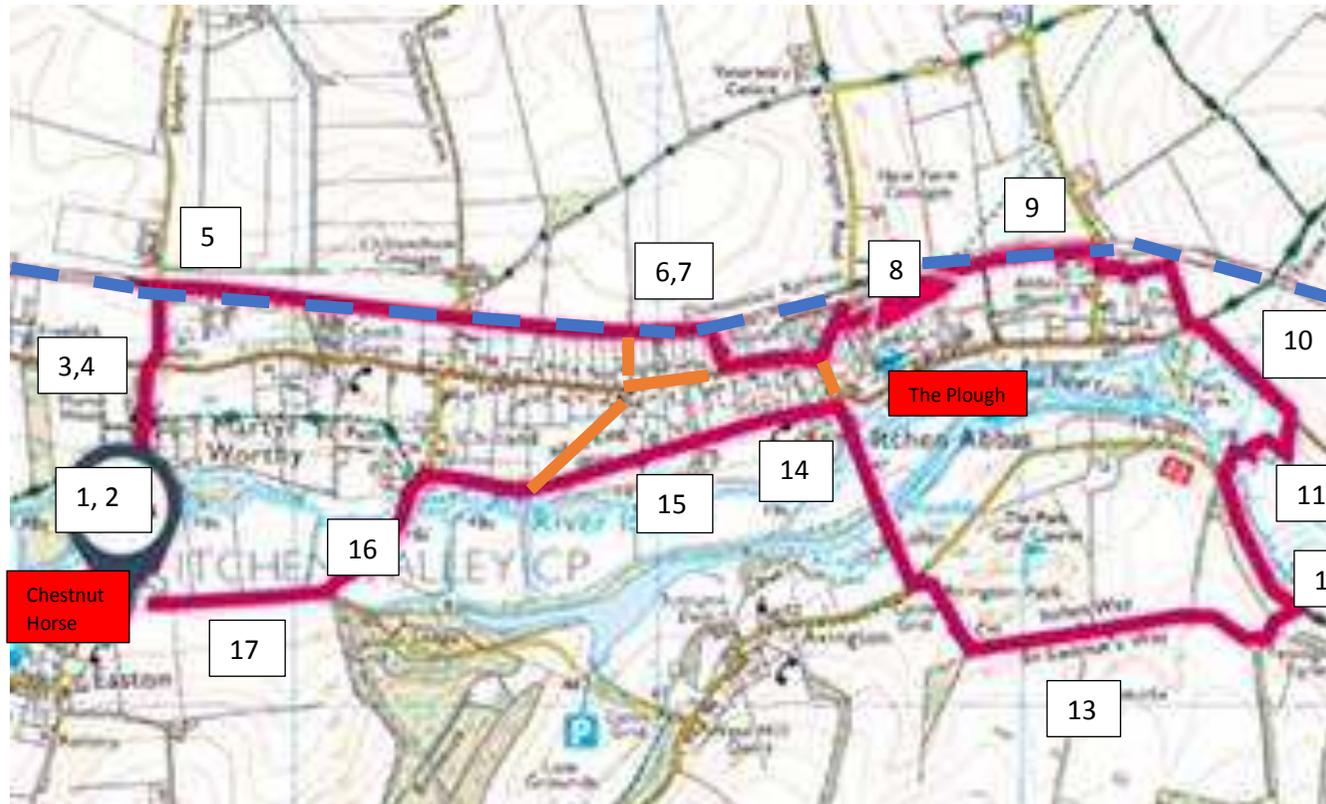


## The Watercress Way: Easton -Itchen Abbas circular walk



- **Start: The Chestnut Horse** pub in Easton (**stage 1**). The carpark and village are small so please park considerately.
- The route is approximately 5.9 miles, 9 km, across rolling chalk downland and farmland, along the River Itchen banks and parts of the disused Mid Hants railway, fondly called the Watercress Line. You can choose a **shorter walk** by cutting back by Chillandham Lane and Chilland or from St Johns Church and another sponsor pub: **The Plough Inn**, Itchen Abbas( **stage 7/8**).
  - There are several stiles and kissing gates along the route. There may be some muddy patches so walking boots/wellies will help.
  - Dogs are welcome but keep under control, especially near grazing animals and across the River Itchen.
  - Refreshments are available at the two pubs and seasonally at **Avington House (near stage 14)**, all sponsors of the Watercress Way. The golf course coffee shop at Avington also may be open (**near stage 13**)

- **Donations** are welcome to help fund our work in opening the old railway lines for public access.
- **Gift aid** makes a big difference- use via MyDonate on our website [www.thewatercressway.org.uk/](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk/).
- Please **contact** the trustees by Facebook, Twitter, or our webpage.
- **Email us at** [info@thewatercressway.org.uk](mailto:info@thewatercressway.org.uk)



- Numbers refer to trail instructions
- Red line is the long route
- Orange shows shorter versions
- Blue dashes show the dismantled Watercress Line now followed by The Watercress Way, a 26 mile trail
- Map Courtesy of the O.S. 100058136

### Useful references

- <https://www.watercressline.co.uk/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itchen\\_Abbas\\_railway\\_station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itchen_Abbas_railway_station)
- [http://www.itchenvalleyparishcouncil.org.uk/ItchenValley-PC/The\\_Villages\\_6199.aspx](http://www.itchenvalleyparishcouncil.org.uk/ItchenValley-PC/The_Villages_6199.aspx)
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/11006046/River-retreat-of-the-man-who-took-Britain-to-war.html>
- <https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryside/walking/greyroosevelt> <http://www.thewatercresscompany.com/>
- <http://www.thewatercresscompany.com/>

*Please park considerately!!.*

## The Watercress Way(WW) loop from West to East (ie clockwise) with watch points

1.	From the <i>Chestnut Horse</i> turn left (North) and follow Avington Road for a short distance until footpath sign on the left, gravel path to small gate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Watercress Way was named after one of the disused railways it follows the Watercress Line, nickname for the Mid Hants Railway. This plus the Didcot-Kings Worthy-Winchester- Southampton railway form the core of the 26 mile trail, linked up by ancient droves between Sutton Scotney and Alresford.</li><li>• Look for wild watercress in the various channels of the River Itchen. This is one of the oldest known leaf vegetables eaten by people, an aquatic or semi aquatic perennial, a member of mustard family which can be grown in gardens too! Hippocrates founded the first hospital on Kos and grew it to treat blood disorders. Famous for scurvy prevention on ships (Captain Cook). Became commercially grown in Britain 1808 and railways were critical in transporting this fragile crop. Called 'poor man's bread', it was sold in cones in Victorian London. It is now branded as a 'superfood'. It thrives on spring water, constant temperature 10 degrees C. Poly culture now used for year round growth. Best not to eat wild watercress because of life threatening liver fluke.</li><li>• Alresford is a major watercress growing hub with an annual Watercress Festival ( May 20<sup>th</sup> 2018)</li><li>• <b>Easton's</b> name originates from Old English: east tun : enclosure /farmstead /village/estate. Now a major commuter village.</li></ul>
2.	Cross the River Itchen grass meadows through a small gate <i>Cattle often grazing- dogs on leads, shut gates.</i> Short walk to main River Itchen over Monet style bridge at Martyr Worthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A small channel of the Itchen is good for pooh stick and dog games</li><li>• Pause at the <b>interpretation sign</b> by the River Itchen, 28 miles long(45km) one of world's premier fly fishing rivers and highly protected.</li><li>• You may see ducks, swans, herons, brown trout, grayling, an egret.</li><li>• Any rainbow trout have escaped from upstream fish farms.</li></ul>
3.	Walk North up quiet lane past Martyr Worthy church: St Swithun's towards B3047	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spot the <b>Watercress Way waymarkers</b>, designed in 2017 by the founding charity, established 2015.</li><li>• The earliest mention of a <b>church</b> at Martyr Worthy is 1251, church linked to convent of St. Swithun</li></ul>
4.	Cross B3047 road at war memorial <i>Take care with busy road crossing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pass by the Listed war memorial English Heritage</li></ul>
5.	Follow Bridget's Lane North until old railway bridge Turn left down gentle ramped incline onto old railway track The trail follows the track bed east for a mile through cuttings and over embankments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1865 The 17 ml <b>Mid Hants Railway</b> from Alton to Kings Worthy opened. Train drivers swapped tokens at Kings Worthy for safety on the single track. It was nicknamed <b>The Watercress Line</b> because of its role in transporting watercress to London</li><li>• In WWII the line transported many troops.</li><li>• 1950's diesel replaced steam trains</li><li>• 1973 despite a decade of public outcry the line closed, victim to Beeching cuts. The line was torn up and sold off cheaply. Volunteers opened the Watercress Line again for tourists in 1977 Alresford- Alton. However, this section could not be reopened because of the construction of the M3 and several houses were built on top of the line in Alresford (Whistlestop)and Itchen Abbas(Beeching!)</li><li>• 2016 a mile stretch was opened to public access.4000 miles nationally are now open for public access.</li><li>• Distinctive viaducts, chalk cuttings and embankments act as a wildlife corridor with a mosaic of habitats</li><li>• <b>Look out for artefacts:</b> old telegraph poles, cinder, sleepers, remnants of an old crushed stone ballast box ( for the trackbed )as well as wildlife: King Alfred's Cakes fungi (black nodular fungi, used for tinder in medieval times), wild garlic, badgers, buzzards, red kites, and chalk blue butterflies.</li><li>• The Watercress line route was partly used as the Northern boundary of the <b>South Downs National Park</b>, who is now very active in helping maintenance and help check natural plant succession and over the next few years their tree felling should increase biodiversity by allowing more sunlight</li></ul>
6.	Exit old railway line at 5 barred gate and smaller gate next to original Station Stop near the 5 barred gate old telegraph pole lying on ground next to old station Here is the first <b>leaflet box</b> installed on the Watercress Way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You are now in <b>Itchen Abbas</b>, the largest village in the upper Itchen valley, dating from Saxon times. A Roman Villa site lies North of the track, and the name Itchen is pre Celtic. Icene or Itchen Abbas was mentioned in Domesday Book 1086 . Abbas comes from Middle English : abbesse, of the nuns- Abbey of St Mary Winchester Nunnaminster</li><li>• <b>Itchen Abbas station</b>, now built on, had a loop for passing trains and goods yard</li><li>• The station was originally built with two platforms in 1865. In the 1930s just a single track serving the down platform was kept open. The station was de staffed in the 1960s, the line closed in 1973, and station demolished in the 1980s for 5 houses, with parts of the platform left the garden of 'Station House'.</li></ul>

7.	<p>Turn left , head east along pavement of B3047.Cross over Station Road.  <b>For a longer route follow stages 8-15</b>  <b>For the short route skip to stage 15</b>  <i>You are near The Plough pub here</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not much of the WW has housing built on the line of the track. Many have names associated, eg Station House here or Whistlestop in Alresford on New Farm Rd</li> <li>• You are near to another sponsor pub., The Plough once called The Trout, just past the Village Hall. A 19th Century Coaching Inn, it is famous for Charles Kingsley who stayed and possibly wrote some of The Water Babies there.</li> <li>• It is worth a diversion left up Northington Road to admire the striking viaduct , <b>see stage 8</b></li> </ul>
8.	<p>Turn left North up Northington Rd, then cross the road up School Lane.  Follow the road through Little Hayes houses to a footpath on the left, which brings you back parallel to the old railway track on your left.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before crossing over to School Lane divert to see the striking <b>1865 viaduct</b>, built to cross one of the many dry tributary valleys of the River Itchen. These valleys were probably carved out of frozen chalk during the ice age when the area resembled Arctic tundra</li> <li>• Just North of viaduct on left in the scrub is an artefact: an upturned piece of track</li> <li>• Good views to the left from School Lane and Little Hayes of the viaduct and embankment</li> <li>• Glimpses of refurbished <b>Abbey House</b> to the right across pony paddocks. Now a private house this was a rectory built originally in 1693.</li> </ul>
9.	<p>At Rectory Lane turn right and left into Baring Close. Go through a metal kissing gate and follow the footpath to the right down to the B3047</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The railway bridge at Rectory Lane has been filled in, with M3 construction waste and possibly waste from Winchester's The Brooks mall development</li> <li>• The railway embankment to the left is quite striking, filling in another dry valley system. Badgers abound here.</li> </ul>
10.	<p>At the B3047 turn left, <b>not</b> up the ancient Three Castles Path drove but the next left turn, up some grassy steps parallel to the main road and hugging a vineyard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hampshire is regaining its reputation for <b>viticulture</b>. Hattingley Valley vineyard is just a few miles to the East. Vineyards were once numerous: 46 are listed in Domesday Book in the South of England.</li> <li>• The dissolution of monasteries by Henry VIII and climate change with a mini Ice Age in the 17<sup>th</sup> C, are responsible for their demise until this century when climate warming dominates.</li> </ul>
11.	<p>Follow the footpath across the B047 across the Itchen floodplain meadows to its south side <i>Several footbridges and boardwalks. Wellies! Dogs on leads.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is quite heavily wooded and wet area, known as 'fen' habitat protected by its SSSI status. (Site of special Scientific Value). Used as flooded meadows up to turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. where the meadows were deliberately flooded to encourage grass growth for sheep farming</li> <li>• Glimpses of trout fish farm</li> </ul>
12.	<p>Turn left along Lovington Lane, towards Alresford. Turn right along Itchen Way before Yavington Farm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old chalk quarries to the right, carved into the Itchen river bluff, ie the edge of the valley cut by the river over millennia.</li> <li>• New kissing gates installed 2018 by the Ramblers</li> </ul>
13.	<p>Follow the Itchen/St Swithun's Way along edge of Avington golf course, <b>with a small coffee shop</b>, back to Lovington Rd. <i>Grazing sheep here</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panoramic views of the valley, with the old Watercress Line an obvious well wooded linear feature mid distance</li> <li>• You pass through a beautiful chalk downland 'beech hanger'(wood at top of a hill) .</li> <li>• The Golf course is an example of farm diversification</li> </ul>
14.	<p>Turn right onto Avington Rd, with Avington Park to the left, back to St Johns Church</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Avington Park's</b> current owners, the Bullen's, are <b>a sponsor of the WW</b>. This is a Grade 1 registered 17<sup>th</sup> C Historic Building /Ancient monument, associated with Charles II and Nell Gwynne. The parkland shows centuries of landscaping.</li> <li>• <b>St Johns</b> is partly Norman (chancel arch), but was rebuilt 1867 in 12<sup>th</sup> C style using flint and Bath stone</li> <li>• There is uncertainty about the actual route of the 112 miles <b>Pilgrims' Way</b> (Winchester to Canterbury) The current route is waymarked by a shell, common to pilgrimages and 2 croziers (hooked staffs), representing St Swithun and St Thomas a Beckett.</li> </ul>
15.	<p>Take the Itchen/Pilgrims way west to Chilland before crossing the Itchen to the south side.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look out for the ancient <b>lime tree avenue</b> and memorial garden on the site of <b>Lord Grey's</b> old cottage on the river banks. Grey was Foreign Secretary in 1914 and took Britain to war, famed for his saying 'the lights are going out in Europe'. In 1910 he took USA President Roosevelt on a 6 mile walk Tichbourne-Easton, recording 38 bird species. The Migratory Bird Treaty protecting N American birds is cited as being passed because of this walk.</li> <li>• 1930s sale of much of Avington estate created the large house plots at right angles to the Itchen</li> </ul>
16.	<p>Turn left then follow the permissive gravel path SW across Itchen meadows</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will pass the <b>old water mill</b> and water 'race'. <b>Chilland</b> was once a major ford across the Itchen.</li> <li>• A special dog swimming area is built into the fenced off river. You may see the distinctive <b>White Park cattle (Hants and IOW Wildlife Trust)</b></li> </ul>
17.	<p>Turn right along Avington road west back to the Chestnut Horse and Easton</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep an eye out for kites, herons in the meadows and hares in the large arable fields</li> </ul>