



The Watercress Way trail guide



Anti-clockwise: Alresford – Micheldever Woods - Sutton Scotney – South Wonston – Kings Worthy – Itchen Abbas - Alresford

The Watercress Way charity was registered in 2016 after locals campaigned to open for public access a mile section (1.6km) of the Mid-Hants/Watercress Line at Itchen Abbas, closed in 1973.

- The aim is to increase access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to the 11 km/7miles abandoned Watercress Line between Alresford-Kings Worthy, and the 6.4 kms/4 miles Didcot-Newbury-Southampton line (DNSL) between Kings Worthy-Sutton Scotney. Over 8km/5 miles of old railway track is now accessible for walkers and cyclists, and most of it for horse riders.
- Both old railways were important in starting the Victorian boom in watercress production, hence the name of the trail. Other rights of way, including historic livestock droves, minor roads and footpaths, have been chosen to make a circular 44km/26 mile route, waymarked for walkers.
- The route may alter slightly in the future if more disused railway line can be opened for public use.
- Our **website** shows a **cycling route**, several **horse riding** routes and suggested **shorter circular routes** all based on the main Watercress Way. www.thewatercressway.org.uk

		Guidance and points of interest	
Sections		The trail follows parts of other routes: Millennium, Arle, Three Castles, Wayfarers Way, Pilgrims Way, Three Castles, Wayfarers and St Swithun's Way. There are several interpretation boards to help along the way. Distances below are approximate. We recommend using an OS map/app with this guide.	
1.	GEORGIAN ALRESFORD & River Arle pavement walking 2.3 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Alresford railway station, visitor centre and car park walk straight ahead, north, down Station Rd towards the town centre, past public toilets. Opposite the public toilets, turn right after the Police Station apartments along a small walled path on right, through St. John's churchyard. Emerge at top of Broad St, cross West St to go gently downhill. Pass by all the shops, restaurants, and houses to the bottom of the hill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Visitors Centre for the Watercress Line is worth a visit: named after one of its original directors Edward Knight, Jane Austen's nephew. Find the plaque on the public toilets by Drs surgery about Portland spy ring Look for Napoleonic graves in St Johns churchyard New Alresford is hardly new, being a planned settlement dating back to Bishop de Lucy in the C.13th It is a remarkably well preserved Georgian town centre, with many surviving from its last major fire in 1689. The houses have long narrow plots called burgage plots Livestock, especially sheep, fairs were held in Broad St for centuries, the last being 1972 Look out for Nos 48 blacksmith, No 50 US Army HQ WW2 and the Old Post House. Look at all the old coaching entrances now garages or converted into the main building, as in The Swan and Bell pubs.
2.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turn left at Ladywell, follow the little spring fed stream on left and the Millennium and Arle Valley trail along bank of the River Arle. Pass the historic Fulling Mill along a narrow path by the River Arle, to the road called The Dean, past Amy's wildfowl feeding station Turn right, do not go up Dean Rd 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chalk springs are the clue to watercress production. Look for pike, trout, swans, ducks and voles This area was once famed for tanneries and fulling mills. You pass the C13 Fulling Mill and ancient ford across the River Arle. An information board here has an image of a horse and flatbed cart pulling watercress from the beds, just visible on the other side of the river, up to Alresford Station. Victorians called watercress sold in paper cones in London: 'poor man's bread' .

3.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue along the river edge, past Arlebury Park recreation ground and carpark to the left Pass the historic Eel house and climb gently up hill with Drove House on the left. The path is between its fence and narrow field. Keep heading straight on /west to Drove Lane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just after the entrance to Arlebury Recreation ground look for Hambone Junior Dog grave plaque just to the right of the footpath. He was a US army mascot in WW2 Look for futuristic modern Drove House on the right. Have a look at the information boards on the C.19th Eel house- fascinating links to the Sargasso Sea The water meadows looking south west here from Drove Rd were used for WW2 tank training The old Watercress Line can be seen mid distance, with many trees cut down from 2019 from ash dieback.
4.	The DROVES (metalled roads and grassy) grassy tracks c. 15 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross Drove Lane , under a height restriction barrier and follow Wayfarers Walk, 1 km grassy bridleway around southern flank of Fob Down Turn first left uphill after another height restriction barrier along a drove heading NW away from Alresford, signposted Wayfarers Way. After about 1 km cross Itchen Stoke minor road (two height restriction barriers) and carry on for another 1 km to a cross roads of 5 bridleways. At crossroads with Three Castles Path take the third on the right heading downhill NW 1/5 km to the minor Northington road crossing, and go straight over, under the two height restriction barriers. You now have 2.5 km of a gradually climbing track out of the Itchen Valley over Itchen Down then down to Micheldever woods. Ignore all turnings to the left taking you south/SW down to the Itchen river, ie keep bearing right until you meet the minor road from A33 to Totford / Candover valley. You are at the eastern edge of Micheldever and Itchen Woods Turn left along the road. No pavements, and a busy road for 3 kms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The water meadows looking south west here from Drove Rd were used for WW2 tank training. The old Watercress Line can be seen mid distance, with many trees cut down from 2019 from ash dieback. Extensive new vineyards planted recently around Fob Down, for sparkling wine. Fob Down has a Romano-British settlement- perhaps wine making occurred here 200 years ago! The Wayfarers Walk is a 70 mile path between Inkpen Beacon in N Hampshire to Emsworth at the coast Look east across the 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 1086 Domesday Book. It flourished until the 14th C, possibly falling victim to the Black Death. The Three Castles path is a 60 mile route from Windsor to Winchester via Odiham, commemorating King Johns 13th C journey. At Itchen Down look out for a trig point 130m above sea level on the left and a windpump obscured by tall conifers and vines. Itchen Down: was the location of 19th C cricket Itchen Woods and Micheldever Woods are working forests with mix of conifers and deciduous trees and springtime bluebell carpets
5.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This road section is actually part of the Oxdrove, labelled on maps as Alresford Drove .Go under the M3 bridge to the A33 dual carriage crossing at the place of worship locally known as Lunways The Oxdrove continues as a bridleway and is partly gravelled for almost 4 km to Stoke Charity Rd at Wallers Ash. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are back on the Oxdrove, called Alresford Drove on maps, a West-East track traceable on maps back to Stockbridge and east to Totford and the Woolpack pub and beyond. It is either still a gravel track or has been metalled into a road. Lunways was a coaching inn used for Winchester Racecourse at South Wonston in 18th and 19th C.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross straight over and follow road towards South Wonston (no pavement) until see first right, a farm track heading north to West Stoke Farm • Follow the grassy bridleway for 2 kms until you get to a staggered cross roads of paths near some farm buildings on the right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may have noticed how straight many of the roads are in this area. Many date back to Roman times, such as the A33 • Wallers Ash is a typical shelter belt created of conifers or beech trees to help the corridor movement of livestock in these open rolling chalk hills without many hedges. The railway era led to their decline. • Look for the plaque on the flint wall around W Stoke farm, commemorating its previous role in the c19th as a pub for passing drovers, herding livestock to Alresford markets and beyond..
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You can shorten the WW trail by 5-6 km by turning first left or South West towards Wonston Manor Farm and South Wonston and bypass Sutton Scotney completely. To do the whole WW trail carry on without turning left or right until get to short metalled section leading to junction with Wonston Lane minor road.

<p>6.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red;">SUTTON SCOTNEY LOOP</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tracks, pavement, recreation ground, 5-6kms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn first right heading North by the old farm buildings on a bridleway for 1 km • Bear left on footpath for 0.5 km to Wonston Lane. Several stiles/kissing gates along here. Half way along here you could detour north to the Wonston Arms pub • At Wonston Lane turn left then after 0.4km first right up a footpath approximately 0.75 km known as Beggars Lane which turns into a gravel road servicing a few houses. • At the main Wonston -Stoke Charity road turn left along pavement, and take the first right into a cul-de-sac called Carthagea. • The footpath keeps to the left of the houses, and bends left at a sewage works to enter The Gratton Recreation Ground • Go right, north, keeping the River Dever on your right handside. Follow the path around the Gratton, passing some allotments . The trail now heads south in front of the Pavillion to the carpark by the Doctors surgery. • Enter the new housing development called Station Park past a lamppost, the site of the DNSL Sutton Scotney station goods yard. Follow the road around to the left and then take a right to go slightly downhill into Taylors Yard housing development • If time take a detour to the railway bridge • At Oxford Rd take a left and follow the pavement with Victoria Hall on your right. Cross the road into Victoria Hall carpark and use the gate/stile into some large fields for about 0.5 km. • The track bends left around a tall hedgerow to meet the Wonston Road again, slightly further south than Beggars Lane. Cross straight over and go up road to meet the bridleways junction at the old farm buildings. • A short distance after is the junction which takes you right/ south to South Wonston past the biogas digester. 	<p>Worth a short detour down to The Wonston Arms, award winning pub (no food)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So many roads in Hampshire are still called by their historic role: Beggar Drove • The Dever drains into the River Test. Only 320 such chalk streams occur globally. Look for brown trout and voles in this Site of Special Scientific Interest. It has long been diverted for fish ponds and watercress beds. Only few working watercress farms exist today. • Gratton Recreation Ground is award winning for its design, upkeep, and conservation: look for the wildflower meadow by its carpark near the allotments. On the other side of the carpark is the DNSL embankment. Have a look at the large information board by the allotments about the WW and Sutton Scotney station. Perhaps sit on our replica GWR bench! • After years of dereliction, Metis housing development was built in 2018 on the old Sutton Scotney station and goods yard. <p style="color: red;">DETOUR to Sutton Scotney railway bridge cleared by the WW charity in 2019: turn right in Station Park Rd, then left by its entrance parallel to road and grassy bank. See the interpretation sign at the bridge entrance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victoria hall was used by Lord Rothschild. Oxford St was part of the coaching route from Southampton to Oxford. One inn remains: The Coach and Horses. The Dever Stores convenience shop is just beyond Taylors Yard • Farming has almost obliterated the line of the DNSL here, but the line of telegraph posts across the fields indicates its original route. At Wonston Lane look left down the road to see the dismantled bridge of the old DNSL.
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7.	SOUTH WONSTON to KINGS WORTHY Gravel and grassy tracks, km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 2 kms of grassy and gravel tracks at South Wonston Farm crossroads turn left/ east. Follow this track for almost 1 km to South Wonston road, past allotments on the left. • Merge into the South Wonston road here (no pavement) for 0.5 km, until on the right you will see Drove Links Rd, a pot holed gravel track about 0.75 km long • Head right, south east, down Drove Links Rd. • At the junction with the Oxdrove, turn left/ east, under the height restriction bar. Shortly after you will see a path to the right leading steeply down a ramp onto old DNSL track bed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This part of the trail is full of artefacts from WW II : look out for pill box defences for the Worthy Down Airfield . • The two interpretation boards at the Oxdrove intersection and further south at Worthy Down Halt give a glimpse into the history of the area, including Spitfire testing and famous people, including Laurence Olivier and Bomber Harris, and its previous use as Winchester's C.18th-19th racecourse.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the old railway track bed (gravel and cinders) for 2 kms, passing Worthy Down Halt and going under Worthy Down railway bridge until you pass over the two distinctive red brick bridges of the old railway at Springvale, Kings Worthy . • You come off old railway down some steps or by doubling back down the west /right side of the embankment down a sloped narrow path. DO NOT OVERSHOOT THIS! • Turn left and go underneath the bridges heading east into Kings Worthy along grassy lane (Hookpit Farm lane) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The railways like these only had a single track. This meant a sophisticated swapping of tokens was needed by train drivers and station masters to ensure only one train was in operation at once. This is still practiced on The Watercress Line heritage railway today. • WATCH OUT FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THIS SECTION AS WE OPEN UP THE TRAIL via Woodhams Farm and Top Field and Kim Bishop Way

<p>8.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">KINGS WORTHY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pavements, roads, grassy tracks, recreation ground 1 km</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass under mainline railway via tunnel, under the height restriction barrier, to the road part of Hookpit Farm Lane • Take first right up Burnet Lane and follow the footpath on the right • Go through the kissing gate into field called Top Field you until reach scrubby woods which mask the Watercress Line track bed. • Follow the Kim Bishop’s Walk down to Wesley Rd • Go over a staggered crossing to Broadview with kissing gate at its entrance. Walk up this wide grassy hill which was once a cutting! Stop at Wesley Rd kissing gate to see the mosaic board and views west • Follow the grassy park east, passing through two more kissing gates until you meet Lovedon Lane. • Turn sharp right along the pavement, and next right along footpath leading into Eversley Park Recreation ground car park. • Walk around park edge or diagonally across to meet tree lined Hinton Lane running south east to the A33. • At the A33, follow the pavement to The Cart and Horses pub. • Cross over B3047 (with care, busy road) and go to the left of Kings Worthy PO with the Reading Room house on the left. This small lane takes you to the A33 dual carriageway, with a narrow pedestrian crossing point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mid-Hants and DNSL railways did not intersect, but they individually joined the main line London-Basingstoke-Southampton line here at Winchester Junction. In 2020 new access was negotiated by the Watercress way charity to access the old track bed rather than walking parallel to it. • Broadview is on top of a very deep infilled cutting of the Mid-Hants line. It is well named because of views SW across to Winchester. As you stand with the mosaic behind you imagine workers hand cutting the hard chalk in the 1860s, and JCBs filling it in for M3 waste in the 1980s. Like all the disused railway sections, active management is needed to maintain a clear access and improve habitat diversity by layering of shrubs and glades • The recreation ground was named after Lord Eversley, an eminent Victorian who lived at Abbots Worthy House and was an early advocate of opening spaces for public access There are several boards around the Park giving more information An ancient packhorse route linking Winchester to Basingstoke. runs across Eversley Park, called ‘The Whiteway’ because of the chalk surface. • To the left of Hinton Lane the scrubby field with woods are the old grounds of one of the large Victorian houses in the area: Kings Worthy House, burned down in the 1960s. The lodge survived. The Reading Room and almshouses remain from local Victorian benefactor Richard Turner. To the right are 2018 award winning eco houses. • The Cart and Horses pub was a farmhouse, becoming a pub in 1760 and coaching inn on the turnpike road from Winchester-Basingstoke.
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9.	<p style="text-align: center;">THE ITCHEN FLOODPLAIN Grassy paths, fields, minor roads , 2.7 km</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross the busy A33 and go down short incline on footpath waymarked St Swithun's Way through trees to Mill Lane. • Go through kissing gate and overgrown paddocks with a derelict farm on left to B3047, turn right for 100m NB No pavement before turning right into field down gentle slope to a stile and the M3 underpass by the River Itchen • Follow the path sharp left to kissing gate then right along field edge. Another kissing gate leads into the water meadows . Beware; often grazing cattle, dogs on leads • Through a kissing gate to cross Easton Rd, still heading east. • The footpath winds through fields with several kissing gates until Martyr Worthy lane. Turn left up lane past Martyr Worthy Church (no pavement, quiet road) • Cross B3047 by the War Memorial, and head north up gentle incline of Bridget's Lane for 0.25 km. (take care – no pavement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may glimpse Abbots Worthy House on the right(north) built for the Baring family in the early C.19th but in Tudor style. • Worth a short diversion at Mill Lane to look over the R Itchen small bridge and read interpretation board on the history of the local area • You will now be following the footpath marked St Swithun's Way. Martyr Worthy church wall has a Pilgrims Way sign of a scallop shell engraved in its wall • The lumps and bumps in the fields here are remnants of the floating meadow system seen at Itchen Stoke. • Look left to see St Mary's Church, Easton. This is probably the earliest church and largest in the upper Itchen valley, dating back to the Normans in the C.12th • It is worth a slight detour to the bridge at Martyr Worthy over the River Itchen with magnificent views. A footpath here leads to Easton with 2 pubs : the Cricketers and Chestnut Horse
10.	<p style="text-align: center;">ITCHEN ABBAS WATERCRESS LINE TRACK 1.6KM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you reach the railway bridge, turn left down a gentle ramp onto the old track bed of the Watercress line, turn right. • A relaxing, straight flat mile 1.6 km now along the old track, (note no roots!) • Right turn at the end of the track bed by some evergreen bushes hiding the garden of one of several houses built on old Itchen Abbas railway station yard. • Small ramp up to five barred gate and side access. A short gravel track brings you back to the B3047. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mid- Hants railway shut in 1973 after about 10 years of opposition to Beeching cuts. Look around for artefacts of the old railway line: concrete sleepers, gravel ballast, old signal telegraph poles. • You are walking not just on the track bed but on the South Downs National Park's northerly boundary • Look out for the first Watercress Way interpretation board and 3 sleeper style oak benches, erected by volunteers in 2018. • Lovely views south (right) over Itchen valley and north across the downs, cleared by volunteers. Look for log piles left for invertebrates •

<p>11.</p>	<p>ITCHEN ABBAS VILLAGE PAVEMENTS, LANES , TRACKS 2 KM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the B3047 turn left, follow the pavement downhill. • Carry on round the bend at the base of the hill and turn left up Northington Rd. You will see the village hall opposite, with the Plough pub just out of sight along the B3047) • Cross the road at the first right up School Lane. A short diversion up Northington Rd to see the viaduct is recommended (no pavements) • Pass the primary school then follow the pavement through a small housing estate called Little Hayes until you see a footpath to the left on the road bend to the right. • After a sharp left and right turn past tall beech trees, the footpath then parallels the old railway track • At Rectory Lane (no pavement) turn right then first left into Baring Close cul-de-sac. • Go through kissing gate at the end of the cul- de- sac. The path then turns right downhill via a small stile to a kissing gate onto B3047. • Take second on left up small steps , DO NOT turn up first left bridleway (3 Castles Path) You are now on a narrow permissive path not marked on maps, which parallels the B3047 and vineyards to the left. Can be overgrown in summer • After 0.25 km you need to cross the B3047 with great care and go onto the River Itchen meadows along a path with a wire fence to left , and a small distributary stream of the Itchen to the right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look left up Station Rd to see the site of Itchen Abbas Station .The original white railway cottages still exist. House names include The Halt and Beeching. • Worth a detour: turn right (north) to venture a few metres up Northington to see a the huge red brick viaduct dating from about 1895. • Good views back to the viaduct and embankment as you walk up School Lane • The railway track is to your left between Little Hayes and Rectory Lane, indicated by old concrete posts and wires fencing . Originally in a deep cutting, it was filled in post 1973 and levelled off with farm waste chalk • To the left after Baring Close, look for the beautiful tree lined embankment across a dry valley. • This vineyard is one of many being established for sparkling wine along the trail
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12.	RIVER MEADOWS AND RIVER CLIFF 3 kms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meadows nature reserve can be very muddy and several footbridges cross the multiple channels of the Itchen - May be slippery. Dogs on lead here. At Love/Lovington Lane turn left for c 1 km (no pavements). This is a quiet road usually but beware speeding cyclists! When you see some converted barns of Yavington Farm on the right, turn slightly left to cross fields with several kissing gates behind black farm, a large house with tennis courts. After a final kissing gate at a footpath junction, turn left to go over a bridge parallel to a ford across the Itchen and then another with a kissing gate into the meadows . There is a permissive path which bears to the right or east, so keep the houses of the small village of Itchen Stoke to your left (north). One more kissing gate leads into Itchen Stoke minor road. Turn right, back south to the river. After a small bridge, this beautiful gravel path crosses back to the south side of the Itchen with a large Monet style bridge. The trail passes the Bush pub, where you turn sharp left along Lovington or East Lane again (no pavement) for a gentle climb of about 1 Km to the busy dual carriageway of the A31 Winchester-Alresford Rd. Take care here Cross over to the opposing bridleway, about 0.25 km long which goes down to the minor Tichbourne Rd. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The River Itchen river cliff gives distant views across the valley. The Mid- Hants line shows as a linear belt of trees on the opposite side of the river. Ash die back is a problem, many felled. The floodplain meadows are a SSSI. Look for reed warblers, damsel flies, trout, wild watercress (DO NOT EAT, danger of liver fluke) The Bush pub dates to the C17th Ovington appears in the Doomsday book as “Ofinetune” meaning ‘the place above’ in Old English- and it is indeed a small village above the floodplain! The Itchen is rarely in one channel, having been channelised over the centuries to use for mills and to stop flooding. ‘Floating’ water meadows were regularly flooded by ‘drowners’ to raise winter temperatures and allow grass to flourish for sheep production. You will walk across several ditches here Itchen Stoke church is worth a diversion, just up the hill to the left across the B3047. Built 1866, it is a Victorian ‘jewel’ inspired by Sainte Chapelle France, with an amazing rose window. The old Mid-Hants line is another 0.25 km further north of the church, in private farmland Winchester to Alresford had 12 old manorial estates recorded in the Doomsday book, including the river Itchen bank ones of Easton, Avington, Yavington and Ovington. ‘Ton’ means a settlement.
13.	WATERCRESS BEDS 0.75 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross the Tichbourne Rd to the opposite side and enter a road named unsuitable for motor vehicles. This is Spring Gardens, and the ford is too deep for cars. Pedestrians have a bridge to use. This pleasant 0.75 km road between watercress beds is a narrow but quiet road, no pavement . At the end cross over and turn sharp left along New Farm Rd. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local names often give clues to the landscape: chalk springs are common in the area. These are the last remaining traditionally run watercress beds in the area. Road transport has replaced the 1865 railway for London’s market. Watercress production boomed once the railway was built after 1865. You are now following part of St Swithun’s Way, a 55 km path from Winchester Cathedral to Farnham, named after C.9th Bishop of Winchester. Its distinctive logo has two bishop’s croziers and a pilgrim’s scallop shell

<p>14.</p>	<p>BACK TO THE STATION Pavements 2.5 km</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow New Farm Rd along pavement for 0.7 km and pass over old Watercress Line Bridge (very narrow pavement). • Cross the B 3047 to start a 1 km section along the pleasant lime tree lined old toll road called The Avenue, all the way to Alresford's West St. Pass Perins School. Perins School expanded its sports grounds partly over the track • At the bottom of Pound Hill cross the road and go right (south) up Jacklyn's Lane, the BO46 • Take the first left just before the railway bridge called Station Approach • Return to the Watercress Line carpark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This deep railway cutting is partly overgrown and disused. An old green railway hut remains. The Mid- Hants line was reopened after its closure in 1973 from east from Alresford to Alton for heritage trains. • You are walking parallel with the old railway line just to the left (South). Perins School extended its sports ground partly over the track. Look for the unusual octagonal toll house policing the 1705 turnpike toll road to Morn Hill, Winchester. You pass Arlebury Park, now flats, but once an imposing white Georgian house. • Pound Hill was used for stray animals in the C19th • Spot the old railway carriages parked on top of Jacklyn's bridge, just east of the station.
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