

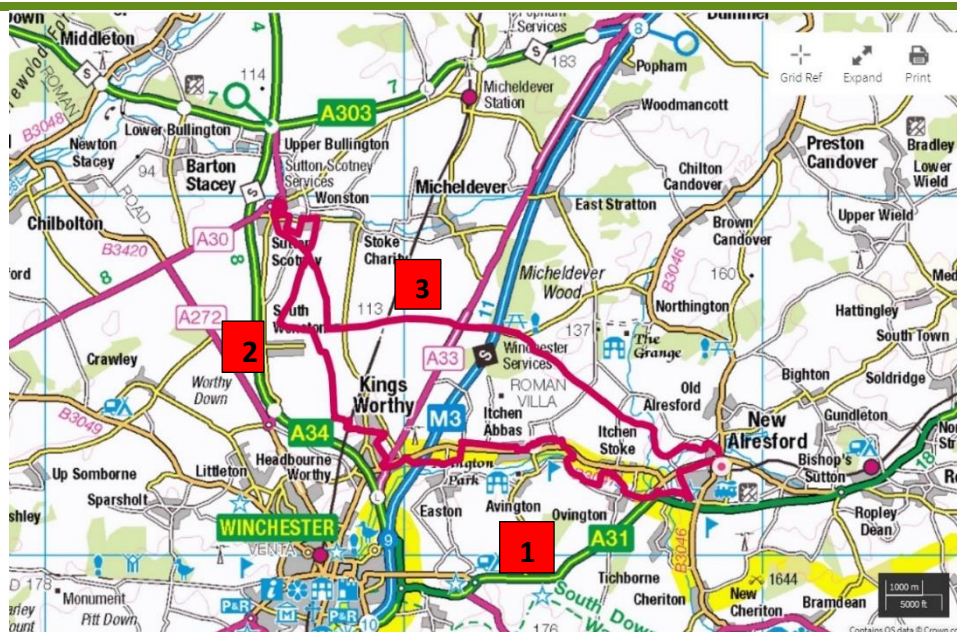
The Watercress Way Trail Guide



- This guide is for walking the trail in a **clockwise direction** from Alresford. Points of interest, watch points, facilities, shorter walks, and detours are shown.
- The 44 kms, 27 miles circular trail is waymarked.
- To help navigate, OS map OL 32, or the OS app is recommended.
- The website has alternative suggestions for cyclists and horse riders.
- Shorter loops are possible at most stages. 8 are listed on the website.

There are 3 main sections, split into 10 stages:

- 1.** Alresford -Kings Worthy, along the River Itchen and old Watercress Line railway
- 2.** Kings Worthy-Sutton Scotney, along the Didcot Newbury Southampton Railway (DN&SR)
- 3.** Sutton Scotney-Alresford via old livestock droves and Micheldever Wood



The trail is based on disused sections of two railways: the Watercress Line (Mid-Hants Railway) and the Didcot Newbury and Southampton Railway (DN&SR) and other historic rights of way: footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways & BOATs.



Follow advice and local signs

In some cases, additional higher rights of access or permissive access could exist.

Footpath



Bridleway



Restricted Byway



Byway open to all traffic



Permissive Path
Follow advice on local signs as landowners voluntarily provide access to these paths and choose who can use them. Some open access areas are also made available in the same way.



National Trail
National Trails are created for walking, with horse-riding and cycling possible on some trails or trail sections.

www.nationaltrail.co.uk



Open Access
You can walk and explore away from paths.

www.openaccess.naturalengland.org.uk

For further information visit www.gov.uk/countryside-code

The Watercress Way follows parts of other long distance trails including The Three Castles Path, The Wayfarers way, The Pilgrims Way, St Swithins Way, Itchen Way, and the town paths of the Millennium and Arle trails in Alresford.

There are minimal gradients along the trail in Sections 1 and 2. The droves across the downs are undulating in Section 3.

Facilities and car parks (most with restriction height barriers) are suggested for each stage. Bus services are limited.

It is advisable to take your own food and drink, especially on Section 3. Please wear suitable outdoor walking clothing, and boots or wellingtons in the winter.

Alternative routes are suggested for some of the water meadows which flood. Remember The Countryside Code on the last page).

Maps used are courtesy of the O.S. Licence No 100063718

Section 1, Stage 1: The Lost 7 miles. West from The Watercress Line, Alresford





Distance: 1.75 miles, 2.8kms along mainly paved roads out of town to the A31.

Facilities : Car parks, shops, refreshments in town centre. Found on or near the trail: West Country Buffet, Station Mill, Arlebury Café, & The Cricketers pub. Public Conveniences near station.




Car park: Station SO24 9JG


Transport: Heritage Watercress Line trains from Alton. Stagecoach Bus No 64 & 67.

1. Start at the Watercress Line Station car park in New Alresford. Look around the Station and its carpark, once the goods yard. For a good vantage point find the small garden, if open, overlooking the station building, up a short ramp.

-  **Spot the name of the railway in its branded green colour.** *It all began with 'Railway Mania' speculation in the early 19th C. Edward Knight (Jane Austen's nephew) and a group of Victorian entrepreneurs wanted to cash in on the boom in goods and passenger trade between London-Southampton. The project they funded was the Alton, Alresford & Winchester Railway, which opened in 1865 after a rebrand to The Mid Hants Railway. The trains offered fast transport to London, and the name 'The Watercress Line' developed from the local boom in watercress production.*
-  **Look down the cutting towards Alton and its mainline link to London.** *The 17 miles, 27kms Watercress Line linked London to Southampton by connections with the main railway lines at Alton and Winchester Junction, Kings Worthy. It was designed for two tracks, as shown by the width of its bridges, however, finances only allowed a single track.*
-  **Look for the red Signal Box on stilts.** *If a train departs on your visit you may spot the simple but effective swapping of a token between train drivers and station staff to ensure only one train is ever on the line! These 'keys' are kept in the Signal box.*
-  **Find the siding railway tracks in front of the station building.** *It could so easily have been called the **Hops or Turnip Line!** Many other goods were transported on The Watercress Line apart from watercress. This siding is where watercress was loaded from horse drawn carts on to waiting steam trains. The cress was harvested by hand from surrounding 'beds', washed, trimmed, and packed into large hampers called 'flats' and 'half flats'. It was sold in Victorian London in paper cones as nutritious '**poor man's bread**'.*

2. With your back to the station, turn to the left, west, parallel to the railway line, to the Edward Knight Visitor Centre and shop.


-  **Artefacts of the past:** *This was once the Goods Shed, now aptly named the Edward Knight Visitor Centre. Can you spot the small iron post outside the main door? It's a boundary marker for the more powerful railway company than the Mid-Hants Railway, which operated the trains and staff on the line: the London and South Western Railway (L&SWR).*
-  **Look at the footbridge over the platforms: a replica? It was once at Uckfield Station.**
-  **Beeching's axe!** *This single track route was not electrified, and never fully competed with the London-Basingstoke-Southampton railway. It was a victim of a 1963 Government report by Beeching on unviable railways to close or 'axe'. After a decade of local opposition, The Watercress Line closed in 1973, and the tracks were literally torn up. All that remains is the imposing double fronted redbrick station building and the platforms. The wooden bridge, signal box, track, telegraph poles, livestock pens, railings etc around you are replicas or brought here from other dismantled railways.*

 **The heritage Watercress Line begins:** Volunteers rebuilt the current, shorter, railway line for heritage passenger trains in stages between 1977-85. Only the 10 mile, 16 km stretch from here, East to Alton, could be saved.




Start looking for Watercress Way waymarkers on lamp posts, road signs, fingerposts seen for the next 44 kms! The 11 kms (7 miles) to the West from here were sold off for farmland, house building sites, and the M3. Much was then abandoned to nature. The Watercress Way charity aims, where possible, to open more old track bed for walking, cycling and horse riding. By 2021 approximately 1.6 miles, 2.6 kms of the original Watercress Line were cleared for walkers in separate sections at Itchen Abbas and Kings Worthy.

3. Take the road downhill from the carpark, called Station Approach.


 **Look up at Jacklyn's Bridge** to see some heritage railway carriages parked on top of the bridge by The Watercress Line along the original track.


4. At the end of Station Approach, turn right, at the old railway bridge over Jacklyn's Lane.

5. At the crossroads, cross over Winchester Road (B3047) and turn left up Pound Hill.

 **Animals, strays, and guns:** as you walk up Pound Hill imagine its past roles. It was once a holding place for stray animals. No 22 is a fine Georgian style house, but its design suggests its past. It was a pub called The Running Horse until recently, but in 1781 was called The Dog and Star, infamous for bull baiting! Once at Arlebury Recreation Ground car park entrance, look across The Avenue at the entrance to Perins School and see the concrete stumps of a World War II machine gun emplacement.

6. Start a 0.6 miles (1km) section of the trail along Winchester Rd , called The Avenue, to New Farm Road. You pass by Arlebury Recreation Ground, and Arlebury Café above the Town Council offices.

 **Pay as you go:** This pleasant lime tree lined road runs parallel to the abandoned railway, which was just to the left. The Avenue was gifted to Alresford by The Bishop of Winchester in 1869. You will pass a red brick octagonal **toll house**, built in 1705 to guard the **turnpike** road from Guildford-Winchester. The current A31 follows much of its route.

 **Bridges and whistles:** You pass Perins School sports ground which covers the old railway, and Bridge Rd, where the track is built on by a few houses. One is called Whistlestop!

For a short circular walk around Alresford:



Follow the trail out of town past the visitor centre in the car park, along The Avenue until Drove Lane, opposite New Farm Rd. Turn right down this old livestock herding route for 0.5 km to meet the northern stage of the Watercress Way at Stage 10, then follow the Watercress Way signs back into town along the River Arle to Broad Street and back to the Station. This is signed The Millennium Walk, a circular route of approximately 1.6 kms, 1 mile

7. For the main trail: at the junction with Drove Lane, cross over The Avenue/Winchester Rd, to turn left up New Farm Rd for 0.5 miles, 0.8 km. Stop at New Farm old railway bridge (narrow pavement).



Deep cutting: Look down over New Farm Bridge at the overgrown and disused track. An old green railway hut for railway workers remains (no access).

8. Almost at the end of New Farm Rd, take the first right, a sharp turn into Spring Gardens. This quiet, narrow road stretches 0.5 miles, 0.8 kms ending in a ford, unsuitable for traffic. (no pavement).

Detour to access The Cricketers Pub : carry on a short distance to the end of New Farm Rd and cross over Jacklyn's Lane to the pub, then return to Spring Gardens.

-  **Pause a while by the watercress beds, washing and packing sheds.** *The clear chalk springs have a constant temperature of 10°C, the key to watercress production. This fragile crop wilts rapidly and needs speedy transport to market. This is now by lorries and vans not the railway. Watercress beds are found around much of the Watercress Way, a good reason for the trail's name! Despite foreign competition, Hampshire is still the main centre for watercress production in the UK.*
-  **Watercress the superfood:** *these are one of the last remaining traditionally run, less mechanised watercress beds in the area. Cress was originally grown in the rivers, but to reduce contamination, concrete lined beds were built, and water abstracted from the chalk aquifer. Production takes place all year by rotating growth by both seeds and propagation. Plastic coverings are used to protect watercress from frost. Early morning mists over the beds are called 'rokes'.*

9. Cross the footbridge parallel to the ford. Pause to look at the River Itchen.

-  *The river's source is just upstream at Cheriton, before it meanders gently 28 miles, 45kms, to Southampton. It flows under the old railway and Winchester Rd at the imposing Seward's Bridge, the western entrance to Alresford. It is then joined by the two tributaries of The Arle and Candover. It is famed for its rare chalk stream habitat and for fly fishing. (Do not eat wild watercress, danger of liver fluke).*
-  **Pilgrimages:** *The trail here follows part of **St Swithun's Way**, a 34 mile, 55km, footpath from Winchester Cathedral to Farnham. It was named after the 9th C. Bishop of Winchester, and its distinctive waymarker has two bishop's croziers and a pilgrim's scallop shell. Shells are often used for pilgrimage waymarking, possibly because shells were taken to receive food on the way. The longer **Pilgrims Way** route from Winchester to Canterbury is not waymarked along its path but has some scallop emblems on the way, seen at Martyr Worthy's church, Stage 5 and St Johns in Alresford, Stage 10.*

SECTION 1, STAGE 2: RIVER ITCHEN CLIFF AND MEADOWS. OVINGTON to ITCHEN STOKE and ITCHEN ABBAS



Distance: 2.86 miles, 4.6kms along a minor road, grassy fields, gravel tracks.

Services: One pub only on this stage: The Bush Inn at Ovington, SO24 0RE.

Transport : Stagecoach bus No 67 to Itchen Stoke

Car parking: At The Bush with permission


- Cross Tichbourne Road, following a 0.2 miles, 0.5km bridleway uphill, to reach the A31 Winchester to Alresford Rd.**
- Cross over the A31 (dangerous crossing) and go diagonally left to East Lane/Lovington Lane, heading west (no pavements). Descend downhill and follow Lovington Road for 0.7miles,1.1kms to Ovington.**

-  **Changing vistas:** *The River Itchen river cliff gives wonderful views west across the valley. Felling of trees to control Ash die back may change the embankment of the old railway visible in the far distance to something closer to Victorian times.*
-  **Domesday village:** *Ovington appears in the 1086 Domesday book as "Ofinetune" meaning "the place above" in Old English, and it is indeed a small village above the floodplain! The Bush Inn is 17th C.*



Alternative route in winter to avoid at Itchen Stoke and Itchen Abbas (Stage 2), often flooded footpaths, but passable with wellies.

Carry on along scenic Lovington Lane towards Avington (**no pavements**) into Itchen Abbas from The Bush . This goes up a steep hill and bears to the right for 1.9 miles,3 kms. Turn right just after Avington Golf course entrance. Beautiful views now to Avington House on your left. It is now 0.6 miles,0.9 kms to the junction with the B3047,at St Johns Church and The Plough pub. Cross over and turn left along the B3047, past the Village Hall, to Northington Rd. This effectively misses out Stage 2, and you have now returned to the trail heading West in Stage 3. It is worth visiting **Northington Rd viaduct** as a small detour, see Stage 3 point 6.

- 3. Turn sharp right in front of The Bush Inn and cross to the north side of the River Itchen, over a scenic Monet-style bridge. Follow the gravel path between the main Itchen to the left and a smaller mill race stream to the right heading west downstream, until the footpath path merges with Water Lane in Itchen Stoke.**


 **Special conservation value:** *The floodplain is made up of a mosaic of fen, carr woodland and meadows. The river and much of its floodplain is protected by Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation. Look for kingfishers, reed warblers, damsel flies, trout, otters, and wild watercress.*

For a detour to Itchen Stoke: Go up Water Lane's hill, past the old schoolhouse, to see St Mary's church.


-  **A Victorian 'jewel':** *St Mary's church was built in 1866, inspired by Sainte Chapelle in France. Look for its stone rose window and distinctive roofing tiles.*
-  **The old Watercress Line** *is another 0.2miles (0.25 km) further north of the church up Folly Lane, in private farmland with no access. You can see its railway bridge, which was saved from infilling in 2021, and how overgrown the cutting has become since the 1973 closure.*

To access the northern droves section of the Watercress Way trail, continue up Folly Hill for 1 mile,1.5 km, otherwise return to Water Lane.



- 4. From Water Lane turn left through a kissing gate, on to a permissive path (**not shown on OS maps and often flooded!**). Follow the well-trodden path which arcs left across the water meadows, keeping the houses of Itchen Stoke to the right.**
Bear slightly left/south to cross the River Itchen, passing through one kissing gate and two bridges

 **All to do with sheep:** *The Itchen is rarely in one channel, having been channelised over the centuries to use for mills and control flooding. 'Floating' water meadows, developed in Medieval times, were regularly deliberately flooded by skilled workers called 'drowners', to raise winter temperatures and allow grass to flourish for sheep rearing. You cross a complex network of ditches, mini dams called 'stops' and small arched brick bridges.*


- 5. As the track rises away from the flood plain to Lovington Lane, take the footpath to the right into a field through a kissing gate. Follow the path slightly uphill through several fields and kissing gates, and then down through a small paddock to Lovington Lane (**Dogs on a lead here, grazing livestock**).**
- 6. Turn right onto Lovington Lane and head downhill past the converted barn houses of Yavington Farm on the left for 0.6 miles (1km). Stay on Lovington Lane, ignoring signs for St Swithun's Way (which climbs steeply uphill left) until a footpath sign to the right, by a wooden 5 bar gate.**

 **Tons galore:** *Between Winchester and Alresford, 12 old manorial estates are recorded in the Domesday book, including Easton, Avington, Yavington and Ovington in this stretch of the River Itchen. 'Ton' means a settlement.*

7. Turn right through a gap next to the gate. After the main bridge across the Itchen, you enter a SSSI nature reserve. (Dogs MUST be on lead here). It can be very muddy here, and also slippery across the footbridges crossing the multiple channels of the Itchen.

-  **One in 210?** The River Itchen is one of a small number of chalk rivers in the world, hence its high conservation value. You will see great tussock sedge clumps and, depending on the season, a rich assemblage of flora including butterbur plants with their giant, prehistoric looking leaves, and fauna including swans, coots, butterflies, warblers, and kingfishers. You may spot trout in the river, but the white tailed crayfish is very shy and nocturnal.
-  **Cormorants and Cuckoos:** You may hear the distinctive call of Cuckoos in spring as they target the various warbler nests hidden in the tall sedges here. Cormorants are often to be seen perched high in the trees, keeping an eye on the fish farms downstream!

8. Cross straight over the B3047 (dangerous crossing) up a small bank through a gap in the tall hedge, then bear sharp left along a narrow permissive grassy path next to Northington Grange's vineyard called Burge's Field. This saves you walking on the B3047. (This path is not shown on OS maps).

-  **A wine tradition?** Vineyards are making a great come back in the area, mainly for high quality sparkling wine. Vines were cultivated in this part of Hampshire in Roman times. There are now about 38 vineyards in Hampshire. This one grows Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio grapes.

SECTION 1, STAGE 3: ITCHEN ABBAS VILLAGE AND NORTHINGTON VIADUCT


Distance: 1.4kms (0.9miles) along pavements, muddy lanes, and gravel tracks

Facilities: One pub on this stage: The Plough, SO21 1BQ.

Transport: Stagecoach No 67 bus service.

Car parking : Itchen Abbas Village Hall SO21 1BQ, with permission.


1. From the path by the vineyard, drop down into a small layby on the B3047. Go past the first bridleway to the right, the Three Castles Path. Take the footpath to the right, after the layby, through a kissing gate. The Watercress Way now goes uphill to Baring Close with huge beech trees lining it on the left.

-  **A dammed fine valley:** The Victorians were famed for their smoothing of landscapes for railways to reduce gradients for steam trains. Ahead is a tree lined large embankment, straddling a large dry tributary valley of the Itchen. Dry valleys are a feature of this landscape, carved out when water tables were higher, or the ground was frozen, during the Ice Age.

2. Go over a small stile and veer left past a small sewage works, then through a kissing gate to enter Baring Close (cul-de-sac).

3. Turn right at Rectory Lane (no pavement).

4. Take the first left after Winton Cottages on to a narrow footpath parallel to the old railway track on the right, its boundary marked by concrete posts and saggy wire. You enter a short stage of old beech trees. Ignore the footpath to the left. An **alternative route** is possible, see below.

-  **Capability Brown of the 21st C. ?** Look left (South) to see a beautiful Georgian white house, the old Rectory. Its re-landscaped grounds include a huge ornamental urn in a field often grazed by the old breed of cattle called the British White. Can you spot a small statue of a dog and owner?

5. At the very end of the gravel track turn into a small housing estate called Little Hayes Lane. Turn right and follow the pavement down the hill past Itchen Abbas Primary School.
6. Look for glimpses of the imposing Northington viaduct to the right, worth a short **detour** to the right up Northington Rd , otherwise turn left to the B3047. To access **The Plough pub**, turn left on the B3047 past Itchen Abbas Village Hall.

Detour/alternative route to Northington Rd, to walk under the railway viaduct

A **permissive footpath** just to the north of the old railway follows the track bed more closely. Instead of turning down the footpath by Winton Cottages to Little Hayes Lane, continue up Rectory Lane, over the railway bridge. Take the first left : pedestrian access next to a metal gate.

- 📍 **A cutting no more:** The railway ran in the narrow linear field to your left. The track bed was once a deep cutting but has been infilled by farm waste and the foundations waste from building the 1991 Brooks shopping mall in Winchester.
- 📍 **Echoes of Navvies:** imagine the itinerant workmen called 'navvies' building cuttings and constructing huge bridges like this with basic tools and no safety gear in the early 1880s.

With the wire fence on your left, cross two fields then carry on downhill via two kissing gates to reach Northington Rd. Turn left to go under the imposing tall red brick railway viaduct, then carry on down the road (no pavement) past School Lane. Cross to a paved section to the B3047.

SECTION 1, STAGE 4: THE WATERCRESS LINE TRACK BED, ITCHEN ABBAS TO MARTYR WORTHY

- Distance: 1.3 miles, 2.1 kms along pavements, minor roads, and the railway gravel track bed.
- No facilities along this stage.
- Transport: Stagecoach bus No 87.
- Carpark: King George V Recreation Ground, Couch Green, Martyr Worthy SO211EA

1. At the junction of Northington Road with the B3047 turn right up Station Hill.
2. Cross over Station Hill Road unless you follow a **short detour** to see the site of Itchen Abbas Railway Station.

Detour to see Itchen Abbas Station yard

- 📍 **The clues are in the house names:** look for Station House, Halt and Beeching built in the 1990s. The platforms of Itchen Abbas station are now part of a private garden (no access).
- 📍 **The old railway track:** This passed in front of the 3 white Railway Cottages built by L&SWR for their workers in 1892.
- 📍 **A bustling station:** Together with Ropley and Alresford, this was an intermediate station between Alton and Winchester Junction to the mainline at Kings Worthy. Despite a sparse local population, the local Avington estate and farms generated enough traffic in crops, milk, and cattle. The Station House was similar to Alresford's station building. There was a passing loop with two platforms, a signal box, and a goods yard on the south side of the line. However, unable to compete with road transport, the station was de-staffed in 1967 before closing in 1973.
- 📍 **A celebrity:** Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary in World War I, often used the station to get to his fishing lodge by the Itchen, including the evening before the decision to declare war on Germany.

3. From Station Hill Rd turn first right up a small gravel lane, with an obscured footpath fingerpost, and continue to a 5 bar gate with pedestrian side access. Take a left and continue for a relaxing, sheltered 1 mile, 1.6km walk along the old track bed.

- 📍 **Stop a while** at one of the 3 sleeper style oak benches and look at the interpretation board, all erected by the Watercress Way charity.
- 📍 **Look left, south to the South Downs National Park:** The old track bed is the newest national park's northerly boundary. There are lovely views from clearings cut by volunteers to the south (right) over the Itchen valley and north (left) across the downs towards a Roman villa site. You pass Couch Green King George VI playing fields, car park and children's playground on the left, accessible by a gentle slope.
- 📍 **Try some artefact hunting:** As you pass along the alternating embankments and cuttings, look for concrete sleepers, gravel ballast and old signal telegraph poles. Under the last bridge at Martyr Worthy is a small piece of wooden sleeper made from hardwearing Jarrah wood from Australia.
- 📍 **Imagine a mini jungle here:** the tangle of scrubby plants and trees developed since 1973, until cleared by volunteers in 2015. This was the start of The Watercress Way charity, formally registered in 2016. The railway track is now owned by Hampshire Country Council and needs constant maintenance: Ash die back is a concern. You will see many log piles left as habitats for invertebrates. **Volunteers to help conservation work are always welcome!**

4. After Martyr Worthy railway bridge, turn left up a gentle ramp. Turn right down Bridget's Lane, a narrow road (no pavement) for 0.2 miles, 0.25 km heading south to cross the B3047.

SECTION 1, STAGE 5: ALONG THE RIVER ITCHEN ABBOTS WORTHY TO KINGS WORTHY

Distance: 2.4 miles, 3.9 kms along minor roads, grassy paths, fields.

Facilities: Two pubs and village shop in Easton SO21 1EG (following detour/alternative route), and Cart and Horses pub in Kings Worthy SO23 7QN.

Transport: Frequent bus services from /to Kings Worthy , No 67 along Itchen valley.

Carpark: off road in Martyr Worthy, or Eversley Recreation Ground, Kings Worthy, SO23 7TF.

1. Go past the War Memorial down Martyr Worthy's Church Lane , past St Swithun's Church (no pavement). Ignore footpaths to the right and left.


- 📍 **Scallops again:** You will now be following the footpath marked St Swithun's Way. St Swithun's church wall has a Pilgrims Way sign of a scallop shell engraved in its wall. Today's pilgrims seek a stamp in their log book!

2. At the bottom of Church Lane hill, turn right up a slight incline in front of a pretty thatched cottage. Follow the alternative route or detour through Easton village to access pubs and shop.


Detour/Alternative route to Easton


At the bottom of Church Lane, follow the footpath through fields across the scenic Itchen and its water meadows, bearing right into Easton Village with The Cricketers and Chestnut Horse pubs. There is a village shop in The Chestnut Horse's carpark, SO21 1EG. You can re-join the Watercress Way at Easton Lane by following the main road through this 'chocolate box' village past The Cricketers Pub SO21 1EJ.

3. From Church Lane follow the footpath through several metal kissing gates and across fields parallel to the River Itchen on the left. Cross Easton Lane and go through a metal kissing gate into meadows with the River Itchen to the left (grazing cattle, keep dogs on a lead).

 **Lumps and bumps:** These are remnants of the floating meadow system also seen at Itchen Stoke.


4. Continue along the footpath at the field edge with the fence to the right. Pass through a metal kissing gate and continue along the footpath, this time keeping the fence to the left. Take a sharp left next to the M3 embankment through another metal kissing gate, turn back south to the River Itchen. Go right under the M3 underpass then take a gate/stile into a gently sloping field up to the B3047 and the hamlet of Abbots Worthy.


 **A Norman gem:** Look left to see St Mary's Church, Easton. This is probably the earliest church built in the upper Itchen valley, dating back to the Normans in the 12th C.

 **Otter alert:** At the underpass right next to the River Itchen you may see brown trout jumping and even an otter!

5. Turn left and walk a few metres on the verge of the B3047 (no pavement) before turning left through a kissing gate into paddocks with one more kissing gate to enter Mill Lane. A detour is possible here to view the River Itchen.

Short detour down Mill Lane to the River Itchen


 **Interpreting the past:** Local historians have designed an interpretation board here. Just a little further you can stand on a bridge over the Itchen with magnificent views, but an important milling centre in past times.


 **Worthy in name and nature:** 'Worthy' probably derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'wordie' meaning part of an estate. 'Abbots Worthy' dates back to the Monks of St Peters Abbey c. 900AD, and 'Kings Worthy' from Barton Stacey tithing, held first by King Edward then King William, according to The Domesday Survey.

6. From Mill Lane follow a meandering footpath through trees to reach the A33 (dangerous crossing).


 **Tudorbethan:** You may glimpse Abbots Worthy House on the right (north) built for the Baring family in the early 19th C. but in Tudor style.

7. Cross over at the narrow pedestrian point, turning right then left up the footpath past the Post Office, with The Cart and Horses pub straight ahead.



 **For the poor:** The Reading Room and alms houses remain from local Victorian benefactor Richard Turner. The ruins of his grand Kings Worthy House lie in the woods behind the Cart and Horses pub.

 **The 'in place':** The Cart and Horses pub was originally a farmhouse which became a coaching inn in 1760 on the old turnpike road from Winchester to Basingstoke, now the A33.

8. From the Cart and Horses pub, follow the pavement to the right, parallel with the A33, and turn first left up the tree lined Hinton House Drive.

 **Eco alert:** On the right are some 'eco houses' with an herb rich meadow planted in 2018, now public open space. To the left, the scrubby field with a wood hides the old grounds of Kings Worthy House, one of the large Victorian houses in the area that burned down in the 1960's.

9. 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.

-  **Lord Eversley:** This eminent local Victorian, who lived at Abbots Worthy House, was an early advocate of opening spaces for public access.
-  **The Whiteway:** You are walking on an ancient packhorse route linking Winchester and Basingstoke. Two interpretation boards in Eversley Park tell the story of this and the role of this location in WWII.

10. At the far end of the park, just beyond the Worthies Social Club buildings, take the footpath to Lovedon Lane. Ignore the footpath to Gillingham Close. At Lovedon Lane turn sharp left, crossing over an old Watercress Line bridge, filled in after closure (narrow pavement).

SECTION 2, STAGE 6 : TWO TRACK BEDS KINGS WORTHY

Distance: 2.4 miles, 3.9km along pavements, grass & gravel tracks.



Facilities: The Cart and Horses and The King Charles pubs, plus two mini supermarkets and Post Office.

Transport: Frequent bus services Stagecoach The Spring and No 67.

Car park: Eversley Recreation Ground, Kings Worthy, SO23 7TF.

1. Turn first left on Lovedon Lane at the kissing gate, and enter Broadview, a grassy linear park. Walk down this to the mosaic interpretation board at Wesley Rd.




To access The King Charles pub (SO23 7NU), carry on down Lovedon Lane and then return.

-  **Broadview indeed:** This is on top of a very deep infilled cutting of the Mid-Hants Railway with stunning views SW across to Winchester via a Roman villa at Woodhams Farm. As you stand with the Millennium mosaic board and Watercress Way leaflet holder behind you, imagine workers hand cutting the hard chalk in the 1860s, and JCBs filling it in to dispose of M3 waste in the late 1980s.
-  **Habitats:** in all the disused railway sections active management, led locally by the Worthys' Conservation Volunteers, is needed to maintain clear access and improve habitat diversity by layering of shrubs and glades.

2. Wesley Rd arcs around, so cross this again and bear right then first left over a staggered crossing.

3. Turn left up a small bank, a footpath signed as Kim Bishop's walk, named after a local resident.

To access shops and chemist turn left from Wesley Rd along Pound Rd/Frazer Rd.

-  **Walking the Line:** You are back on another section of the original track bed of the Mid-Hants Railway. This fairly straight narrow path continues across the bridge over Springvale Rd through scrubby woods grown since 1973. In 2020 new access was negotiated by the Watercress Way charity to access more of the track bed all the way to Winchester Junction, now marked by a tall wire fence to stop access to the current main line railway.
-  **Winchester Junction:** The Mid-Hants and DN&SR lines did not intersect, separately joining the main London to Southampton railway via Basingstoke (L&SWR). The Mid-Hants joined the L&SWR here at Winchester Junction, manned by staff and their families living here in the "V" formed by the main line and the Mid-Hants. Just a few bricks lying in the overgrowth remain of the railway cottages and signal box after demolition 1968-79.
-  **A railway under a railway:** If you look through the wire fence across today's busy railway, the line of trees running right to left mark the deep cutting of the DN&SR, which actually went under the L&SWR at Woodhams Farm! The DN&SR speculators ran out of funding, and it never reached Southampton, instead joining the L&SWR south of Winchester at Shawford. The DN&SR had a temporary junction to the L&SWR here during World War II (see Twin Bridges below).

4. **The current route** bears right from the track bed clockwise around Hookpit Farm, known locally as 'Top Fields'. The fence to the mainline railway will be on your left.
5. Take the first footpath on the left, down Blackberry Field to Burnett Lane.
6. Turn left on Hookpit Farm Lane, which turns into a gravel track after the height restriction barrier. Go under the main line railway tunnel and follow the curving track with good views of the 'spur line' embankment beyond the pony paddocks, to the imposing red brick Twin Bridges.
7. Turn immediately left after the bridges up a small track which takes you up the embankment of the DN&SR. Turn left (North) at the top. To the right, South, the old railway track is accessible to Woodhams Farm.

Follow the waymarker signs closely here. Proposed increased access to track beds in 2021.

Following Top Fields new housing and access changes, the route is planned to bear left (South), from the track bed of the Mid-Hants railway in Top Fields across to Woodhams Farm Lane. There are good views along the field edge back east across Kings Worthy to Broadview. Turn right up Woodhams Lane, and go under the main line railway tunnel to meet the southern end of the DN&SR. This is a deep cutting section, often used by horse riders and cyclists, leading north to Twin Bridges and the Oxdrove. 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.

- 📍 **Link to The Valley of The Kings!** *The celebrity associated with this example of 'Victorian Railway Mania' was Lord Henry Herbert Carnarvon (of Highclere Castle fame), who energetically revised an initial idea for the DN&SR opening the Didcot to Newbury section in 1882. He was the father of the Earl of Carnarvon who discovered Tutankhamun's grave.*
 - 📍 **Track facts:** *In 1885 the link to Cheesehill station Winchester (Chesil Street car park) was completed. Like the Mid-Hants line, the DN&SR could not afford to run their own trains, so the Great Western Railway (GWR) was contracted to operate it. Eventually, in 1891, the link from Winchester to Shawford, via the beautiful Hockley Viaduct, was built, but finances ran out to extend to Southampton, where the terminus was planned for a site now occupied by West Quay shopping Centre. Instead, it joined the London and South West Railway (L&SWR) line, which is the current main line. Like the Mid-Hants, the DN&SR track bed and all its bridges were designed for two lines, but only one track with passing loops was financed.*
 - 📍 **Beeching was the final straw:** *The DN&SR fell victim to road transport as did the Mid-Hants railway, and firstly its passenger and then its heavy freight (including oil from Fawley) dwindled. The Didcot-Newbury section closed just before the Beeching Report, and the whole line finally shut in 1967.*
8. **Stop a while at Twin Bridges**
 - 📍 *You can see the railway's extra 'spur' line. Its bridge was doubled in size after its upgrading to accommodate World War II traffic in 1943. The spur shut in 1951, and the old embankment snaking off away from the main DN&SR was gradually used for farming and light industrial units, or just abandoned.*
 - 📍 **Spot the pill box:** *As you walk north from Twin Bridges, spot two pill boxes masked by vegetation on the right, which was part of the security ring built to withstand German air attack on Southampton Docks and Worthy Down Camp in World War II.*
 - 📍 **Why Racehorse Bridge?** *The next railway bridge you pass under just before Worthy Down Halt, is named after the old Winchester racecourse, now occupied by the Army camp.*
 9. **Halt at Worthy Down**
 - 📍 *A 'halt' was constructed for World War I traffic linking Southampton to the Midlands. Look at its unusual 'island' platforms, remodelled in 1943 to service the extra spur track during World War II. The remaining red brick building on the platform is probably an ammunition store, not a waiting room!*
 - 📍 **A SINC without water:** *Worthy Down Halt, abandoned to nature from 1960, was made a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation in 2020 to recognise its rare habitat. In addition to the chalk tolerant*

flora, it has acid loving plants, adapted to the tarmac and cinders from the old railway. Look for the rare wild liquorice by the southern ramp of the platforms.

- 📍 **Layers of history:** The interpretation boards at Worthy Down Halt, and further north near the Oxdrove interstage, give glimpses into the past, and the importance of this location as a crossroads. There are layers of occupation here, including ancient droves, an 18th century racecourse, a World War II airfield with its remarkably intact pill box defence system, and today's recreational routes.
- 📍 **Imagine Spitfires overhead:** Worthy Down airfield was famed for its Spitfire testing, which moved from Woolston in Southampton because of bombing during World War II. Other celebrities linked to the airfield were the film star Laurence Olivier and Commanding-in-Chief of RAF Bomber Command Sir Arthur Harris (Bomber Harris).
- 📍 **Ship or a camp?** The base has been home to a variety of military units over the years and became a naval air station in 1939 when it was known as HMS Kestrel. A propaganda broadcast from Germany by Lord Haw Haw proudly proclaimed: "we have sunk HMS Kestrel"! Despite bomb damage, the camp stayed afloat!

10. At the end of the railway track go up a ramp to the Oxdrove and turn left, West.

- 📍 **More landfill:** Straight ahead you can see the abandoned railway track to the north of the Oxdrove junction called Christmas Hill, once a deep cutting now a waste site (no access).

SECTION 2, STAGE 7: THE DROVES BEGIN SOUTH WONSTON TO SUTTON SCOTNEY

Distance: 2.33 miles, 3.7kms on gravel and grassy tracks

Facilities: The South Wonston village store is on Downs Road, SO21 3TA.


Transport: Stagecoach No 86.

Car parking: at the South Wonston, SO21 3ER.

1. Turn left , East, along The Oxdrove from the DN&SR track to a height restriction barrier, and take the first right along Drove Links Rd. This gravel track is about 0.4 miles, 0.6 kms long, leading to South Wonston Rd.

- 📍 **Drove confusion:** The Oxdrove went west from here to the Stoke Charity Rd, North for 0.5km, then East to Lunways. On maps it is called Alresford Drove (see stage 10.) However, Hampshire County Council has used the name for a long-distance cycle path called **The Oxdrove Way**, which follows a 25 mile, 40 km figure of eight along parts of the original Oxdrove, and Alresford Drove.
- 📍 **Migration over the ages;** The main livestock droves in Hampshire run West to East, so this is a linking South to North route from local sheep and cattle fields to the main travelling routes. Place names like Oxdrove and 'Gypsy' Bushes suggest its earlier importance as a drove route from Salisbury to Alresford then to Alton, and for migrant gypsy hop pickers.
- 📍 **South Wonston has quite a past!** The village grew rapidly from the turn of the 20th C. when local farmland was sold off for development in one-acre plots. In World War I the building of Worthy Down airfield and camp encouraged the village's growth. However, the several Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows in the fields just to the right at the end of Drove Links Rd show its importance for the earliest of settlers.

2. Turn left / west (no pavement) for 0.3miles,0.5km, to join a byway directly ahead, just as the road bears left into the village. Carry on left to access the village stores on Downs Rd. Follow the byway for 700m, past allotments on the right until a crossroads of 4 bridlevays/byways. Take the first right, a bridlevay heading North to Sutton Scotney, passing through large arable fields.

 **Where are the sheep?** Old troughs indicate previous uses. Much chalk downland was ploughed up for arable crops in WWII.

3. After about 1.75km you cross the old DN&SR track, which is a distinctive tree lined overgrown linear feature bisecting the bridleway, now used for farm equipment storage (no access).
4. Just after a biogas digester on the left, is a junction of bridleways. **THIS IS A CRITICAL JUNCTION with two options:** To follow the whole trail into Sutton Scotney: turn left, North West, carrying straight on to meet a farm road stretching 0.5km to Wonston Lane. To shorten the trail by 5-6 km: turn right, South East towards West Stoke Farm, avoiding Sutton Scotney completely.

SECTION 2, STAGE 8: THE SUTTON SCOTNEY LOOP




Distance: 3.5 miles, 5.7 kms, along grassy and gravel tracks

Facilities: The Dever Stores village shop, Texaco garage shop and The Coach and Horses and The Wonston Arms.

Transport: No 86 bus service to Winchester-Basingstoke.

Car parks: at Victoria Hall off Stoke Charity Rd and The Gratton off Oxford Rd, both SO21 3GX.




1. From Wonston Lane, turn right then after 50m left onto a footpath heading north west across fields for 0.6miles, 1km to enter Sutton Scotney via Victoria Hall car park. Cross over Stoke Charity Rd, keeping Victoria Hall to the left.

-  **Why do the telegraph poles cross the field?** Farming has almost obliterated the DN&SR here, but the line of poles indicates its original route into Sutton Scotney.
-  **Spreading the gospel:** Film mogul, J Arthur Rank, moved to Sutton Manor in 1939. As a committed Methodist he used films shown in Victoria Hall to spread the gospel to locals.
-  **Whips and riots:** Oxford St was part of the coaching route from Southampton to Oxford. The Coach and Horses remains as one of two coaching inns in the village. It has a plaque commemorating the 'Swing Riots', when 177 local people petitioned King William IV in 1830 to reduce their poverty.

2. Pass by **The Coach and Horses** and **Dever Stores** and follow the pavement to the end of Oxford St, bearing right at the mini roundabout. Just opposite the Texaco garage take the footpath right into The Gratton Recreation Ground and allotments.

 **Spot the red brick parapets** of the old DN&SR bridge over Oxford Rd, demolished after closure in 1963.

3. Bear left along the edge of the allotments, and bear right with the River Dever to your left.

-  **Perhaps pause** at the Watercress Way interpretation Board and Great Western Railway (GWR) bench installed by the Watercress Way charity. On the far side, west of the car park, is the DN&SR embankment. This whole area was once dominated by the station you will walk through after the park.
-  **No longer The Itchen!** The little stream here is The Dever, which drains into the River Test and then on to Southampton. It too is classified as an SSSI. Look for brown trout and voles. It has long been diverted for fishponds and watercress beds, although only few working watercress farms remain locally now.
-  **Award winning:** The Gratton Recreation Ground is famed for its design, upkeep, and conservation. Look for the wildflower meadow by its car park near the allotments.

4. 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.

- 📍 **Narnia lamp post?** *Passing the lamppost, you have just crossed the old track bed into the station yard.*
- 📍 **Look for** No 34-36 location of the old Goods Shed and No 24-26, location of the old two storeyed station building. *The gardens of the houses on the left as you walk along Station Drive was where steam trains whistled by!*
- 📍 **The last station before Winchester?** *This was an important local station, since Worthy Down Halt and Kings Worthy were not part of the Victorian's plan! There was a passing loop, goods yard a 3 ton crane and livestock pens (especially for local pigs). A footbridge linked the two platforms roughly where The doctor's surgery is today. The last passengers used the station in 1960, and goods traffic stopped being loaded here in 1964. The station buildings were then demolished, and the site became derelict, although partly used by Taylors coach company. In 2019 the site was redeveloped for the housing development called Old Station Park.*
- 📍 **The Watercress connection:** *Beds were established after the World War I close to the River Dever in the villages around Sutton Scotney. The railway goods rate book for 1896 shows that it cost 2/- (10p) to send half a hundredweight (56lbs) of watercress from Alresford to Waterloo and 3/6d (17½p) to Birmingham.*

5. Turn left at Stoke Charity Road to pass by the old DN&SR Wonston Bridge.

- 📍 **People now not trains:** *Until 2019 this bridge was derelict and used as a landfill dump. It was cleared by the Watercress Way charity working with Wonston Parish Council. Look for the interpretation sign on the bridge entrance. The aim is to open more of the old DN&SR track bed south from here for walkers.*

6. Carry on East along the Stoke Charity Road, taking the second turning on the right called Beggars Drove. This gravel track becomes an often overgrown footpath. 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.

Detour to The Wonston Arms SO21 3LS

After 4 small fields with their unusual wooden V-Shape gates there is a small lane to the left (North). This leads to the Stoke Charity Rd and the Wonston Arms, a CAMRA award winning pub.

7. Back on the main trail, follow the path for another 0.25miles,0.4km, then take the bridleway to the right, just before the Wonston to Stoke Charity Rd. You are now heading south towards South Wonston. After 0.6miles (1km) you reach the staggered junction by the farm buildings you passed originally when entering Sutton Scotney from the south west, but now bear left (south east) to West Stoke Farm.

- 📍 **The Red Lion?** *Look for the plaque on the flint wall as you pass West Stoke Farm, commemorating its previous role in the 19th C. as a pub for passing drovers herding livestock to Alresford markets and beyond.*


SECTION 3, STAGE 9: DROVES & WOODS


Distance: Approximately 6.9 miles, 11. km, along metalled roads and grassy tracks

Facilities: No shops or refreshments on this stage.


Car park: at Micheldever Woods. SO24 9UB- NB post code not accurate, so use What3words app: reference picnic.ties.walled

1. At South Wonston Rd turn left parallel to the road, opposite Bayley's clump woodland (no pavement). Cross over the Stoke Charity Rd onto a wide gravel byway. Ignore all farm track turnings. This 2mile, 3km track takes you to the A33 dual carriageway junction, opposite a religious meeting house. The original building was The Lunways Inn (dangerous crossing).

 **The Oxdrove again:** Although named Alresford Drove on maps, The Oxdrove is a west to east track traceable on maps back to Stockbridge (with links to Welsh drovers) and east to Totford and the Woolpack pub and beyond. It is either still a gravel track or has been metalled into a road. The railway era led to the decline of droving and droves.


 **An Inn with quite a history:** Lunways was a coaching inn between Winchester and Basingstoke, also used for often quite rowdy Winchester Racecourse visitors. You may have noticed how straight many of the roads are in this area. Many date back to Roman times, such as the A33.

2. Cross straight over and follow Main Road for 1 mile, 1.6 kms, going under the M3 bridge past the entrance on the left to Micheldever Woods car park (no pavements).

 **Bluebells and Banjos:** Itchen Woods and Micheldever Woods are working forests with a mix of conifers and deciduous trees and bluebell carpets. They are partly ancient woodlands and have many archaeological features.

 A worthwhile **detour** is to follow a waymarked **Archaeological Trail** from the main Forestry England carpark to see Bronze Age burial barrows and Iron Age banjos (farmstead enclosures).


3. As the woodland ends, look for the byway signed on the right of the road heading SE to Alresford. Stay on this gently undulating track for 1.6 miles, 2.5 kms, ignoring tracks off to the right and left until you get to Northington Rd, with two height restriction barriers.

 **Old Trig Point and Wind pump:** Look out at the highest point for a small concrete surveying 'trig point' once used by mapmakers, 130m above sea level. It is on the left in mid field. As the Watercress Way takes a left-hand bridleway down to Northington Rd, you may see an early 19th C windpump obscured by tall conifers and vines.

4. From Northington Road continue up a gentle incline for 0.3 miles, 0.5kms, until a staggered junction.

 **Anyone for cricket?** The flatter hill top at Itchen Stoke Down is the unlikely location for famous cricket matches between 1778-1806.

5. Ignore the Three Castles path and take the next bridleway, almost straight on, still heading south east. This is now part of the Wayfarers Walk.

 **A Royal route:** The Three Castles Path stretches 60m (96km) from Windsor to Winchester castles via Odiham, commemorating King John's journey in the 13th century. The Wayfarers Walk is a 70miles, 112km path between Inkpen Beacon in North Hampshire and Emsworth on the South coast.

6. After 0.3miles, 0.5kms, pass under two height restriction bars crossing Folly Lane, which leads down to Itchen Stoke. Carry on gently downhill towards Alresford for 0.6miles, 1km.

- 📍 **A sad memorial:** As you cross Folly Lane think of the three spitfire pilots killed here whilst training in 1944.
- 📍 **A deserted village:** Look east across the beautiful 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 the Domesday Book. It flourished until the 12th/13th centuries. Depopulation happened over a long time, probably exacerbated by Plague outbreaks.

7. At the junction of bridleways, turn right under a height restriction barrier around the southern edge of a prominent hill called Fob Down. This track meets Drove lane after 0.6miles,1km, with another height restriction barrier next to Pinglestone vineyard.

- 📍 **Vines, tanks, and trains:** Extensive new vineyards have been planted recently around Fob Down, for sparkling wine. Fob Down has a Romano-British settlement, perhaps wine making occurred here then! On Drove Lane look right (south west) across the water meadows where the Arle joins the Itchen. They were used for World War II tank training. The Mid- Hants Railway embankment can be seen mid distance.

SECTION 3, STAGE 10: HISTORIC ALRESFORD

Distance: 1.39 miles,2.2 kms, on gravel paths and pavements

Facilities: Many shops, pubs, and cafes here, including The Swan Hotel, The Globe, Horse & Groom and Bell pubs, Caracoli's coffee shop and The Courtyard Café.

Transport: Stagecoach bus 64 & 67.

Car parks: Longer-term at the Station SO24 9JG & Arlebury Recreation Ground SO24 9EP.

1. Cross over Drove Lane and take the footpath heading east into Alresford. Drop down to the River Arle through a kissing gate and pass by the Eel House.

- 📍 **What a view:** Look south across the futuristic Drove House and the many ponds and lakes of The Arle dammed up for Arlebury House. Some are now fish farms. You can see in the far distance the line of the old Watercress Line heading to Alresford Station.
- 📍 **Link to the Caribbean:** Have a look at the information boards on the rare Georgian Eel house. This is the scene where eels were trapped on moonless autumn nights during their once in a lifetime migration from the Caribbean's Sargasso Sea to breed in the headwaters of the Arle.

2. Continue past Arlebury Recreation Ground and car park to the right. This is also waymarked as the Millennium and Arle Valley trail. Continue along the south side of The Arle's river edge. For a quick return to Alresford Station, turn up Dean Road.

- 📍 **Hambone Junior:** Just after the entrance to Arlebury Recreation ground look for Hambone Junior Dog's **grave** just to the right of the footpath. He was a US army mascot in WWII.
- 📍 **Amy's spot:** You may spot pike in the river, and the holes in the path partly made by shy voles, as well as the many swans, ducks, and coots often clustered at **Amy's wild fowl feeding station**.
- 📍 **Alders:** Look out for alder trees, where the word Alresford probably originated (the ford over the river where the alder trees grow). Alders belong to the same family as birches. They have shiny leaves catkins and small cones, thriving in waterlogged conditions.
- 📍 **A road in a stream?** Near the **Fulling Mill** an information board shows a horse and flatbed cart pulling watercress from Pinglestone Farm, just visible on the other side of the river, along the riverbed via Dean Lane to Alresford Station. Victorians called watercress sold in paper cones in London 'poor man's bread'. Chalk springs are the clue to watercress production being here.
- 📍 **Not just corn mills here!** Imagine the noise of the fulling mill's water driven hammers here back in the 13th century. Only one remains now, perhaps the most photographed building in Alresford!. Fullers Earth was beaten into woven cotton to close up the weave and improve it.

3. Continue walking along the narrow river path. Bear to the right up a gentle incline called Ladywell Lane, passing a little spring fed stream on the right, to emerge at Mill Lane, at the bottom of Broad Street.

- 📍 **A lido? Here?** Pop into the tranquil Memorial Gardens, given to the town by local benefactor Sir Francis Lindley in 1951. You may spot the brick outline of an outdoor swimming pool once enjoyed by the locals.
- 📍 **A little bit of Marrakech?** It is difficult to imagine the stench of the many local tanneries, as shown on the information board on Mill Lane.

A detour or alternative route to see the beautiful Old Pond behind The Globe pub is possible here. Otherwise continue right up Mill Hill.

Alternative route /detour to The Old Weir, Pond, and the Globe

It is worth a diversion to the bottom of Mill Lane behind Arle Mill House.

- 📍 **A cascade now outdoors:** this beautiful waterfall is from water released from the sluices called 'Shettles', out of The Old Pond. The water once ran through the mill to power corn grinding and now provides hydro-electric power. The B3046 runs along the top of the River Arle's dam, called The Great Weir, built by Bishop de Lucy in the 12th century.

As you walk back up Mill Lane, look for some little steps on the left and take the narrow footpath to The Globe. The footpath crosses the main B3046 (dangerous bend) and you can go to the right of the pub down The Soke to look over the pond and see the memorial to Cogswell.

- 📍 **The first coaching inn into Alresford from the north:** The Globe's garden overlooks the Pond, famed more for its wildfowl nowadays rather than as a fishpond for the Bishops of Winchester!
- 📍 **Saving the day:** Cogswell was a US pilot who deliberately crash landed his plane here rather than hitting the town. You can see the sluices called Shettles here too.

Return to the trail either by following the main road past the Old Fire Station (no pavement) or retrace your steps back to Mill Hill.

4. Back on Mill Hill and Broad St stop opposite the Old Fire station, and look for No 10, Old Timbers.

- 📍 **The oldest place in town?** Part of Old Timbers dates to the 14th century. Look up to see its rare metal 'Fire mark', used to guide firefighters in the past about which buildings had paid up insurance to be saved from fire! After successive fires, Georgian slate and bricks replaced wattle and daub and thatched buildings. Their elegant buildings have survived wars and even 20th century redevelopment schemes. Much of the town centre is now protected by its Conservation Area and has 130 Listed Buildings.
- 📍 **A missing house and a glimpse into Norman town planning:** The missing house next door allows a glimpse of the now rare **burgage** plot layout. These measured 11 by 110 yard plots, with a main house and outhouses for animals and servants, maximising the number that could front a road, whilst also giving privacy. Once a common feature across England, burgages have largely disappeared as town centres have become more densely built on.
- 📍 **Pineapple Ahoy!** Find the bright yellow house and look up to the roofline to see why its name is Pineapple House! Pineapples were viewed as status symbols in the 18th century because of the difficulty in importing them on sailing ships.
- 📍 **Fire Fire!** Opposite is The Old Fire Station, adjoining the narrow medieval bridge carrying the old coaching route, now the main B3046 road, past The Globe to Old Alresford and Basingstoke.

5. Walk up Broad Street's gentle hill past Alresford's shops, restaurants, and houses.

- 📍 **Market day:** Markets in Broad St date back 800 years. This street was designed to serve as a market square and in the 18th century had a Market Hall in the centre, and open butchers either side. So many of the buildings here have fascinating histories and stories to tell, many centred around fires and sheep! Many buildings show their original coaching entrances, now garages, or converted into the main building.

- 🏠 **Sheep? Here?** Alresford's 'hey day' was in the 14th century when it was one of the 10 most important wool centres in England. Imagine the scene here in 1837 with 140,000 sheep penned by wooden hurdles. The last sheep fair had a mere 8000 in 1972. East St was once called Ram Alley.
- 🏠 **Colours help:** The number of plaques on buildings recognises how special they are. Look out for bright blue No 48 (blacksmith), Cream No 50 (US Army HQ World War II), Blue No 23 (The Old Post House), Blue No 27 (the birthplace of poet Mary Mitford), and Black: No 17 Oxley's Bookshop (where a Russian spy posed as an antiquarian book buyer).
- 🏠 **Don't forget the pubs:** Being an important trading centre between Winchester and London, over 24 pubs and inns were open in the 19th century. Now only 5 survive, but their old names are a giveaway: The old Stag, White Hart, White Horse, Peaceful Home, Golden Lyon etc. Wessex Pharmacy was once The New Inn!
- 🏠 **So, is Alresford really New?** No, it's actually a late 12th century planned T-shaped settlement called 'Novum Forum (Latin for New Market), established by two Bishops of Winchester: Henri de Blois, brother of King Stephen, and Godfrey de Lucy. Old Alresford just to the North dates back even further to Saxon times. Many buildings in the town centre have survived from Georgian times.

6. Emerge at the top of Broad Street and continue straight over junction of East and West Streets to a narrow lane leading to St John The Baptist's Church.

- 🏠 **So just how old is this church?** St John's has had several makeovers in its time. Its Saxon rood, a small sculpture of Christ above its west door is puzzling because New Alresford stems from the Normans. In 1400 a splendid perpendicular style church was built, remodelled in 1689 after a major fire in the town. In 1869 the whole church was rebuilt, giving a Victorian twist to its appearance.
- 🏠 **The 'Frenchie's are in town!** Opposite are 19th century Napoleonic graves of captured officers and their families. Alresford was one of several open prisons called Parole Towns for officers in England. In 1757 there were 300 prisoners in a town of only about 1000 people! They rarely bothered to escape because if caught were sent to the floating prison ships off Portsmouth called 'the hulks' with their appalling conditions.
- 🏠 **A swan song:** The low white building behind the prisoner of war gravestones was once the stabling for The Swan Inn, famed for hosting the rich and famous throughout its long history. Oliver Cromwell stayed there, and Edward Knight held his first board meeting to set up the railway here too! It is now a hotel.

7. Follow the footpath through the churchyard leading to a narrow-walled path on the right, emerging onto Station Road. Turn left opposite the Public Conveniences (look at the plaque) to return to the Watercress Line Station car park.

- 🏠 **What a past!** Unlike many of the roads in the town centre, Station Road was only constructed in 1866, after the railway was built, by demolishing a burgage house which fronted on to West St. Find the plaque on the public toilets, by the GP surgery, about the Portland spy ring. Right opposite is the redeveloped Old Police Station, ironically just across from the Cold War dead letter drop used by Harry Houghton and the Russian spy Peter Kroger, who used Oxley's bookshop as a cover.

You have now come full circle.

The Watercress Way Trustees hope you have enjoyed your walk with glimpses into Hampshire's beautiful landscape and hidden histories.

The concept of a circular trail joining up two old railways by historic droves is, we think, unique.

Perhaps consider donating for this little snapshot into the trail's heritage, geography, and wildlife : do use Give as you Live Donate

www.thewatercressway.org.uk

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Registered charity 1167675.

Written by Kim Adams, Trustee of The Watercress Way, April 2021

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The
Countryside
Code



Your guide to enjoying parks and waterways, coast and countryside

Respect everyone

- be considerate to those living in, working in and enjoying the countryside
- leave gates and property as you find them
- do not block access to gateways or driveways when parking
- be nice, say hello, share the space
- follow local signs and keep to marked paths unless wider access is available

Protect the environment

- take your litter home - leave no trace of your visit
- take care with BBQs and do not light fires
- always keep dogs under control and in sight
- dog poo - bag it and bin it - any public waste bin will do
- care for nature - do not cause damage or disturbance

Enjoy the outdoors

- check your route and local conditions
- plan your adventure - know what to expect and what you can do
- enjoy your visit, have fun, make a memory

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