

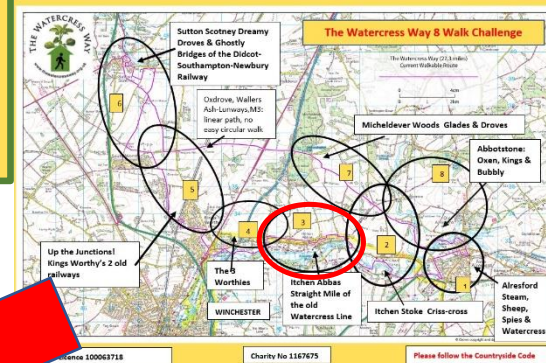


Walks from the Watercress Way No 3/8: Itchen Abbas Straight Mile

Shady railway tracks, a world famous river, pilgrims & navvies

A circular, flexible walk from Itchen Abbas to Martyr Worthy (Easton extension) 4- 6 miles

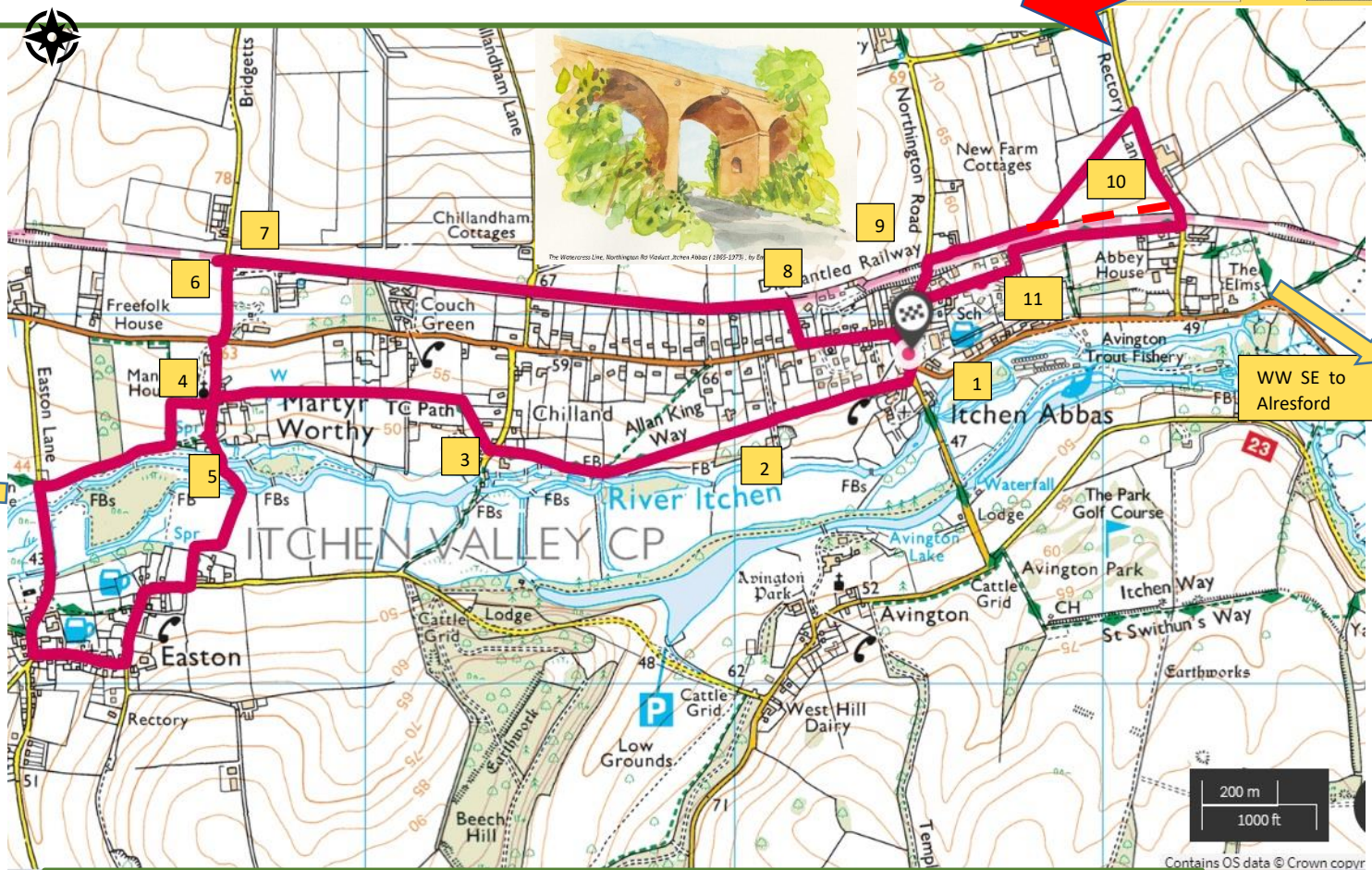
This walk follows about 3 miles of the Watercress Way (WW). It crosses rolling chalk downs and farmland and follows the River Itchen banks and parts of the disused Watercress Line . It is suitable for children, and dogs under control. It is on grassy & gravel tracks & a few minor roads (no pavements). Several kissing gates. Some paths can become overgrown and muddy in winter. Wear appropriate clothing. **Please follow our Countryside Code: Respect, Protect, Enjoy!**



The Watercress Way (WW) is a waymarked 27-mile circular trail, near Winchester, Hampshire. It links parts of two disused Victorian railway lines, by historic rights of way including livestock droves.



WW West to Kings Worthy



Services

Parking:

At Itchen Abbas Village Hall SO21 1BQ, (1) or on roads near or at The Plough
What3words:
solicitor.causes century

Alternatives:
King George V Recreation Ground, Couch Green , **Martyr Worthy** SO21 1EA or **Easton** near the Chestnut Horse pub, SO21 1EG **turntable. armrests. roughness.**

Buses from Winchester No 67 to Alresford

Access

Start in Itchen Abbas, at or near the pub, The Plough . NB other gateways are Easton and Martyr Worthy . Wheelchair access is difficult on this walk. The straight mile (7-8) is flat but accessed currently via steep ramps.

Please consider a donation to use this route map. Map courtesy of the O.S. 100058136. Charity No 1167675

	Directions	Points of interest
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start at the Village Hall/Plough pub/road parking • Cross B3047 to St Johns Church <i>Take care with busy road crossing</i> • Follow the footpath signed the Itchen Way west towards Winchester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Plough is a 19th Century Coaching Inn linked to Charles Kingsley (The Water Babies). • St Johns is a Grade II listed building. Its Victorian façade masks the original Saxon/ Norman church. War graves & the last man executed for horse theft in England, John Hughes. • Itchen Abbas, the largest village in the upper Itchen valley, dates from Saxon times. Itchen is pre Celtic from Icene Abbas is from Middle English : 'abbesse', of the nuns (Abbey in Winchester: Nunnaminster).
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross a private drive, with an avenue of old lime trees(kissing gate). <i>Short detour to see Grey's fishing lodge</i> • Follow the footpath across the field west, keeping near the righthand boundary, past a tree swing. • Through a metal kissing gate then downhill to another kissing gate by a fenced off river bank. <i>You can shorten walk here,</i> otherwise carry on west along a gravel track with a tall brick wall on the left. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fabulous views from river bluff down to the River Itchen, and the meadows of. Avington Park, a privately owned Grade 1 registered 17th C Historic Building /Ancient monument, associated with Charles II and Nell Gwynne. The parkland shows centuries of landscaping • Detour to a small, fenced paddock near the river to see Sir Edward Grey's memorial garden & remains of his fishing hut. He was Foreign Secretary in WW1. • The fields often have docile British White cattle, a heritage breed used as part of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Trust's conservation management of the River Itchen, which is designated a SSSI. As of 2021 there is no access to the river at all along this stretch, to help erosion and disturbance of its rare ecology & fishing • <i>To shorten the route:</i> turn sharp left through a kissing gate back to the B3047 , back to Station Hill then down to The Plough /Village Hall. <i>Beware, no pavements</i>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross Chilland Lane, with a slight dogleg to the left, then take the first footpath right, still heading west. • <i>A short detour</i> to Chilland Mill & River Itchen possible. • <i>Can shorten the walk here.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilland was a major ford across the Itchen .<i>Detour</i> to the Itchen past the Mill for an information board on local wildlife & SSSI status (one of only 210 or so chalk streams globally with trout, otters, white clawed crayfish, lamprey, eels, kingfishers, damselflies, orchids). • Mills are a feature along the Itchen for fulling (cloth) & grain. The 28 mile (45km) Itchen has been channelised for centuries for water power, meadow flooding & for flood defence since the Romans • <i>To shorten the walk:</i> go up Chilland lane, turn right and immediately left up Chillandham Lane. Once under the railway bridge some steep steps lead to the track bed. Turn left, east
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At St Swithun's ,Martyr Worthy church turn right (north) up the lane to the B3047. Signs for the WW feature now. Carrying on west leads to Kings Worthy, where the WW joins the Didcot-Newbury-Southampton disused track north to Sutton Scotney. The Itchen Way carries on into Winchester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martyr Worthy is one of a cluster of villages (Kings, Abbots, Headbourne. Worthy). First recorded in 1243, Worthy means enclosure. Martyr may originate from Old French 'matre' . • The earliest mention of a church at Martyr Worthy is 1251, linked to convent of St. Swithun. St Swithun's Church is Grade II listed, with a Norman nave and doors. It is on the Pilgrims Way 153 long distance footpath. Look for the scallop shell carved in the boundary walls, sign of St James, patron saint of pilgrims.
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Optional detour</i> south to the River Itchen over a Monet style bridge at Martyr Worthy. Can access Easton here too. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>You can access Easton</i> here by following the footpath across water meadows and bearing right into the village with its pubs The Cricketers and The Chestnut Horse, and village shop. <i>Return to the trail by retracing your route or carry on through the village (no pavements),</i> keep bearing right. Pass The Cricketers, then take Easton Lane out of the village, north towards the B3047. Just after a series of bridges over The Itchen, turn right just before Newbridge Cottage, (signed WW). Follow the signs east back to St Swithun's church .

6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow the WW signs heading right, north up Church Lane past St Swithun's church in Martyr Worthy. Pass the war memorial & cross the B3047 up Bridget's Lane (<i>no pavements</i>). Just before the old railway bridge over the Watercress Line, turn left down a ramp. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The war memorial is English Heritage Listed. As you walk up Bridget's Lane, look left, west to see glimpses of the old Watercress Line which joined the mainline London-Southampton at Winchester Junction in Kings Worthy. This is now rewilded or used as farmland. There are more opened up sections of this track bed in Kings Worthy. The WW trail then joins the disused Didcot-Newbury-Southampton Railway track bed for a few miles towards Sutton Scotney. Where the charity has not gained access to the old track beds so far, alternative rights of way are used, so a continuous 27 miles is available for walkers.
7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locals call this 'The straight mile', and the Watercress Way trail follows the track bed east for a mile through cuttings and over embankments. The track is also maintained by the South Downs National Park volunteers, since the Mid-Hants Watercress line route was partly used as the Northern boundary of the South Downs National Park. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1865 the 17 mile Mid -Hants Railway from Alton to Kings Worthy opened, nicknamed The Watercress Line because of its role in transporting watercress to London. In 1973 the line closed, victim to Beeching cuts. In 2016 a mile stretch was opened to public access. Along the track, owned by Hampshire County Council you will find leaflet boxes, an interpretation board & benches installed by the WW charity, aided by funding from parish councils, HCC, the Rotary club & Boomtown festival. Look out for artefacts & wildlife: old telegraph poles, cinder, concrete and a few wooden sleepers. You will see ash tree die back, King Alfred's Cakes fungi (black nodular fungi, used for tinder in medieval times), wild garlic, buzzards, red kites, & signs of badgers. Natural plant succession is managed by volunteers, replanting of native species & log piles left for invertebrates.
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exit old railway line at a 5 bar gate next to the original Itchen Abbas Station, private housing. Turn left at end of track, along the B3047. Pass by Old Station Road down the hill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Itchen Abbas station had a loop for passing trains and goods yard. The station was de staffed in the 1960s, the line closed in 1973, and station demolished in the 1980s for 5 houses, including names like Station House, Beeching and Old Railway Cottages. These are all private houses and gardens, no access. Wildflower verges on the left on Station Hill bloom in summer.
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the junction with Northington Rd, optional return to Itchen Abbas Village Hall / Plough. For the full route turn left, north, to Northington viaduct. Ignore any signs for the WW up School Lane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northington Road has a striking red brick 1865 viaduct, built to cross one of the many dry tributary valleys of the River Itchen. Engineers designed the railways, but it was the gangs of navvies, from 7 years old, who built the amazing cuttings, embankments, bridges, tunnels and sidings that changed the landscape in the early 19th C. The name 'navvy' is from the 'navigators' who built the first 'navigation canals in Europe. No JCBs here, they were equipped with just gunpowder, picks, shovels, horses and carts and wheelbarrows.
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After the viaduct, take the footpath first right, parallel to the embankment. This links to Rectory Lane across 2 fields. Turn right, across the infilled railway bridge. Take the first right footpath, before Winton Cottages. Follow this footpath west through a belt of trees to Little Hayes Lane housing estate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A permissive way from 2021 shortens the route across these fields east to Rectory Lane, paralleling the old track bed to the right (south). The old railway line is to the right, in a long narrow overgrown field. Once a deep cutting, it has been infilled by farm waste and redevelopment of central Winchester's shopping centre in the late 1980s/1990s (the Brooks Centre) This path has the old fencing of the early 20th C on the left.
11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go down School Lane hill. At Northington Rd, cross over, turn left to return to Point 1 Itchen Abbas Village Hall/Plough pub. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look right through gaps between the houses to glimpse the viaduct and its high embankments. Imagine the steam smoke and whistles which would have been heard by the children in the primary school here until 1973, although diesel trains replaced steam in the 1950s.