



Walks from the Watercress Way No 8 /8: Oxen, Kings & Bubbly

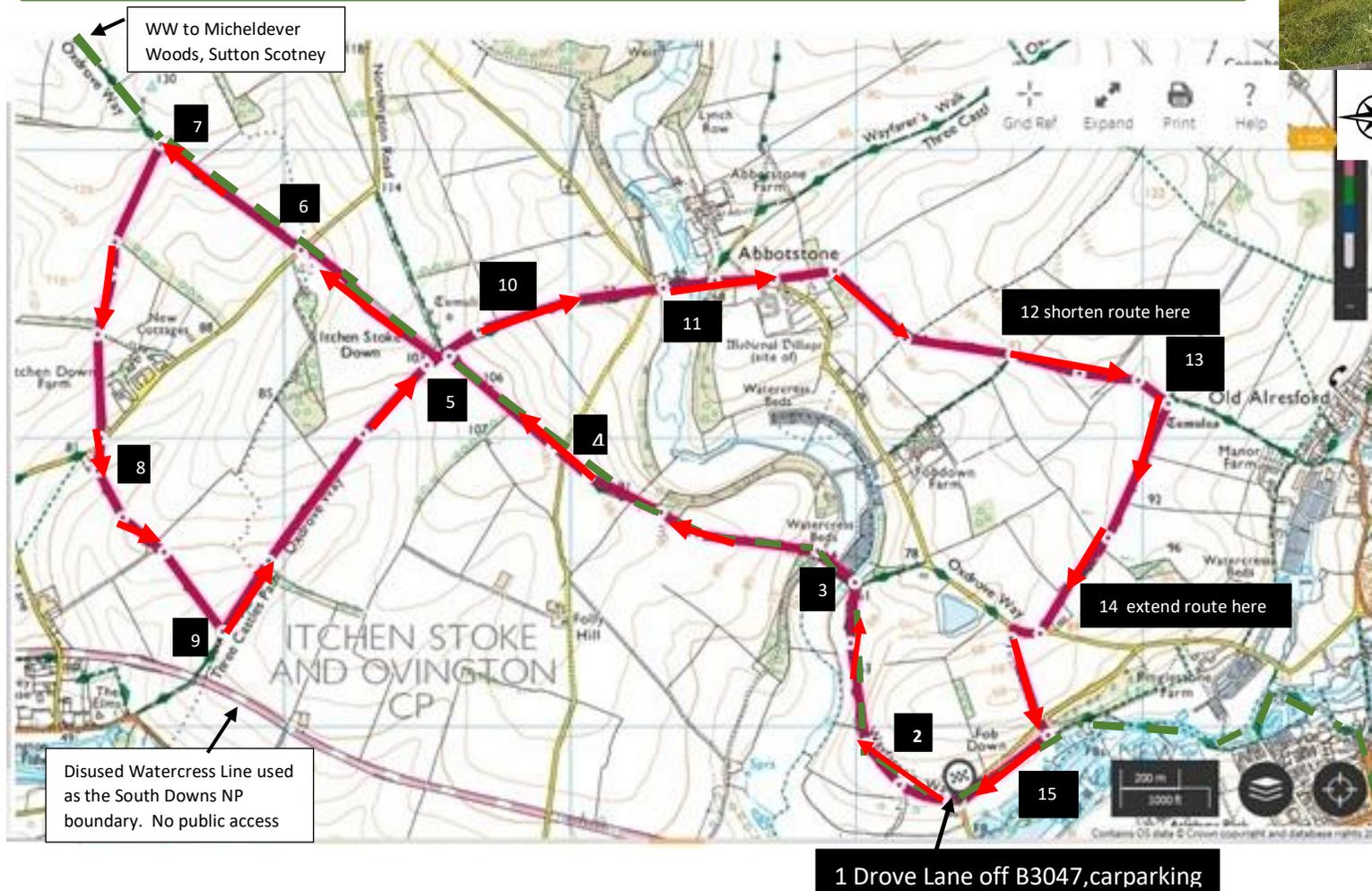
A circular walk from Alresford to Itchen Abbas & Abbotstone 11.5 km/ 7.2 miles

This shorter circular walk follows the NE part of the WW. It can be shortened /lengthened & is suitable for children, and dogs under control. It is on grassy and gravel tracks and some roads without pavements. Some tracks can become overgrown. Wear appropriate clothing.



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

The route follows approx. 2.6 miles / 4.2 kms of the WW through rolling chalk downland, with stunning views across the Rivers Itchen, Arle and Candover. It starts just outside the South Downs National Park, west of Alresford, & follows the Oxdrove, Wayfarers Walk & Three Castles Path



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Please consider a donation to use this route map. www.thewatercressway.org.uk Charity No 1167675



		Directions	Watch points:
The Watercress Way	1.	From carparking area off Drove Lane go under height restriction barrier heading west along Wayfarers Walk, waymarked as the WW	The water meadows looking SW from Drove Rd were WW2 tank training grounds. The old Watercress Line can be seen mid distance, with many trees cut down from ash dieback.
	2.	Follow the grassy bridleway for 1 km around southern flank of Fob Down, go under a height restriction barrier	Fob Down had a Romano British settlement. The Wayfarers Walk is a 70 mile path between Inkpen Beacon in N Hampshire to Emsworth on the south coast.
	3.	Take the first left, over the Candover stream and its watercress beds, up a slight hill signposted Wayfarers Walk, heading NW.	The Candover is a rare spring fed chalk tributary of The Itchen (only about 200 globally). Watercress production from the areas clear water boomed from the Mid Hants Railway of 1965, and gave the name to the heritage railway of today and the name of the Watercress Way trail.
	4.	After approx. 1 km go under a height restriction barrier, cross straight over minor road, Folly Hill /Itchen Stoke Rd, under another barrier and follow the bridleway NW	Fabulous views here NE across the Candover valley. Look out for a memorial to the 3 Spitfire pilots killed in a crash during training here in 1944 , due to be erected 2021.
	5.	Another 1 km until a staggered crossroads of 5 bridleways. Take the second left, following the WW markers, slightly downhill for ½ km to Northington Rd	The Oxdrove is a West-East track, vital before the railway era to move livestock (oxen, sheep, turkeys, geese, horses) to markets. It is traceable west to Stockbridge & east to The Woolpack Inn (clues in the names here!), then Guildford/London. Parts are gravel/grassy tracks, parts now roads.
	6.	Go under height restriction barrier, cross Northington Rd and under second barrier uphill, following WW signs.	Itchen Down was the location of famous 19 th C cricket matches. Look out for buzzards and red kites and occasional ancient specimen oaks in the middle of fields.
3 Castles Path	7.	Leave the WW by taking the first left, an obtuse angled turn downhill. The track is metalled here.	Lovely view here SW across to Winchester, St Catherine's Hill, Cheesefoot Head. The WW carries on to Itchen and Micheldever Woods, S Wonston and Sutton Scotney. The whole anti-clockwise route is on the WW website as a pdf.
	8.	At Northington Rd cross diagonally over to follow the undulating grassy bridleway with a hedge on the left and a small copse with abandoned farm buildings on the right.	Look for the linear tree belt to the right which is the Watercress Line's embankment across a dry valley. The fields nowadays are for arable crops: wheat, barley, rape, linseed & pharmaceutical morphine poppies. In autumn you may see cover nitrate fixing crops like purple borage/ Phacelia
	9.	Take the first left after a small metal gate, and follow The Three Castles Path/ Oxdrove, a narrow hedged path which climbs steadily after one dip back to the 5 Bridleway crossroads.	The 3 Castles Path is a 96 km (60 mile) footpath linking Winchester Great Hall via Odiham to Windsor Castle, based on C.13 th journeys of King John at the time of the Magna Carta. Take a short detour to glimpse the abandoned Watercress Line. Instead of turning left at the metal gate go right to the abandoned railway bridge & cutting, rewilded since 1973's closure. Return to point9.
Abbotstone & Fob Down	10.	Carry straight on at the crossroads, the third bridleway exit, heading downhill NE to Abbotstone, signed The Wayfarers Walk.	Abbotstone has a long history. Its name may derive from Abeds Dune (Celtic fortified hill) or Abbotston,(Saxon settlement).The medieval vilage marked on the OS map is recorded in The Domesday Book, and flourished until the early 14th C. It is now just mounds in fields either side of the road, protected by English Heritage, as are the garden walls of Abbotstone House. Built by Charles Paulet, Duke of Bolton it was to replace Basing House destroyed by Cromwell. It was destroyed in 1759 but its parkland was famous for its beauty, even mentioned by Daniel Defoe. Just to the north of here is The Grange , a 17 th C house transformed in 1816 to a Greek temple, now a focus of opera productions
	11.	At the minor road bear towards the right to cross the River Candover again. Carry straight on up the hill along this road, ignoring signs to the left of the Wayfarers Walk. Take the bridleway at the hilltop as the road bears slightly right.	
	12.	Carry straight on ignoring the first bridleway to the right Take the second bridleway right heading south to New Alresford NOT to Old Alresford.	You can shorten the route here by taking the first right bridleway to Fob Down Farm then turn left for a short distance along the road, and first right on a bridleway down a hill bringing you back to point 3. Retrace your steps back to carparking by bearing left under height restriction barrier
	13.	Turn right at Abbotstone Rd/Oxdrove Way. After a few 100m turn left through a tall gate footpath up over Fob Down vineyard	Views to Old Alresford church & New Alresford , founded by the Bishop of Winchester in the C12th/13 th and planned as a T shaped town. The Norman houses were repeatedly burnt down by fires over the centuries, but the the Georgian houses remain today .
	14.	Go over Fob Down hill and down to a second tall gate	Can extend route into Alresford from here. Extensive vineyards were recently planted for bubbly sparkling wine!.
15.	Cross diagonally over Drove Lane, to re-join the WW footpath which then bends right. Head west (right) back to the start.	Look left, south to see the imposing white Georgian Arlebury House , now flats. You will see the many ornamental and fish lakes made by damming the River Arle , another tributary of the Itchen.	