



Alresford and Abbotstone Wood

Distance: 18 km=11 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 19-apr-2015

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Last update: 2-oct-2015

Refreshments: New Alresford

Map: Explorer 132 (Winchester) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Woodland, historic locations, river, medieval town, ideal lunch stop, views

In Brief

You won't want to leave! New Alresford has *something*: you'll know it when you get there (if you haven't been there a dozen times already). This walk takes a good long approach over the hills to save the charming half-hour till about two-thirds of the way round. First of all, you need to pronounce it right: it's like "Allzford", with the "r" and "e" silent. As well as the swift running water, the mills and the old watercress beds, as well as the pubs, delicatessens and old-world shops, there is the *Watercress Line*, a legacy steam line, so you *could* start the day at Alton station.

This walk seems shorter than it is because of the long easy stretches along the Ox Drove Way and the Wayfarer's Walk, where you can build up a good head of steam. There is just one brief patch of nettles, so shorts should be fine. This seems to be a *dry* walk, even though it was researched in April, because the tracks are solid, even tarmac for much of the way. There is some road walking, but only on minor roads with very little traffic. For these reasons, boots are not required. Your dog is welcome too.



The walk begins at the **Abbotstone Wood** car park, nearest **postcode**

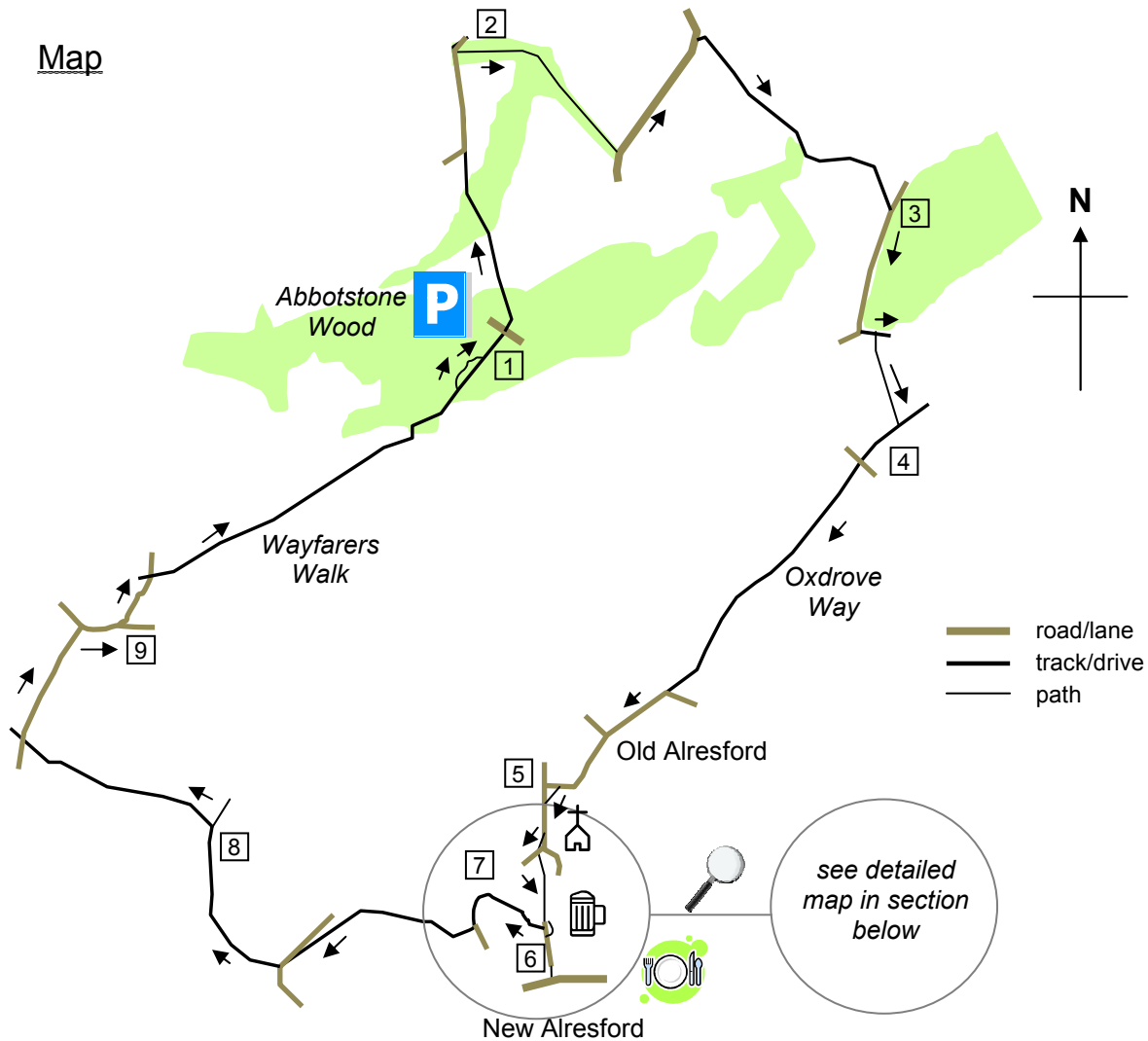
SO24 9TQ. **Warning! isolated car park: leave car visibly empty - see**

Guidelines. Another possible starting place is Alresford itself, such as in the station car park where there is low-cost all-day parking and a tea room.

For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



Map



The Walk

- 1** Go out of the car park, cross the road and take a bridleway opposite, going under a bar. *This path is part of the Wayfarer's Walk (WW), a 70-mile=113 km long-distance path running from the Berkshire Downs to the sea near Portsmouth.* Ignore a swing-gate on your left and follow the narrow bridleway first between a coppice and woodland, then between open fields with a good view to your right. Your path widens and runs through more woods, then emerges as it runs downhill with more views, this time to your left. You reach a tarmac drive at a bend: keep straight on uphill. After ½ km, there is a wide strip of woodland just before the drive bends right up ahead. Turn **right** here on a path through the woodland.
- 2** The path zigzags, bends right and soon runs straight very gently downhill and, after more than 1 km, meets a road. Turn **left** on this quiet road gently uphill. After 700m or so, you come through a yew grove where the road bends left. Leave the road here by turning **right** on a gravel track marked *Godsfield Farm*. *(The Private sign refers to cars: this is a byway and bridleway as you will soon see.)* In 250m, **ignore** a signposted byway on your left and stay on the main track. You pass *Godsfield House and Cottage*, after which your path narrows, curves left and runs between banks of wild flowers. At the farm, keep generally straight ahead past buildings on your left, leaving by the main driveway. Immediately on your left, almost joined to the Manor House, is a 14th-century chapel, on private land unfortunately.

Godsfield Chapel stands on what was a manor granted to the Hospitallers in the 1100s. The Order of Hospitallers was founded in the Holy Land to give comfort to the sick and wounded and to aid pilgrims. After the fall of Jerusalem they were granted lands in Cyprus, Malta and England and were organised like monasteries, with the Knights Hospitallers holding the top rank. This limestone and flint chapel was part of a complex of buildings which served the whole of Hampshire. Shortly after the chapel was built, the Black Death struck and the Order moved elsewhere. (The Order was revived in the 1800s but as a protestant one because of opposition from the Pope. To visit their one remaining site, you need to go to Clerkenwell in London.)

Continue on the drive and out to a road. Turn **right**.

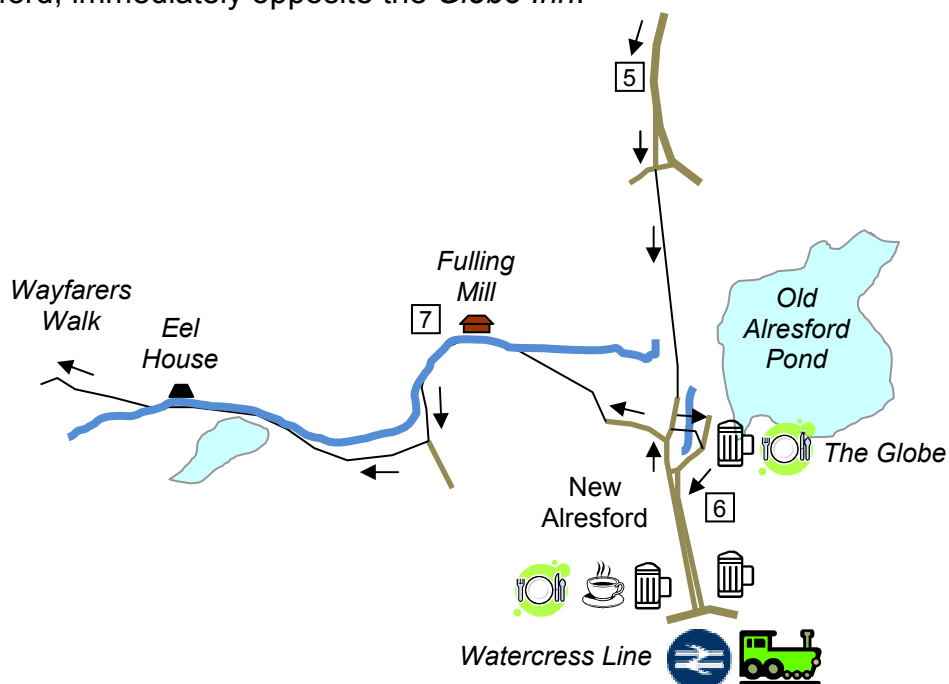
- 3 After 700m on this quiet road, after passing a stand of pines on your left, you come down to a junction. Turn **left** here between gate columns into the hamlet of Lower Lanham. *The 18th-century thatched long barn on the left is Grade-II listed; it **might** be possible to visit it. (Walker, please notify!)* In 70m, just before the farm buildings, go **right** at a fingerpost, to the right of a wire fence, and through a swing-gate. **In some seasons, you may pass some cute calves.** Go straight up the grass slope to a swing-gate a little to the left of a large metal gate. Your route now veers left across the centre of a crop field on a good path. At the end, in the far corner, continue straight on along a narrow path through shrubbery to meet a T-junction with a very wide track. *This track is part of the Ox Drove Way, another long-distance path, this one being circular. This point is a junction on another walk in this series "Medstead and Bighton".* Turn **right** on the Ox Drove Way.

- 4 This wide path goes under a bar, crosses a lane and goes on tarmac past a cottage and farm, becoming a dirt track. You now have an easy straight narrow path between hedges, widening as farm tracks join it. *After more than 1 km, on your left in the private field is a stone memorial, dedicatees unsure, possibly two beloved hunt horses.* Finally, after nearly 2 km on the Ox Drove Way, you come past a large metal gate to a tarmac lane at a bend. Keep straight on. *On your left, hidden behind a flint wall, is a great house, Upton Park.* Go past Upton Park Farm and **ignore** a junction on the right, thus leaving the Ox Drove Way. The next large historic building on your left is *Old Alresford Place*, now a conference and reception centre. Slip through a little wooden gate on your **left** into the churchyard of St Mary's, a good place for a sit-down and a visit to the church.

Old Alresford Church is dominated by a huge wall memorial to Jane, the wife of Admiral George Brydges Rodney. The marble of the dead 27-year old, with her two angelic handmaidens seems to thrust itself into the body of the church, a testament to the grief (and audacious wealth) of her husband. Admiral Rodney, by the way, was a self-made naval officer, hero of several battles against the French during the 1700s and pioneer of naval tactics later used by Nelson at Trafalgar. So famous was he that the name Rodney (as in 'Trotter') became popular as a first name (Trigger, please note!).

- 5 **See detailed map below.** Leaving the church, exit the churchyard to the road at the bottom left-hand corner of the cemetery, cross the road to some steps and turn **left** on the tarmac footway. In 200m, fork **right** on a minor road, signposted *Abbotstone*, but immediately fork **left** and cross the lane at a T-junction onto a waymarked tarmac path between wooden rails. The path runs beside a stream and crosses it by some of the old watercress beds, a feature to be seen often on this walk. The path runs past *Arle Mill*, now a private home but with the mill race still surging unseen behind the wall on your right. On your left next is the impressive mill race of the

converted large *Town Mill*, cascading noisily down. Next on your route is one of the hidden secrets of the town: don't walk on by! Immediately after the Town Mill building, turn **left** up some shallow concrete steps. This path leads to a little iron bridge over the swift stream. The mill race is on your left, audible only, with gardens on your right, the dappled water mingling in summer with the sweet scent of honeysuckle. The shingle path leads out to the road in New Alresford, immediately opposite the *Globe Inn*.



There are two other pubs in New Alresford but the old cliché really does apply here: look no further! The *Globe Inn* looks modest from the outside but this impression changes as you go through the bar, maybe take a table or sit outside on the large lawn. Here your gaze sweeps the huge Old Alresford Pond with its resident swans. The excellent menu includes scallops with haggis and guinea fowl. Ales include Otter and the local Watercress Line's own brew. The *Globe* is open midday to 11 every day. Food is served all day Sunday, meal times on other days.

- 6 After refreshments, coming out of the *Globe*, turn **left** on the road (or **right** if you did not visit the pub). Immediately, you arrive at the head of Broad Street and a short diversion to tour the town is essential.

Unlike the Old town which goes back to Saxon times, New Alresford is relatively 'modern', having been founded and laid out by Henri de Blois, brother of the last Norman king, Stephen, around the year 1200. Along the "T" shape were narrow plots to enable the burghers to build a house and pursue a trade. This is the reason for those pretty narrow houses along Broad Street, now famously painted in pastel colours. The Georgian brickwork is the consequence of the several fires through the 1600s and 1700s which destroyed the old wooden buildings. "Alresford" probably means "ford by the alder trees", so the river "Alre" is named after the town, not the reverse.

Walking down Broad Street takes you past the Old Fire Station to a house used by one US army division to plan for D-Day, followed by shops and restaurants. At the head of the "T" is St John's church, the station on the Watercress Line and several coffee shops, plus a greengrocer and fishmonger.

After your visit, turn **right** back on Mill Hill (that is, keep **left**, if coming back along Broad Street) which is the narrow lane by which you arrived. But in only 50m, turn **left** on Ladywell Lane, marked as the *Wayfarers Walk*, using the high or the low path. The lane curves right and continues as a footpath beside the quiet stream, soon passing on your left a little public garden. It meets the faster-flowing River Alre and goes past the Fulling Mill, complete with its notice quoting a 13th-century law against fishing.

The 13th-century Fulling Mill is now a private house having been saved from dereliction, believe it or not, in 1951. Fulling is a process of thickening woven woollen cloth by pounding it with hammers. After weaving, woollen cloth looks transparent (a bit like sack-cloth) and must be "fulled" before it can be used. Traditionally it would be soaked first in stale urine, whose ammonium salts clean and whiten the cloth. It was then brought to the monastery fulling mill. (Most mills belonged to the monastery landlords who had a monopoly of the business.) Two heavy wooden hammers, powered by the water wheel, would then pound the cloth producing a much thicker and wearable result.

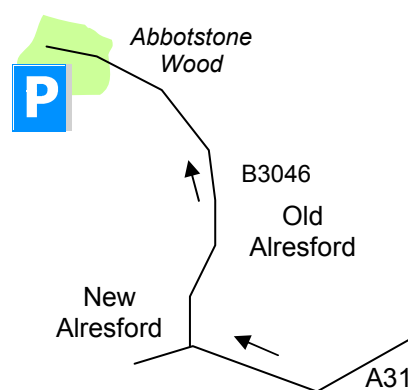


- 7 Continue beside the river. At the head of a residential road, turn **right** to resume the riverside walk. As well as the fast-flowing Alre on your right you now have ponds on your left, another part of the town's heritage in agriculture and pisciculture. The next funny little brick house is the Eel House. *Eels would have travelled down the Rivers Alre and Itchen and thence out to sea to spawn in the Sargasso Sea. The Eel House was built in the 1820s. It has three water channels each of which leads to a trap. The eels were then boxed and sold alive in the market.* A little bridge now takes you over a side stream and up and away from the river. Your path runs beside a concrete drive on your left and then turns **left** through a gate onto the drive. Ignore the drive, which curves way uphill to the right, and instead cross straight over the drive to a path between wooden fences. In nearly ½ km, your path joins a lane coming in from the right. Go 50m along the lane to a junction and turn **right** on a wide path, going under a bar, still on the WW.
- 8 After 1 km, your path comes out under a bar to a Y-junction. Take the **left** branch, passing on your right more old watercress beds. Your path crosses a drive beside a flint house and runs uphill. Soon you are between fields and meadows, then under beeches. Your path narrows and rises again. It leads under a bar to a tarmac crossing lane. Turn **right** on the lane, thus temporarily leaving the WW. Go downhill on this quiet lane into the hamlet of Abbotstone. Turn **right** at the signpost on a lane, passing the front of a little group of thatched cottages. *Note that they have no names, only numbers 178, 177, 176 as though they were suburban houses.* The lane goes over a stream again showing more extensive water meadows. In 200m, opposite "no. 175", at a little grass triangle, turn **left** on another tarmac lane.
- 9 The lane quickly becomes a rough track. In 200m, at a junction, turn **right** on the signposted bridleway, going past a metal barrier. Your route follows a large field on your left, using a cinder track or the grass verge. At the end, you pass a ruined farm building. Keep straight on past a junction. At the end of the next field, your path zigzags into the Abbotstone Wood.

Keep to the wide path along the edge of the wood. After 350m in the woods, you will notice a little wooden swing-gate on your left. This is the first gate and it is just before a clearing visible ahead. Abbotstone Wood has many paths worth exploring. To conclude the walk, it is pleasant (though not necessary) to go **left** through the gate and keep **right** across the clearing amidst a mass of molehills, going parallel to the main path. You can exit through another wooden gate on your right back onto the main path, just before the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: If coming from the London area, the best way is on the A31 through Farnham, bypassing Alton. About 8 miles after you pass Alton, turn **right** at a roundabout for *Alresford*, go into New Alresford and turn **right** in the centre, signposted *Old Alresford*, on Broad Street. Follow the winding road through Old Alresford, avoiding turnoffs until, about 2 miles from the town, you enter woods. The car park is $\frac{1}{4}$ mile further on the left. (NB: there is a *second* car park a little further on: yours is the *first*.)



By bus/train: bus 64 from Alton or Winchester Station, including Sunday. Check the timetables.

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