Equipment

Although perfectly doable on a gravel bike or hybrid, I, personally I will be riding a hardtail MTB for this tour. If it was only ~20% off-road then I'd likely go for a gravel bike or similar, but as this one is 65%, a MTB will be more comfortable, better handling, and won't be significantly slower on the road sections simply because there aren't that many of them!

As usual, you should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes.

A low bottom gear (eg. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended; if unsure about gears, please talk to the Bikexplore Organiser about them.

Mudguards are optional.

Lights are recommended in the very unlikely event of arriving back late and useful if walking outdoors at night. A bell is advised and bring a bike lock for security. Water bottles are required to ensure you are hydrated at all times.





You will be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs, including an inner tube and e.g. a spare gear cable, split link and spare brake pads. There may not be many bike shops on route and they are never when you need them.

I highly recommend knobbly tyres, and the wider the better.

Helmets are mandatory on this trip.

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This route description from the Cycling UK website:

"Both gravel bikes and hardtail mountain bikes work well here. The terrain isn't very technical, but rooty woodland and chalky climbs can challenge riders, especially when wet.

Hardtail MTB: Offers maximum comfort and control on rougher trails.

Gravel bike: Fast and efficient on lanes and tracks. Use wide tyres (40mm+), tubeless setup, and low gearing for the short climbs.

E-bikes are also a great choice. Assistance on the hills is appreciated and there are plenty of café charging points along the way."

Rides, Rest Days and Fitness

The holiday is for 6 days with 5 overnight stops and has no rest days.

It is a moving-on tour, but with a luggage transportation service included in the price

65% of the surfaces we ride on will not be metalled - they are 'gravel' (see the 'Gravel Terrain Definition' section below). The rest will be mainly minor roads, used by rural/tourist traffic. We may need to use some busier roads at times but avoid them as much as possible.

Most of each cycling day may be spent cycling. You will be expected to ride at your own pace and often in loose groups, at around 12-18 km per hour on the flat, slower up hills and occasionally walking, usually meeting up at cafes for lunch and refreshment breaks. You will be notified of the two or three available or recommended refreshment stops each day.

It is expected that you may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore and this is okay. You are on holiday.

Inevitably, you might consider parts of the route hilly, so you need to be fit to get the most out of this tour.

It is essential to get out on your bike and do some comparable rides before the tour starts.

There may be steep descents too, so you should be able to negotiate these safely.





Please note it may not always be possible to follow the itinerary exactly due to road works or weather etc, as things do not always go as planned. In these circumstances, you will be advised of alternative arrangements.

The Organiser will not always be at the front of the group but may be anywhere within it, as circumstances require, so you will need to be aware of the route and likely stopping places each day.

Weather and Clothing

Lightweight clothing, suitable for a range of temperatures is needed and possibly smarter, warmer clothing for the evenings.

Lightweight waterproofs/windproofs will be needed.

Sun cream, lip balm and sun glasses are recommended.

My packing list is available on request - advisable if this is your first tour.

Come prepared for UK June temperatures – I recommend you keep an eye of the weather forecast, but not bank on it being accurate!

The best protection from the sun is to cover up.

Maps and Guides

A .gpx file for each day's route and/or detailed route notes will be provided before the start of the tour.

If you have any other mapping requirements, let me know before the start of the tour and I will do my best to accommodate.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is not mandated for tours in the UK, but it is recommended.

Passport, Visa and Monies

N/A

Gravel Terrain Definition

* Non tarmacked, gravel covered routes or sandy routes. Usually double track, but it does not necessarily exclude single track. However, it should not have technical sections, or at the minimum any technical sections need to be risk assessed and the clientele warned. The focus is keeping both wheels on the ground.

* Steep descents or climbs (anything over 25%) should be avoided.

* Drop offs, (greater than 2 inches), should be avoided

* Roots and ridges running across the path should be minimised.





* Gravel bike rides may cover short sections of the more technical terrain, but the clients will be warned about these in advance of riding them and encouraged to walk these sections.

Support and luggage transfer

For the first time on one of my tours, we have vehicle support. This is mainly due to wanting to offer luggage transportation - I don't want to exclude those of you who don't necessarily go for the minimalist 'bike-packing' set up and panniers aren't really so suitable for this type of adventure. In addition, our support driver has a 'garage' in his van and is an ex-bike mechanic, so is on hand should anyone get a mechanical along the way that can't be easily fixed at the trail-side.

Tour Organiser contact details

John Upton

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