



The Watercress Way trail guide



Clockwise: Alresford- Itchen Abbas - Kings Worthy- South Wonston- Sutton Scotney- Micheldever Woods - Alresford

- **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. www.thewatercressway.org.uk

		Guidance and points of interest	
Sections		The trail follows parts of other routes: Millennium, Arle, Three Castles, Wayfarers Way, Pilgrims Way, Three Castles, Wayfarers and St Swithun's Way. There are several interpretation boards to help along the way. Distances below are approximate. We recommend using an OS map/app in conjunction with this guide.	
1.	FROM THE WATERCRESS LINE RAILWAY STATION ALRESFORD Pavements 2.5km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the Mid-Hants Watercress Line carpark and Edward Knight Visitor Centre at Alresford station, walk west parallel to the railway line down Station Approach. • Turn right or north at the railway bridge on Jacklyn's lane. • At the crossroads, cross over Winchester Road (B3047). • Go up Pound Hill and start a 1km section along the pleasant lime tree lined The Avenue, past Bridge Road and the Toll House until New Farm Road. • Turn left up New Farm and follow the pavement for 0.7km, passing over the old Mid-Hants railway bridge (very narrow pavement here). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mid- Hants line was reopened after its closure in 1973 from east from Alresford to Alton for heritage trains. Spot the old railway carriages parked on top of Jacklyn's bridge, just east of the station. • Pound Hill was used for stray animals in the C19th • You are walking parallel with the old railway line just to the left (South). Perins School extended its sports ground partly over the track. Look for the unusual octagonal toll house policing the 1705 turnpike toll road to Morn Hill, Winchester. You pass Arlebury Park, now flats, but once an imposing white Georgian house. • This deep railway cutting is partly overgrown and disused. An old green railway hut remains.
2.	WATERCRESS BEDS Minor road and bridleway 0.75 KM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn sharp right at Spring Gardens, along a narrow road for 0.75km (no pavement) • Pass by all the watercress beds • Cross the footbridge parallel to the ford across River Itchen, too deep for cars. The Itchen's source is just upstream at Cheriton, then it meanders 45km/28 miles to Southampton 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local names often give clues to the landscape: chalk springs are common in the area. • You are now following part of St Swithun's Way, a 55 km path from Winchester Cathedral to Farnham, named after C.9th Bishop of Winchester. Its distinctive logo has two bishop's croziers and a pilgrim's scallop shell • These are the last remaining traditionally run watercress beds in the area. Road transport has replaced the 1865 railway for London's market.

3.

RIVER MEADOS AND RIVER CLIFF
Grassy fields and gravel tracks 3KMS

- Cross Tichbourne Road, following a 0.25km bridleway uphill to reach the A31 Winchester-Alresford Road.
- Cross over this busy road, bearing left to East Lane/ Lovington Lane heading east. (no pavements)
- Descend downhill and follow road for 1.1km to the Bush pub.
- Turn sharp right in front of the Bush Pub and cross to the north side of the river Itchen over a Monet-style bridge.
- Follow a gravel path next to river heading west, downstream, until path merges with the minor road at Itchen Stoke
- Turn left through the kissing gate, on to a permissive path that bears across the meadows, keeping the houses of Itchen Stoke to the right.
- Bear slightly left/south to cross the R Itchen via one kissing gate and a series of bridges.
- Before going slightly uphill back to Lovington Lane, turn right into field through a kissing gate.
- Follow the path slightly uphill through several fields and kissing gates down to Lovington Lane. Keep the large house Black Farm on the right.
- After last kissing gate turn right onto Lovington Lane and head down past the converted barn houses of Yavington Farm on the left for 1 km.
- **KEEP DOGS UNDER CONTROL HERE, LIVESTOCK GRAZING**
- The River Itchen 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.
- The floodplain meadows are a SSSI. Look for reed warblers, damsel flies, trout, wild watercress (DO NOT EAT, danger of liver fluke)
- The Bush pub dates to the C17th
- Ovington appears in the Domesday book as "Ofinetune" meaning 'the place above' in Old English- and it is indeed a small village above the floodplain!
- 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.
- Winchester to Alresford had 12 old manorial estates recorded in the Domesday book, including the river Itchen bank ones of Easton, Avington, Yavington and Ovington. 'Ton' means a settlement.
- 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

4.	<p style="text-align: center;">ITCHEN ABBAS VILLAGE PAVEMENTS, MUDDY LANES, GRAVEL TRACKS 2 KM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay on Lovington Lane until just after small chalk pit quarry on the left. Enter the Meadows Nature Reserve through a gap next to a 5 Bar gate. It can be muddy, and several footbridges cross the multiple channels of the Itchen so it may be slippery too. Dogs MUST be on lead here. Continue along the path with the wire fence to the right and cross the B3047 with great care. Go through small gap in tall hedge and follow a narrow permissive path along the vineyard to the right (not shown on maps). This parallels the B3047. DO NOT turn up the first right bridleway (Three Castles Path but not waymarked) and take the second right via a small kissing gate going uphill. The path veers to the left past a sewage works. Go through a kissing gate and enter Baring Close (cul-de-sac) Turn right at Rectory Lane (no pavement), then take the first left after Winton Rd Cottages on to a narrow footpath which parallels the old railway track. At the end of the track turn right into a small housing estate called Little Hayes Lane. Follow the pavement down the hill past the Primary School. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignore signs for St Swithun's Way going steeply uphill from Lovington Lane across a field. The River Itchen is one of only about 300 chalk rivers in the world, hence its high conservation value. You will see great tussock grass clumps, butterbur plants which look almost prehistoric, and depending on the season, a rich assemblage of butterfly and bird life including kingfishers. You may spot trout in the river, but the white-tailed crayfish is very shy and nocturnal. Cuckoos are common in Spring as they target the various warbler nests hidden in the tall sedges here. Vineyards are making a great come back in the area, mainly for sparkling wine. Vines were cultivated in this part of Hampshire in Roman times. The Victorians were famed for their adaption of landscapes for railways: You can see the old embankment covered in beech and ash trees as you go up the hill to Baring Close. From Rectory Lane look left to see the white house called The Old Rectory but newer landscaping including a massive C.21st ornamental urn. To the right, maps show a deep cutting, but this was filled in post railway closure in 1973 for chalk farm waste.
5.	<p style="text-align: center;">ITCHEN ABBAS WATERCRESS LINE Pavements, minor roads and gravel tracks 1.6KM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At Northington Road cross over to pavement and turn left (south) At the junction with the B3047 turn right. Cross over Old Station Road Turn first right up a small gravel lane at the footpath sign, continue to a 5 bar gate with pedestrian side access. Here you will see a leaflet holder with WW leaflets. Take a left and continue for a relaxing sheltered 1 Mile (1.6km) walk along the old track. You pass an information board near Couch Green and a children's playground on the left. There are 5 benches along this stretch. When you reach Bridgets Lane railway bridge turn left up a gentle ramp. Turn right down a narrow road (no pavement) for 0.25km, heading south to cross the B3047 to the War Memorial down the lane past Martyr Worthy Church –quiet road no pavement. Ignore turnings to left and right until bottom of the hill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worth a detour: turn right (north) to venture a few metres up Northington Road (no pavement) to see the huge red brick viaduct dating from about 1895. The Mid- Hants railway shut in 1973 after about 10 years of opposition to Beeching cuts. Station Hill Rd houses to the right are built on the site of Itchen Abbas Station. No public access other than the road. The original white railway cottages still exist. House names include The Halt and Beeching. Look around for artefacts of the old railway line: concrete sleepers, gravel ballast, old signal telegraph poles. You are walking not just on the track bed but on the South Downs National Park's northerly boundary. Look out for the first Watercress Way interpretation board and 3 sleeper style oak benches, erected by volunteers in 2018. Lovely views south (right) over Itchen valley and north across the downs, cleared by volunteers. Look for log piles left for invertebrates

6.

THE ITCHEN FLOODPLAIN
Grassy paths, fields, minor roads, 2.7 km

- At the bottom of the hill, just before the river, turn right up slight incline, and follow the footpath through several metal kissing gates winding through fields parallel to the River Itchen.
 - Cross Easton Lane and go through a metal kissing gate (a diversion to the left takes you Easton Village with 2 pubs).
 - Continue along the footpath at the field edge, with the fence to the right. Pass through a metal kissing gate, continue along the footpath this time keeping the fence to the left).
 - A sharp left underneath the bank of the M3 through another metal gate now heading south towards the River Itchen
 - Then right through the M3 underpass.
 - There may be a stile or kissing gate into last field before B3047, keeping to the footpath on the left. Continue up a gentle slope to reach the main road.
 - Turn left and walk a few metres (no pavement) before turning left through overgrown paddocks with derelict farm buildings on the right. Pass through kissing gate and cross Mill Lane.
 - Follow the meandering path through trees to reach the A33. DANGEROUS CROSSING! Cross over at a narrow pedestrian point. Turn right then left up the footpath past the Post Office (closed), towards the Cart & Horses Pub.
- You will now be following the footpath marked St Swithun's Way. Martyr Worthy church wall has a Pilgrims Way sign of a scallop shell engraved in its wall.
 - It is worth a slight detour to the bridge over River Itchen: magnificent views.
 - Beware. The water meadows here often have grazing cattle.
 - The lumps and bumps in the fields here are remnants of the floating meadow system seen at Itchen Stoke.
 - 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.12th.
 - You may glimpse Abbots Worthy House on the right(north) built for the Baring family in the early C.19th but in Tudor style.
 - It is worth a short diversion at Mill Lane to look over the River Itchen and look at the Information Board on the left on the history of the local area
 - The Cart and Horses pub was a farmhouse, becoming a pub in 1760 and coaching inn on the turnpike road from Winchester-Basingstoke.
 - The Reading Room and alms houses remain from local Victorian benefactor Richard Turner. The ruins of his grand house lies behind the Cart and Horses pub.

7.

KINGS WORTHY
pavements, recreation ground, gravel and grass tracks 1KM

- From the Cart and Horses pub, follow the footpath to the right, parallel with the A33. Turn left up tree lined Hinton House Drive, with 2018 award winning eco houses on the right.
- The footpath goes around the edge of Eversley Park but you can cut across diagonally, keeping the football pitches to the right and children's playground to the left.
- At the far end of the park, just beyond the Worthies Social Club buildings is a footpath to Lovedon Lane, nearest to the buildings. Ignore the footpath to Gillingham Close.
- At Lovedon lane turn sharp left, crossing over the old bridge of the Mid-Hants Line. (NARROW PAVEMENT)
- Turn first left at the kissing gate and enter Broadview, a grassy linear park.
- Cross Wesley Rd via two kissing gates but visit the mosaic interpretation board just to the right.
- Walk down Broadview grassy hill to meet Wesley Rd again cross over and bear right then first left: a staggered crossing.
- Turn left up a small ascent signed Kim Bishop walk (with a gravel surface)
- You are now on the old track bed of the Mid-Hants Line again: the fairly straight narrow path continues across the road bridge of Springvale Rd through scrubby woods.
- At the end of Kim Bishop Walk bear right and follow the path into Top Field. At the fork follow the left path.
- After 250m take the narrow path to the left which leads to a field.
- Turn right around the field keeping to the edge. Dogs should be kept on a lead.
- Turn right up Woodhams Farm Lane passing under the railway bridge. At the end pass under the railway bridge to join the railway cutting. The old DN&SR track bed accessible for walking, cycling and horse riding stretches 1.5 miles, 2.4 km, through deep cuttings and a series of embankments to South Wonston.
- Stop a while at Twin Bridges, where the old DNSL split after its upgrading for WW2 traffic.
- Stop a while at Worthy Down Halt
- At the Oxdrove turn left/ east.
- Go under a height restriction barrier and take the first right along Drove Links Rd, a gravel track about 600m long leading to South Wonston Road. You will pass many pony paddocks.
- To the left 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 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.
- An ancient packhorse route linking Winchester to Basingstoke. runs across Eversley Park, called 'The Whiteway' because of the chalk surface.
- There are several boards around the Park giving more information.
- 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.
- The Mid-Hants and DNSL railways did not intersect, but they individually joined the main line London-Basingstoke-Southampton line here at Winchester Junction.
- 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.
- You pass above the **Twin bridges** at the green railings. A path to the left 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.
- As you walk north two pill boxes masked by vegetation are on the right. 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 has an information board describing the history of the camp. The second is at the top of the embankment.
- The next railway bridge you pass under is named Racehorse Bridge after the old Winchester racecourse,
- The Halt was constructed for World War I traffic. Remodelled in 1943. The remaining red brick building on the platform is probably an ammunition store, not a waiting room! You can also access the route here down an inclined path from parking on Worthy Down Lane, SO21 2RR.
- South Wonston has a convenience shop on its main road.

8.

SUTTON SCOTNEY LOOP
Tracks, pavement, recreation ground, 5 kms

- Turn left / west (no pavement) for 0.5 km until you see a bridleway directly ahead, as the road bears left into the village.
- Follow the bridleway for 700m past allotments on the right, until a crossroads of 4 bridleways.
- Take the first right, heading north to Sutton Scotney, passing through large arable fields.
- Follow the signed path on the right before the farm buildings. (No Access sign ahead)
- After about 1.75km you cross the old DNSL track, a distinctive tree lined linear feature still but now used for farm equipment storage (NO ACCESS)
- The route takes a right turn before Wonston Manor Farm skirting round the farm buildings. At the top of the rise is a junction of bridleways. THIS IS A CRITICAL JUNCTION with two options: To follow the whole trail into Sutton Scotney and Wonston in a clockwise direction: turn left, North West, carrying straight on to meet a farm road stretching 0.5km to Wonston Lane.
- When you reach the road carry on along it for a few hundred metres then at the road junction turn right then follow the path immediately on the left following The Watercress Way sign onto a footpath heading NW across fields for 1 km, to enter Sutton Scotney via Victoria Hall car park.
- Cross over Stoke Charity Rd keeping Victoria Hall to the right.
- Pass by The Coach and Horses and Dever Stores and follow the pavement to the end of Oxford Road, bearing right at the roundabout. Just opposite the Texaco garage take the footpath right under the barrier into The Gratton Recreation Ground and allotments.
- At the end of the car park bear left by the information board and follow the path towards the River Dever.
- Turn right at the southern end of the park by the adventure playground, heading west back to a large metal gate. Cross the doctor's surgery car park and take the footpath (with a lamp post almost blocking it) between houses into Station Drive, the site of the old station. Follow the road through the houses.
- Turn left at Wonston Road to pass by the old DN&SR Wonston Bridge.
- Carry on East along the Wonston Road, taking the third turning on the right called Beggars Drove. This gravel track becomes a footpath (sometimes overgrown). At Wonston Lane turn left (north) for just under 0.3miles/0.5km, and take the footpath on the right, heading East. A short detour to The Wonston Arms is possible here.

- **To shorten the trail by 5-6 km: turn right, Southeast towards West Stoke Farm, avoiding Sutton Scotney / Wonston completely.**
- At Wonston Lane look left down the road to see the dismantled bridge of the old DNSL. Farming has almost obliterated the line of the DNSL here, but the line of telegraph posts across the fields indicates its original route.
- 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
- 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.
- 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.
- 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: See the interpretation sign at the bridge entrance.
- So many roads in Hampshire are still called by their historic role: Beggars Drove.
- Wonston Arms is an award-winning pub (limited opening and food).

- Follow the path for another 0.25miles/0.4km, then take the bridleway to the left just before the Wonston to Stoke Charity Rd. You are now heading south towards South Wonston.
- After 0.6miles (1km) you pass an old barn on your left and reach the staggered junction before Wonston Manor Farm you passed originally when entering Sutton Scotney from the southwest, but now bear left (southeast) and continue straight on to West Stoke Farm. Once past the farmhouse continue up a chalky farm track for 850m towards Alresford Drove.
- At Alresford Drove turn left (east), opposite Bayley's clump woodland (no pavement). Cross over the Stoke Charity Rd onto a wide gravel byway.
- Ignore all farm track turnings and this 3 km track takes you to the A33 dual carriageway junction opposite a religious meeting house known locally as Lunways.
- **TAKE CARE DANGEROUS CROSSING**
- Cross straight over and carry on down the Micheldever woods/Northington Down/Totford Rd for 1.7 km, under the M3 bridge past the entrance on the left to Micheldever Woods car park. NO PAVEMENTS TAKE CARE
- As the woodland ends, look for the bridleway signed on the right of the road heading SE to Alresford.
- Stay on this gradually descending main track for 2.5 km, ignoring tracks off to the right and left until you get to Northington Rd height restriction barrier. Cross straight over through the next height restriction barrier.
- Continue up a gentle incline for 0.5km until a staggered junction. Ignore the Three Castles path and take the next bridleway, ie straight on still heading SE. This is now part of the Wayfarers Walk.
- After 500m pass under two height restriction bars crossing the Itchen Stoke minor road, carrying on gently downhill towards Alresford for 1 km.
- At the junction of bridleways, turn right under a height restriction barrier around the edge of a hill called Fob Down.
- This track meets Drove Lane after 1 km, with another height restriction barrier next to a main gate into vineyards.
- Look for the plaque on the flint wall around West Stoke farm, commemorating its previous role in the c19th as a pub for passing drovers, herding livestock to Alresford markets and beyond.
- You are back on the Alresford Drove, a West-East track traceable on maps back to Stockbridge and east to Totford and the Woolpack pub and beyond. It is either still a gravel track or has been metalled into a road. On OS maps it is named. 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 era led to their decline.
- Lunways was a coaching inn used for Winchester Racecourse at South Wonston in 18th and 19thC.
- You may have noticed how straight many of the roads are in this area. Many date back to Roman times, such as the A33.
- Itchen Woods and Michedever Woods are working forests with mix of conifers and deciduous trees and bluebell carpets.
- At Itchen Down look out for a trig point 130m above sea level on the left and a windpump obscured by tall conifers and vines. Itchen Down: was the location of 19thC cricket.
- Three Castles Path is a 60-mile route from Windsor to Winchester castle via Odiham, commemorating King John's journey of the 13th C. The Wayfarers Walk is a 70 mile path between Inkpen Beacon in N Hampshire to Emsworth at the coast.
- Look east across the Candover valley to Abbotstone, one of 2000 deserted villages nationally. Indentations in the fields middle distance show the outlines of the houses and church and mill here recorded in 1086 Domesday Book. It flourished until the 14th C, possibly falling victim to the Black Death.
- 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.

10.

GEORGIAN ALRESFORD
Gravel path and pavement 2.3 km

- Cross Drove Lane and take the footpath parallel to Drove House on the right. The path is between its fence and a narrow field.
- Drop down to the River Arle through a kissing gate and pass by the Eel House and a bench.
- Continue past Arlebury Recreation Ground and Car park to the right.

- Continue along the river edge (do not turn up Dean Road).
- Pass Amy's wild fowl feeding station and continue walking along the narrow path of the Millennium and Arle Valley trail by the River Arle passing the historic Fulling Mill.
- Bear to the right up a gentle incline called Ladywell, passing a little spring fed stream to emerge at Mill Lane, the bottom of Broad Street

- Walk up the gentle hill, Broad Street, past Alresford's shops restaurants and houses
- Emerge at the top of Broad St and continue straight over junction of East and West St to a narrow lane leading to St Johns Church.
- Follow the footpath through the churchyard leading to a small path on the right emerging onto Station Road.
- Turn left opposite the Public Toilets to return to the Watercress Line car park.

- Extensive new vineyards planted recently around Fob Down, for sparkling wine. Fob Down has a Romano-British settlement- perhaps wine making occurred here 200 years ago!
- Look for futuristic modern Drove House on the right.
- Have a look at the information boards on the C.19th Eel house - fascinating links to the Sargasso Sea.
- 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.
- This area was once famed for tanneries and fulling mills. Look for 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' .
- Chalk springs are the clue to watercress production. look for pike, trout, swans, ducks and voles
- New Alresford is hardly new, being a planned settlement dating back to Bishop de Lucy in the C.13th.
- Livestock, especially sheep, fairs were held in Broad St for centuries, the last being 1972.
- 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.
- 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.
- Look for Napoleonic graves in St Johns churchyard.
- Find the plaque on the public toilets by Drs surgery about Portland spy ring.
- The Visitors Centre for the Watercress Line is worth a visit: named after one of its original directors Edward Knight, Jane Austen's nephew.