

The Writers' Way is a 13 mile trail linking Alton to surrounding villages through some beautiful countryside. It uses a mixture of paths and rural lanes and is open to walkers, cyclists and, where possible, horse-riders.

Several famous authors were closely connected to the countryside here, hence the route's name:

- The novelist Jane Austen lived at Chawton and was very familiar with the surrounding countryside, taking regular walks with her family and friends. The Austen's beautifully-decorated house, museum and cottage gardens are well worth a visit.
- Gilbert White lived in Selborne and was curate of nearby Farringdon; his detailed wildlife observations and fascination with nature, conveyed in his hugely influential book, 'The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne', transformed the way we think about the natural world today.
- William Cobbett was born in nearby Farnham to a farming family; self-educated, he campaigned for better living conditions for rural families and as research he undertook long rides on horseback through the countryside. He describes much of the area in his book 'Rural Rides' and was inspired to visit Selborne after being given a copy of Gilbert White's book.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council worked in partnership to identify the route and to improve many of the paths. We hope you will now enjoy using it!

Who can use Writers' Way?

The route is open to walkers (and dogs) and cyclists and is mostly on paths and rural lanes; **please take particular care to look for traffic at the points shown on the maps and be aware that parts of the route can be muddy, so are most suited to those with walking boots or mountain bikes!** Horse-riders are also welcome but are advised against riding through the busy urban area of Alton; Watery Lane is the first off-road section leaving Alton. The route is 13 miles in total; to return you can use the same route, other rights of way as marked on the maps, the bus (walkers only) or the steam railway (walkers and cyclists). There is also an 11-mile circular option for walkers, returning to Chawton from Farringdon (shown overleaf and on the map for section 2).

SECTION 1: CHAWTON - ALTON - SELBORNE (7 miles)

What will I see? The section starts in the picturesque village of Chawton, just outside Alton. Here is the pretty 17th century house where Jane Austen lived with her mother and sister and wrote her six novels; with its lovely country garden and authentic interior, it conveys life as Jane would have known it. The site is generally open every day from early March to Christmas eve (01420 83262; www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk). Jane's letters refer to the 'Great House' where her brother lived; this is nearby Chawton House, now a fascinating library fostering research and understanding of early women writers. It has extensive



©Jane Austen's House Museum

grounds including terraces, a lime tree avenue and a 'ha-ha' and is open to visitors from late March to late October (01420 595908 www.chawtonhouse.org). Neighbouring St Nicholas' church has several memorials to the Austen family including the graves of Jane's mother and sister.



©Jane Austen's House Museum

Leaving Chawton, you travel through the busy market town of Alton, which has much to draw the visitor back, including the Curtis Museum (01420 82802; www.hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/curtis-museum) which houses a wonderful array of objects including the celebrated Roman cup found near Selborne and an impressive Anglo Saxon buckle. There is a Jane Austen Trail at the museum, highlighting people and objects that would have been familiar and giving a picture of what it was like to live in Alton at the

time. The 11th Century St Lawrence's Church was part of the Battle of Alton, a skirmish in the Civil War. Royalists were surprised by a Parliamentary force and were beaten back to the church. They were eventually defeated and the commanding officer and some of his men were shot in the church (there are still bullet holes in the west door!).

Climbing the hill out of Alton, you cross the steam railway and, once past the dual carriageway, you are in gently rolling countryside, a mosaic of fields and woodland. Watery Lane is a beautiful sunken path, with tree roots clinging to the bank sides and a stream bed crunching under your feet. Briefly passing through the hamlet of West Worldham, you are then back onto tracks and lanes, along the edge of woodland and then the southern side of a valley which brings you gently into Selborne. The second author for whom this trail is named, Gilbert White, was a lifetime resident of Selborne; see the next section for details of the village and his house.

What is the path like?

From Chawton the route uses a short section of lane, an underpass under the dual carriageway (cyclists please dismount here) and then it turns sharp left onto a track up to the leisure centre. Through Alton the route is on road/pavement; leaving the centre of the town it follows the road up and over a fairly steep hill, down the other side and back under the dual carriageway (take care here) then immediately right onto a small lane. You are then on a mixture of gently undulating tracks and rural lanes all the way to Selborne, travelling through farmland and woodland.

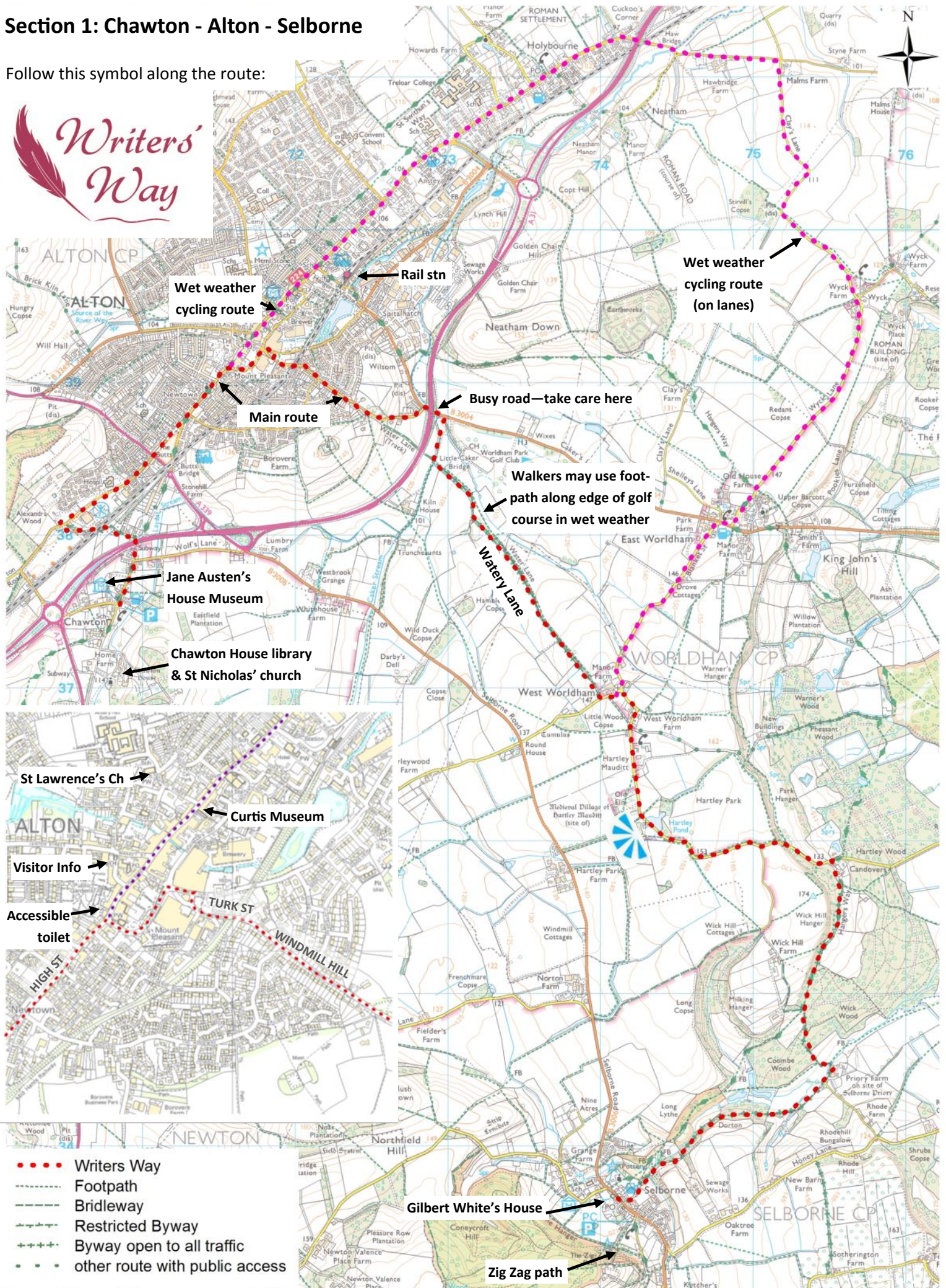
The first of these is Watery Lane - it has partly been resurfaced but as its name implies it sometimes carries a stream. This means that at the northern end the surface is uneven and after rain the water can be a foot or more deep. At such time walkers may wish to use a footpath which runs alongside Water Lane on the edge of the golf course; an alternative route for cyclists starts from Alton (shown on the map in pink dots).



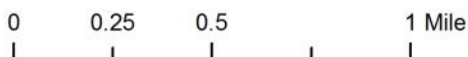
Watery Lane

Section 1: Chawton - Alton - Selborne

Follow this symbol along the route:



- Writers Way
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- Restricted Byway
- ++++ Byway open to all traffic
- other route with public access





What facilities are available?

Refreshments: Chawton has a pub serving meals (The Greyfriar) and two tearooms - Cassandra's Cup and Chawton House Library. Alton has the full range of facilities you would expect from a busy market town. In Selborne, the Selborne Arms serves meals and there is also the Gilbert White House Tea Parlour (no entry fee required).

Toilets: There are public toilets in Alton and in Selborne (in the village car park, at the southern end of the village).

Transport: Alton has a mainline rail station, the Watercress Line steam railway to Alresford and a good network of buses; one option to return from Selborne at the end of your walk is to use the 38 bus (runs weekdays approx. 2 hourly). There is some parking in Chawton, including a village car park - please park considerately, avoiding the coach bays and only use the pub car park if you are visiting the pub. Alton has several pay and display car parks. Selborne also has a village car park, towards the southern end of the village.

SECTION 2: SELBORNE - FARRINGDON - FOUR MARKS (6 miles)

What will I see? This section starts in the beautiful village of Selborne, where there is much to see. The Revd Gilbert White was an amazing man. His systematic records of the birds, animals and plants he saw each day, noted over decades in the 1700s, together with measurements of the weather and his observations of the inter-dependence of living things, have led to him being described as one of the fathers of modern ecology. His house tells the story of his life and work and the extensive gardens are beautifully kept. Both are open every day except Monday from mid-February through to December (www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk 01420 511275)

William Cobbett describes the countryside around Selborne in 1823: "Nothing can surpass in beauty these dells and hillocks and hangers, which last are so steep that it is impossible to ascend them, except by means of a serpentine path." Writers' Way uses a gentler route, but the zig-zag path Cobbett refers to is nearby (see map); it is very steep but well worth the effort!



Church window

White describes the beech trees in this hanger as *"the most lovely of all forest trees, whether we consider its smooth rind or bark, its glossy foliage, or graceful pendulous boughs"*.

Both White and Cobbett noted the ancient yew tree in the churchyard and made very similar observations, finding it to be several centuries old even then and 23 feet in circumference, with a short trunk and healthy, broad spread. Sadly it was felled by the 1990 great storm and despite careful re-planting did not survive. However, in the last few years a new, self-seeded yew has grown alongside the old. Inside the church are beautiful windows showing the birds and animals which White wrote about - a very fitting tribute.



Gilbert White's

Gilbert White was Curate at Farringdon for over 20 years, so would have known the paths and lanes you have used very well. One of his successors, the eccentric Revd Thomas Massey, left his mark in a different way: "Massey's Folly" is a huge, ornate Victorian building constructed over thirty years by just one bricklayer, one labourer, and one carpenter, supervised by the Revd Massey (not open to the public but easily viewed from the road).

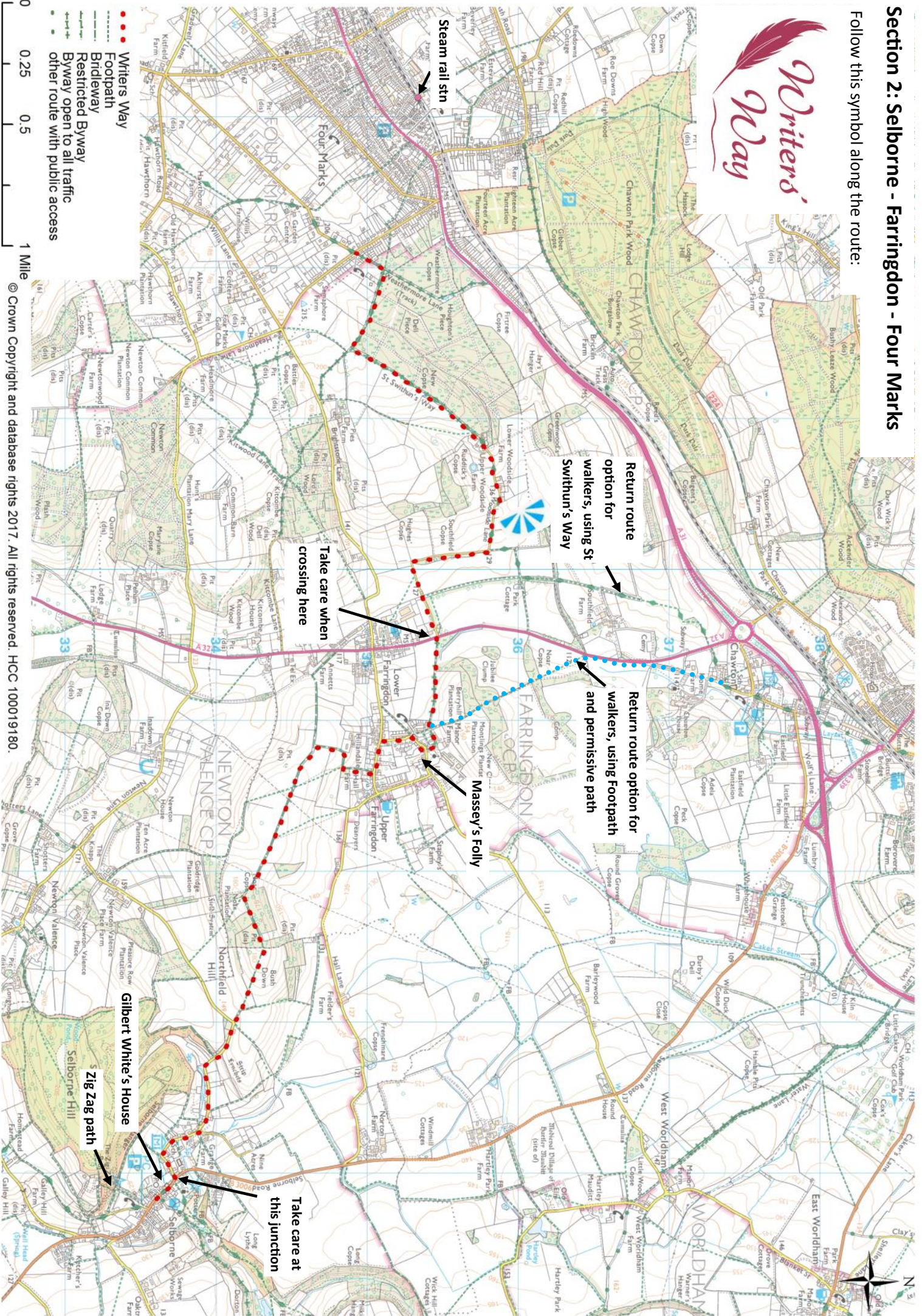


Massey's Folly

If you are a walker, you have two options at this point in order to complete an 11-mile circular walk back to Chawton (see the map).

Section 2: Selborne - Farringdon - Four Marks

Follow this symbol along the route:



Steam rail stn

Four Marks

Take care when crossing here

Massey's Folly

Gilbert White's House

Zig Zag path

Take care at this junction

Return route option for walkers, using St Swithun's Way

Return route option for walkers, using Footpath and permissive path

0 0.25 0.5 1 Mile

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- Writers' Way
- - - - Footpath
- - - - Bridleway
- - - - Restricted Byway
- - - - Byway open to all traffic
- - - - other route with public access

Leaving Farringdon, you cross the disused Meon Valley Railway; for those that remember the old adverts for Milk Tray chocolates, it was from this bridge that the man in black leapt onto the moving train roof! Look back as you leave the lane for views across to where you started.

Four Marks lies at the end of the route, so named as it is located at the boundaries of four parishes. The steam railway through the village opened in 1865 and this is its highest point. The line provided an alternative route between London and Southampton and, besides transporting locally produced watercress, was particularly important for military traffic between the army town of Aldershot and the military embarkation port at Southampton. Electrification of the line from London to Alton in 1937 meant that it became necessary to change trains at Alton and, together with the growth in motorised transport, passenger numbers fell until it was eventually closed by British Railways in February 1973. Today, you can experience the age of steam once again, travelling through the picturesque countryside; there are special events throughout the year including steam galas, Thomas the Tank Engine days, War on the Line and an annual walk along the line in November.



What is the path like?

You leave Selborne on a rural lane (take care at the junction with the main road) and then join a chalky track up and over a rise and drop into Farringdon on a sunken path. Through the village and onwards, the route is on tarmac lanes and then a wide gravel track through woodland to Four Marks.



What facilities are available?

Refreshments:

In Selborne, the Selborne Arms serves food as does the Gilbert White House Tea Parlour (no entry fee required). Farringdon has two pubs, both serving food - the Golden Pheasant (cyclists/riders are advised to dismount and use the pavement along the main road) and the Rose & Crown. Four Marks offers the Tree House coffee shop, The Highpoint Bar at the golf club, Nosh Cafe Bar, and a parade of shops near the car park marked on the map including a supermarket, a fish & chip shop and Tandoori.

Toilets: There are public toilets in Selborne (in the village car park, at the southern end of the village).

Transport: Selborne has a village car park, towards the southern end of the village; in Four Marks there is both a car park and on-road parking (please park considerately). To return you can use the same route or other rights of way as marked on the maps. If you started in Chawton/Alton, there are several options:

- Walkers have two options to complete a circular route, as shown on the map: the blue dotted route over Berry Hill or the St Swithun's Way, which uses in part the line of the old Meon Valley Railway.
- The 64 bus will take walkers back to Alton (half-hourly Monday-Saturday; every two hours on a Sunday)
- The Watercress Line steam railway (01962 733810 www.watercressline.co.uk) carries dogs and cycles for free and operates every weekend from mid-February to the end of October, daily during school holidays and midweek from May until September. Note that the station in Four Marks is listed as 'Medstead' on the timetable.



We hope you have enjoyed using the Writers' Way!

For other great things to do in Hampshire, try www.visit-hampshire.co.uk