

## The Watercress Way trail guide

## Anti-clockwise: Alresford – Micheldever Woods - Sutton Scotney – South Wonston – Kings Worthy – Itchen Abbas -Alresford



<sup>(atercress<sup>we''</sup>)</sup> **The Watercress Way charity** was registered in 2016 after locals campaigned to open for public access a mile section (1.6km) of the Mid-Hants/Watercress Line at Itchen Abbas, closed in 1973.

- The aim is to increase access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to the 11 km/7miles abandoned Watercress Line between Alresford-Kings Worthy, and the 6.4 kms/4 miles Didcot-Newbury-Southampton line (DNSL) between Kings Worthy-Sutton Scotney. Over 8km/5 miles of old railway track is now accessible for walkers and cyclists, and most of it for horse riders.
- Both old railways were important in starting the Victorian boom in watercress production, hence the name of the trail. Other rights of way, including historic livestock droves, minor roads and footpaths, have been chosen to make a circular 44km/27 mile route, waymarked for walkers.
- The route may alter slightly in the future if more disused railway line can be opened for public use.
- Our website shows a cycling route, several horse riding routes and suggested shorter circular routes all based on the main Watercress Way. <u>www.thewatercressway.org.uk</u>

Sections		The trail follows parts of other routes: Miller Three Castles, Wayfarers and St Swithun's W	and points of interest nnium, Arle, Three Castles, Wayfarers Way, Pilgrims Way, /ay. There are several interpretation boards to help along e. We recommend using an OS map/app with this guide.
1.	GEORGIAN ALRESFORD & River Arle pavement walking 2.3 km	<ul> <li>From Alresford railway station, visitor centre and car park walk straight ahead, north, down Station Rd towards the town centre, past public toilets.</li> <li>Opposite the public toilets, turn right after the Police Station apartments along a small walled path on right, through St. John's churchyard.</li> <li>Emerge at top of Broad St, cross West St to go gently downhill.</li> <li>Pass by all the shops, restaurants, and houses to the bottom of the hill.</li> <li>Turn left at Ladywell, follow the little spring fed stream on left and</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The Visitors Centre for the Watercress Line is worth a visit: named after one of its original directors Edward Knight, Jane Austen's nephew.</li> <li>Find the plaque on the public toilets by Drs surgery about Portland spy ring.</li> <li>Look for Napoleonic graves in St Johns churchyard.</li> <li>New Alresford is hardly new, being a planned settlement dating back to Bishop de Lucy in the C.13<sup>th</sup> It is a remarkably well-preserved Georgian town centre, with many surviving from its last major fire in 1689. The houses have long narrow plots called burgage plots.</li> <li>Livestock, especially sheep, fairs were held in Broad St for centuries, the last being 1972.</li> <li>Look out for Nos 48 blacksmith, No 50 US Army HQ WW2 and the Old Post House. Look at all the old coaching entrances now garages or converted into the main building, as in The Swan and Bell pubs.</li> <li>Chalk springs are the clue to watercress production. Look for pike, trout, swans, ducks</li> </ul>
	J	<ul> <li>the Millennium and Arle Valley trail along bank of the River Arle.</li> <li>Pass the historic Fulling Mill along a narrow path by the River Arle, to the road called The Dean, past Amy's wildfowl feeding station</li> <li>Turn right, do not go up The Dean</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>This area was once famed for tanneries and fulling mills. You pass the C13 Fulling Mill and ancient ford across the River Arle. An information board here has an image of a horse and flatbed cart pulling watercress from the beds, just visible on the other side of the river, up to Alresford Station. Victorians called watercress sold in paper cones in London: 'poor man's bread'.</li> </ul>

2.	<ul> <li>Continue along the river edge, past Arlebury Park recreation ground and carpark to the left.</li> <li>Pass the historic Eel house and climb gently uphill with Drove House on the left. The path is between its fence and narrow field.</li> <li>Keep heading straight on /west to Drove Lane</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Just after the entrance to Arlebury Recreation ground look for Hambone Junior Dog grave plaque just to the right of the footpath. He was a US army mascot in WW2.</li> <li>Look for futuristic modern Drove House on the right.</li> <li>Have a look at the information boards on the C.19<sup>th</sup> Eel house- fascinating links to the Sargasso Sea. There is a bench here donated by a legacy from the Newitt family via Alresford Rotary.</li> <li>The water meadows looking southwest here from Drove Rd were used for WW2 tank training. The old Watercress Line can be seen mid distance, with many trees cut down from 2019 from ash dieback.</li> </ul>
<b>3.</b> The DROVES (metalled roads and grassv) grassv tracks c. 15 km	<ul> <li>Alrestord, signposted Waytarers Way.</li> <li>After about 1 km cross Itchen Stoke minor road (two height restriction barriers) and carry on for another 1 km to a crossroads of 5 bridleways.</li> <li>At crossroads with Three Castles Path take the third on the right heading downhill NW 1/5 km to the minor Northington road crossing, and go straight over, under the two height restriction barriers.</li> <li>You now have 2.5 km of a gradually climbing track out of the Itchen Valley over Itchen Down then down to Micheldever woods. Ignore all turnings to the left taking you south/SW down to the Itchen river,</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>above sea level on the left and a windpump obscured by tall conifers and vines. Itchen Down: was the location of 19<sup>th</sup> C cricket.</li> <li>Itchen Woods and Micheldever Woods are</li> </ul>

<ul> <li>This road section is part of the Oxdrove, labelled on maps as Alresford Drove. Go under the M3 bridge to the A33 dual carriage crossing at the place of worship locally known as Lunways DANGEROUS CROSSING</li> <li>The Oxdrove continues as a bridleway and is partly gravelled for almost 4 km to Stoke Charity Rd at Wallers Ash.</li> <li>Cross straight over and follow road towards South Wonston (no pavement) until turn first right, a farm track heading north to West Stoke Farm</li> <li>Follow the grassy bridleway for 2 kms until you get to a staggered crossroads of paths near some farm buildings on the right.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>roads are in this area. Many date back to Roman times, such as the A33.</li> <li>Wallers Ash is a typical shelter belt created of conifers or beech trees to help the corridor movement of livestock in these open rolling chalk hills without many hedges. The railway erailed to their decline.</li> <li>Look for the plaque on the flint wall around W Stoke farm, commemorating its previous role in</li> </ul>
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You can shorten the WW trail by 5-6 km by turning first left or Southwest towards Wonston Manor Farm and South Wonston and bypass Sutton Scotney completely. To do the whole WW trail carry on without turning left or right until get to short metalled section leading to junction with Wonston Lane minor road.

4.	SUTTON SCOTNEY LOOP Tracks, pavement, recreation ground, 5-6kms	<ul> <li>Turn first right heading north by the old farm buildings on a bridleway for 1 km.</li> <li>Bear left on footpath for 0.5 km to Wonston Lane. Several stiles/kissing gates along here. Halfway along here you could detour north to the Wonston Arms pub.</li> <li>At Wonston Lane turn left then after 0.4km first right up a footpath approximately 0.75 km known as Beggars Lane which turns into a gravel road servicing a few houses.</li> <li>At the main Wonston -Stoke Charity Road turn left along pavement. Cross the road and continue until you reach the old railway bridge. See the interpretation board.</li> <li>Turn right into Station Drive through the new houses on the site of Sutton Scotney Railway Station</li> <li>Pass through the narrow opening into the Surgery car park. Walk straight across to the path opposite towards the children's playground.</li> <li>Follow the path ground the Gratton passing the River Dever until you reach the bench and information board.</li> <li>Turn right through the car park and exit on to the road. Turn left along the pavement through Sutton Scotney village passing Dever Stores and the Coach and Horses pub.</li> <li>Take the footpath by the Victoria Hall and cross the Wonston Road to the footpath opposite. Use the gate/stile into some large fields for about 0.5 km.</li> <li>The track bends left around a tall hedgerow to meet the Wonston Road again, slightly further south than Beggars Lane. Cross straight over and go up road to meet the</li> </ul>	Worth award • S th • T s b S fi w • G it th a th th a th th a th th s o • A d S • V V v o • A d S • V V v v e th • T s s b S fi i v v v • G • S fi th • S s fi v v • G • S • S fi th • S s fi th • S s fi th • S s fi th • S s fi th • S s s fi th • S s s fi th • S s s fi th • S s s fi th • S s s fi th • S s s s fi th • S s s fi th • S s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s
		hedgerow to meet the Wonston Road again, slightly further south	

south to South Wonston.

Worth a short detour down to The Wonston Arms, award winning pub ( no food )

- So many roads in Hampshire are still called by their historic role: Beggar Drove
- The Dever drains into the River Test. Only 320 such chalk streams occur globally. Look for brown trout and voles in this Site of Special Scientific Interest. It has long been diverted for fishponds and watercress beds. Only few working watercress farms exist today.
- Gratton Recreation Ground is award winning for its design, upkeep, and conservation: look for the wildflower meadow by its carpark near the allotments. On the other side of the carpark is the DNSL embankment. Have a look at the large information board by the allotments about the WW and Sutton Scotney station. Perhaps sit on our replica GWR bench!
- After years of dereliction, Metis housing development was built in 2018 on the old Sutton Scotney station and goods yard.
- Wonston railway bridge was cleared by the Watercress Way charity in 2019. New fencing erected in 2023. See the interpretation sign at the bridge entrance.
- Victoria hall was used by Lord Rothschild. Oxford St was part of the coaching route from Southampton to Oxford. One inn remains: The Coach and Horses. The Dever Stores convenience shop is just beyond Taylors Yard
- Farming has almost obliterated the line of the DNSL here, but the line of telegraph posts across the fields indicates its original route. At Wonston Lane look left down the road to see the dismantled bridge of the old DNSL.

5.	SOUTH WONSTON to KINGS WORTHY Gravel and grassy tracks, km	<ul> <li>After 2 kms of grassy and gravel tracks at South Wonston Farm crossroads turn left/ east. Follow this track for almost 1 km to South Wonston road, past allotments on the left.</li> <li>Merge into the South Wonston road here (no pavement) for 0.5 km, until you turn right on Drove Links Rd, a pot holed gravel track about 0.75 km long.</li> <li>At the junction with the Oxdrove, turn left/ east, under the height restriction bar. Shortly after turn onto a path to the right leading down a steep ramp onto old DNSL track bed.</li> <li>Follow the old railway track bed for 2 kms, passing Worthy Down Halt and going under Worthy Down railway bridge until you pass over the two distinctive red brick bridges of the old railway at Springvale, Kings Worthy.</li> <li>Continue along the cutting until you reach Woodhams Farm Lane.</li> <li>Pass under the mainline railway bridge. After 200m take a left turn around the edge of the field. Please keep dogs on a lead here.</li> <li>Take the first exit from the field through the trees which cover the old railway line. After 100m turn right on the gravelled path and then take the right fork on to Kim Bishop Walk. Follow this until you reach Wesley Rd.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>This part of the trail is full of artefacts from WW2: look out for pill box defences for the Worthy Down Airfield .</li> <li>The two interpretation boards at the Oxdrove intersection and further south at Worthy Down Halt give a glimpse into the history of the area, including Spitfire testing and famous people, including Spitfire testing and famous people, including Laurence Olivier and Bomber Harris, and its previous use as Winchester's C.18<sup>th</sup>-19th racecourse.</li> <li>The railways like these only had a single track. This meant a sophisticated swapping of tokens was needed by train drivers and stationmasters to ensure only one train was in operation at once. This is still practiced on The Watercress Line heritage railway today.</li> <li>Worthy Down Army camp is on the right by Worthy Down Halt. It has been extensively extended over recent years.</li> <li>There are 5 benches spaced along this section with viewpoints over the surrounding countryside. At Worthy Down Halt there is a magpost which enables junior botanists to closely examine any finds while their parents rest on the bench.</li> <li>As you walk south two pill boxes masked by vegetation are on the left. They were part of the security ring built to withstand German air attack on Southampton Docks and Worthy Down Camp in World War II. The first is at the top of the embankment. The second has an information board describing the history of the camp.</li> <li>You pass above the <b>Twin bridges</b> at the green railings. A path to the right takes you down to view them. The bridge was doubled in size to accommodate World War II traffic in 1943. The spur shut in 1951.</li> </ul>
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9 KINGS WORTHY Pavements, roads, grassy tracks, recreation ground 1 km	<ul> <li>Go over a staggered crossing to Broadview with a kissing gate at its entrance. Walk up this wide grassy hill which was once a cutting! Stop at Wesley Rd kissing gate to see the mosaic board and views west.</li> <li>Follow the grassy park east, passing through two more kissing gates until you meet Lovedon Lane.</li> <li>Turn sharp right along the narrow pavement crossing the infilled railway bridge. Take care as very narrow.</li> <li>Turn next right along the footpath leading into Eversley Park Recreation ground.</li> <li>Walk around the park edge or diagonally across to meet tree lined Hinton Lane running southeast to the A33. The path is left by the children's playground.</li> <li>At the A33, follow the pavement right to The Cart and Horses pub.</li> <li>Cross over B3047 (with care, busy road) and go to the left of Kings Worthy PO (closed) with the Reading Room house on the left. This small lane takes you to the A33 dual carriageway.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The Mid-Hants and DNSL railways did not intersect, but they individually joined the main line London-Basingstoke-Southampton line here at Winchester Junction. In 2020 new access was negotiated by the Watercress way charity to access the old track bed rather than walking parallel to it.</li> <li>Broadview is on top of a very deep infilled cutting of the Mid-Hants line. It is well named because of views SW across to Winchester. As you stand with the mosaic behind you imagine workers hand cutting the hard chalk in the 1980s.Like all the disused railway sections, active management is needed to maintain a clear access and improve habitat diversity by layering of shrubs and glades.</li> <li>The recreation ground was named after Lord Eversley, an eminent Victorian who lived at Abbots Worthy House and was an early advocate of opening spaces for public access There are several boards around the Park giving more information An ancient packhorse route linking Winchester to Basingstoke. runs across Eversley Park, called 'The Whiteway' because of the chalk surface.</li> <li>To the left of Hinton Lane is a wild meadow maintained by the Parish Council. On the right the scrubby field with woods are the old grounds of one of the large Victorian houses in the area: Kings Worthy House, burned down in the 1960s. The lodge survived. The Reading Room and alms houses remain from local Victorian benefactor Richard Turner. To the left are 2018 award winning eco houses.</li> <li>The Cart and Horses pub was a farmhouse, becoming a pub in 1760 and coaching inn on the turnpike road from Winchester-Basingstoke.</li> </ul>

7. THE ITCHEN FLOODPLAIN	Grassy paths, fields, minor roads, 2.7 km	<ul> <li>Cross the busy A33. TAKE CARE. To the right go down short incline on footpath waymarked St Swithun's Way through trees to Mill Lane.</li> <li>Go through kissing gate and overgrown paddocks with a derelict farm on left to B3047, turn right for 100m (no pavement) before turning right into field down gentle slope to a stile and the M3 underpass by the River Itchen</li> <li>Follow the path sharp left to kissing gate then right along field edge. Another kissing gate leads into the water meadows. Beware; often grazing cattle, keep dogs on leads.</li> <li>Through a kissing gate to cross Easton Rd, still heading east.</li> <li>The footpath winds through fields with several kissing gates until Martyr Worthy Lane. Turn left up lane past Martyr Worthy Church (no pavement, quiet road)</li> <li>Cross B3047 by the War Memorial, and head north up gentle incline of Bridget's Lane for 0.25 km. (take care – no pavement)</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>You may glimpse Abbots Worthy House on the right(north) built for the Baring family in the early C.19<sup>th</sup> but in Tudor style.</li> <li>Worth a short diversion at Mill Lane to look at a small bridge over the River Itchen and read interpretation board on the history of the local area</li> <li>You will now be following the footpath marked St Swithun's Way.</li> <li>The lumps and bumps in the fields here are remnants of the floating meadow system seen at Itchen Stoke.</li> <li>Look left to see St Mary's Church, Easton. This is probably the earliest church and largest in the upper Itchen valley, dating back to the Normans in the C.12<sup>th</sup>.</li> <li>It is worth a slight detour to the bridge at Martyr Worthy over the River Itchen with magnificent views. A footpath here leads to Easton with 2 pubs: the Cricketers and Chestnut Horse</li> <li>Martyr Worthy church wall has a Pilgrims Way sign of a scallop shell engraved in its wall.</li> </ul>
.8 ITCHEN ABBAS WATERCRESS LINE TRACK 1.6KM		<ul> <li>When you reach the railway bridge, turn left down a gentle ramp onto the old track bed of the Watercress line, turn right.</li> <li>A relaxing, straight flat mile 1.6 km now along the old track, (note no roots!)</li> <li>Right turn at the end of the track bed by some evergreen bushes hiding the garden of one of several houses built on old Itchen Abbas railway station yard.</li> <li>Small ramp up to five barred gate and side access. A short gravel track brings you back to the B3047.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The Mid- Hants railway shut in 1973 after about 10 years of opposition to Beeching cuts. Look around for artefacts of the old railway line: concrete sleepers, gravel ballast, old signal telegraph poles.</li> <li>You are walking not just on the track bed but on the South Downs National Park's northerly boundary.</li> <li>Look out for the first Watercress Way interpretation board and 5 sleeper style oak benches, erected by volunteers in 2018 and 2023.</li> <li>Lovely views south (right) over Itchen valley and north across the downs, cleared by volunteers. Look for log piles left for invertebrates.</li> <li>Ash dieback has resulted in many trees being felled or cropped. However, there are now signs of regrowth.</li> </ul>

	ITCHEN ABBAS VILLAGE PAVEMENTS, LANES, TRACKS 2 KM	<ul> <li>pavement downhill.</li> <li>Carry on round the bend at the base of the hill and turn left up Northington Rd. You will see the village hall opposite, with the Plough pub just out of sight along the B3047.</li> <li>Cross the road at the first right up School Lane. A short diversion up Northington Rd to see the viaduct is recommended (no pavements).</li> <li>Pass the primary school then follow the pavement through a small housing estate called Little Hayes until you see a footpath to the left as the road bends to the right.</li> <li>After a sharp left and right turn past tall beech trees, the footpath then parallels the old railway track.</li> <li>At Rectory Lane (no pavement) turn right then first left into Baring Close cul-de-sac.</li> <li>Go through kissing gate at the end of the cul-de-sac. The path then turns right downhill via a small stile to a kissing gate onto B3047.</li> <li>Take second on left up small steps, DO NOT turn up first left bridleway (3 Castles Path) You are now on a narrow permissive path not marked on maps, which runs parallel to the B3047 with vineyards to the left. (Can be overgrown in summer)</li> <li>After 0.25 km you need to cross the B3047 with great care and go onto the River Itchen meadows along a path with a wire fence to left, and a small distributary stream of the Itchen to the right</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Abbas Station. The original white railway cottages still exist. House names include The Halt and Beeching.</li> <li>Worth a detour: continue left (north) to venture a few metres up Northington Rd to see a huge red brick viaduct dating from about 1895.</li> <li>Good views back to the viaduct and embankment as you walk up School Lane</li> <li>The railway track is to your left between Little Hayes and Rectory Lane, indicated by old concrete posts and wires fencing. Originally in a deep cutting, it was filled in post 1973 and levelled off with farm waste chalk.</li> <li>To the left after Baring Close, look for the beautiful tree lined embankment across a dry valley.</li> <li>This vineyard is one of many being established for sparkling wine along the trail</li> </ul>
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10.	RIVER MEADOWS AND RIVER CLIFF 3 kms	<ul> <li>The meadows nature reserve can be very muddy. Several footbridges cross the multiple channels of the ltchen - may be slippery. Dogs on lead here.</li> <li>At Love/Lovington Lane turn left for c 1 km (no pavements). This is a quiet road usually but beware speeding cyclists! When you see some converted barns of Yavington Farm on the right, turn slightly left to cross fields with several kissing gates behind black farm, a large house with tennis courts.</li> <li>After a final kissing gate at a footpath junction, turn left to go over a bridge parallel to a ford across the ltchen and then another with a kissing gate into the meadows.</li> <li>There is a permissive path which bears to the right or east, so keep the houses of the small village of ltchen Stoke to your left (north). One more kissing gate leads into ltchen Stoke minor road. Turn right, back south to the river.</li> <li>After a small bridge, this beautiful gravel path crosses back to the south side of the ltchen with a large Monet style bridge. The trail passes the Bush pub, where you turn sharp left along Lovington or East Lane again (no pavement) for a gentle climb of about 1 Km to the busy dual carriageway of the A31 Winchester-Alresford Rd. Take care here.</li> <li>Cross over to the opposing bridleway, about 0.25 km long which goes down to the minor Tichbourne Rd.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The River Itchen river cliff gives distant views across the valley. The Mid- Hants line shows as a linear belt of trees on the opposite side of the river. Ash die-back is a problem, many felled.</li> <li>The floodplain meadows are a SSSI. Look for reed warblers, damsel flies, trout, wild watercress (DO NOT EAT, danger of liver fluke)</li> <li>The Bush pub dates to the C17th.</li> <li>Ovington appears in the Doomsday book as "Ofinetune" meaning 'the place above' in Old English- and it is indeed a small village above the floodplain!</li> <li>The Itchen is rarely in one channel, having been channelised over the centuries to use for mills and to stop flooding. 'Floating' water meadows were regularly flooded by 'drowners' to raise winter temperatures and allow grass to flourish for sheep production. You will walk across several ditches here.</li> <li>Itchen Stoke church is worth a diversion, just up the hill to the left across the B3047. Built 1866, it is a Victorian 'jewel' inspired by Sainte Chapelle France, with an amazing rose window. The old Mid-Hants line is another 0.25 km further north of the church, in private farmland.</li> <li>Winchester to Alresford had 12 old manorial estates recorded in the Doomsday book, including the river Itchen bank ones of Easton, Avington, Yavington and Ovington. 'Ton' means a settlement.</li> </ul>
11.	WATERCRESS BEDS 0.75 km	<ul> <li>Cross the Tichbourne Rd to the opposite side and enter a road named unsuitable for motor vehicles. This is Spring Gardens, and the ford is too deep for cars. Pedestrians have a bridge to use.</li> <li>This pleasant 0.75 km road between watercress beds is a narrow but quiet road, (no pavement). At the end cross over and turn sharp left along New Farm Rd.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Local names often give clues to the landscape: chalk springs are common in the area. These are the last remaining traditionally run watercress beds in the area. Road transport has replaced the 1865 railway for London's market. Watercress production boomed once the railway was built after 1865.</li> <li>You are now following part of St Swithun's Way, a 55 km path from Winchester Cathedral to Farnham, named after C.9<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Winchester. Its distinctive logo has two bishop's croziers and a pilgrim's scallop shell</li> </ul>

12.		<ul> <li>Follow New Farm Rd along</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>This deep railway cutting is partly overgrown</li> </ul>
		pavement for 0.7 km and pass over	and disused. An old green railway hut remains.
		old Watercress Line Bridge (very	The Mid- Hants line was reopened after its
		narrow pavement).	closure in 1973 from east from Alresford to
		<ul> <li>Cross the B 3047 to start a 1 km</li> </ul>	Alton for heritage trains.
			-
	7	section along the pleasant lime tree	<ul> <li>You are walking parallel with the old railway line</li> </ul>
	km VTIO	lined old toll road called The	just to the left (South). Perins School extended
	STATION 2.5 km	Avenue, all the way to Alresford's	its sports ground partly over the track. Look for
		West St. Pass Perins School. Perins	the unusual octagonal toll house policing the
	THE ents	School expanded its sports grounds	1705 turnpike toll road to Morn Hill, Winchester.
		partly over the track.	You pass Arlebury Park, now flats, but once an
	BACK TO THE Pavements	• At the bottom of Pound Hill cross	imposing white Georgian house.
	Pa AC	the road and go right (south) up	• Pound Hill was used for stray animals in the
	ΞÓ.	Jacklyn's Lane, the BO46	C19th.
		<ul> <li>Take the first left just before the</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Spot the old railway carriages parked on top of</li> </ul>
		-	
		railway bridge called Station	Jacklyn's bridge, just east of the station.
		Approach	
		Return to the Watercress Line	
		carpark	