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## River Test and Villages: Wherwell, Longstock, Chilbolton

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Distance: 15½ km=9½ miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 18-aug-2012

Author: Botafuego

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Refreshments: Wherwell?, Longstock, *The Mayfly*

Map: Explorer 131 (Andover) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Villages, rivers, streams, gardens, pubs*

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### In Brief

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This walk takes you through some of the prettiest Hampshire villages that lie close to the county's most perfect chalk stream, the River Test. All along the way, there are always new things to see that will surprise you. This walk includes 3 km along the abandoned Andover-Southampton railway, now a very easy, although rather featureless, hiking trail.



There are no nettles on this walk so shorts are ok. You may find that boots are better than walking shoes in case you find one or two muddy patches along the old railway. *There are no stiles*, so your dog will also thrive.

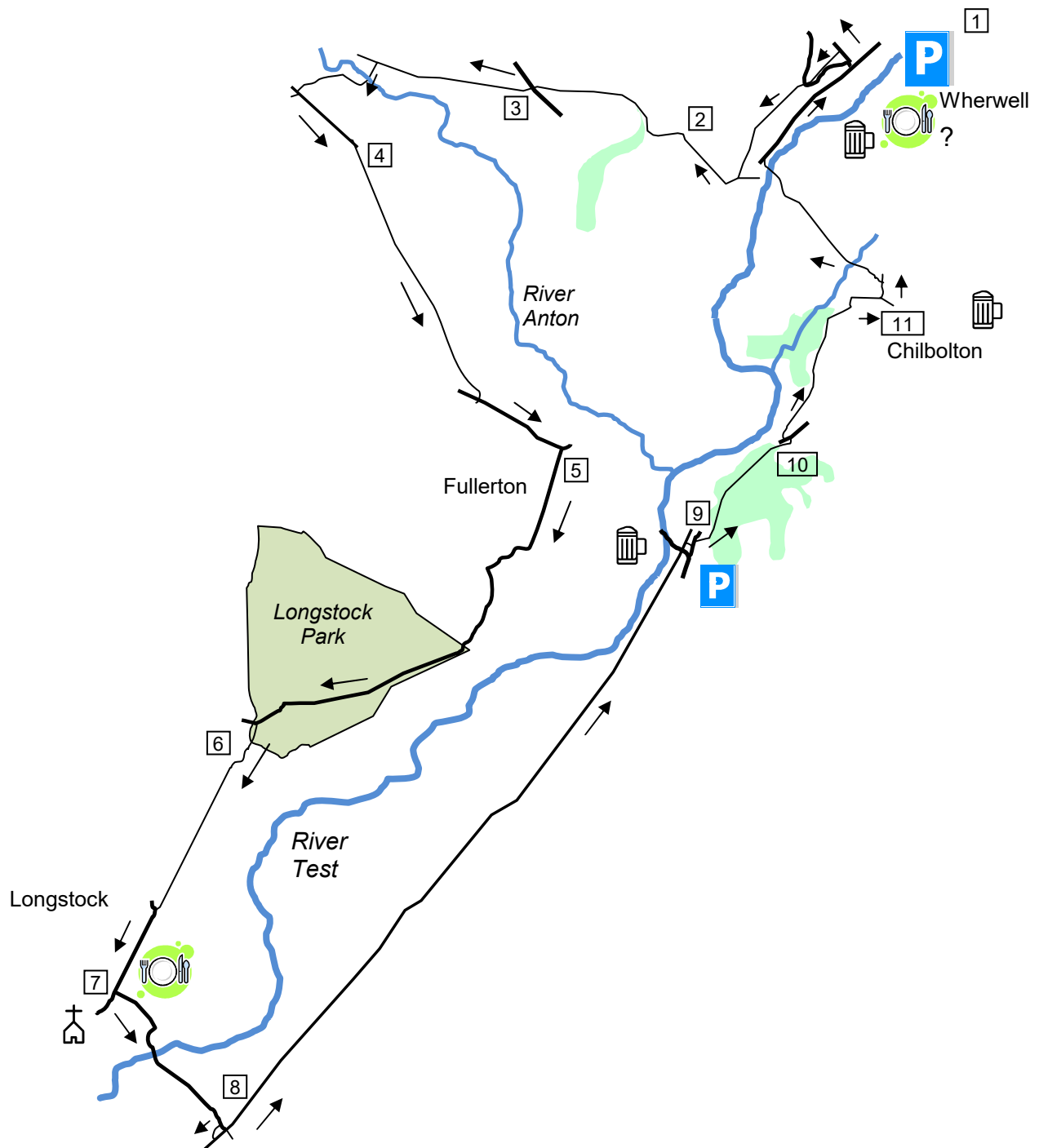


The walk begins in the village of **Wherwell, near Andover, Hampshire, postcode SP11 7JG**. There is a parking space opposite the hairdressers at the northeast end, or further down the road, or down narrow Church Street where there is the river, more charming cottages and the church car park. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**). Another possible starting point is the West Down car park, gridref SU 383 389, **postcode SO20 6AZ**, over the bridge from *The Mayfly*.

### The Walk

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*The River Test begins just west of Basingstoke and runs for 40 miles=64 km before flowing through Romsey and emerging in Southampton Water. It is claimed to be the most perfect fly fishing chalk stream in the world, yielding brown trout, rainbow trout, grayling, sea trout and salmon. The fish are sustained by the vast clouds of mayfly that hatch in May and early June, shedding their skins, rising into the trees to mate, laying their eggs and dying all within a day.*



Leg 1: Wherwell to Longstock 8 km=5 miles


*Wherwell lay for centuries under the influence of Winchester Abbey and was, as early as the 900s, an important hunting ground and dwelling place for kings and queens. King Edgar, father of Ethelred, heard of the great beauty of a certain Lady Elfrida and despatched Earl Athelwold, who owned the forest here, to find her and report back on her quality. The Earl was so struck by her that he took her for himself and reported to the King that she was of "vulgar and commonplace appearance". When King Edgar discovered the treachery, he slew the Earl whilst hunting here in Harewood Forest. Elfrida, now queen, eventually died here by falling into to the river (presumably the Test).*

*Wherwell has many legends. Perhaps the best known is that of the **cockatrice**. In the crypt of the Abbey, a duck laid an egg which was hatched by a toad, resulting in a cockatrice, a kind of dragon, which grew to an*

enormous size by snatching and feeding on the villagers. A reward of land was offered to anyone who would kill the monster and a man named Green answered the challenge by polishing a piece of steel and lowering it down into the beast's lair. The cockatrice fought its own reflection to exhaustion, enabling Green to finish it off with his javelin. This explains the area of nearby Harewood Forest, still known as "Green's Acres" where no trees grow.

For further history and accounts of legends surrounding this village, see [www.wherwell.net/past-articles-introduction.htm](http://www.wherwell.net/past-articles-introduction.htm).



-  **1** Walk west along the High Street in Wherwell towards the *White Lion* Inn. and turn **right** before the pub. *The White Lion, highly recommended by walkers, is open all day and also does tea and coffee in case you need a starting booster. It is also a hotel. [1 Apr 2024: closed for refurbishment; it is expected to be open again for the summer.]* Immediately turn **right** up The Old Hill. In high summer, the Test Way path, just ahead, may be choked with undergrowth; in this case it may be better to stay on the Winchester Road for 200m to the hairpin mentioned below. A bridge takes you over the old railway. After the bridge, turn immediately **left** on a narrow path beside a resident's parking area. *You have joined the Test Way, a 79-km (49-mile) long-distance footpath from Walbury Hill in Berkshire (the highest point in the South East) to Eling, near Southampton.* The path comes down to a main road. Turn **right** on the road and in 30m, at a hairpin, keep ahead on a wide path which runs along the left-hand side of a large undulating meadow. In the corner, go through a tall hedgerow and continue along the left-hand side, ignoring a permissive path on your right. A path joins you from the left from under a railway arch. Bear **right** round the edge of the field, gently uphill.
- 2** Your path turns **left** at the top, giving you your first view of Chilbolton Radio Observatory. At the next corner, your path turns **right** and descends between hedgerows, with Wallis Bottom's thicket on your left. At the end, turn **left** towards some open fields. Your path veers right alongside a field on a path where many wild flowers are on display in the summer. The path winds a bit and goes through a small metal gate, then straight ahead in a grassy meadow. As the meadow widens out, keep to the **right**-hand side. Your path now descends fairly steeply to take you through a metal gate at the bottom. Cross the Romney Road carefully and go through a large metal gate opposite.
- 3** Keep straight ahead on a path between a field and water meadows on your left. When your path enters woodland, immediately turn **left** at a signpost. This path takes you over a bridge across the River Anton. *This is the river that flows through Andover and joins the Test here. It is one of the best trout streams in the county.* Go through a small metal gate straight ahead,

avoiding the gate on the right which is for anglers only, and turn **right** in the meadow. The path bends left away from the river, meets it again briefly and heads onwards, avoiding gates on the right, to a concrete bridge across another arm of the Anton between ash trees. Continue to another metal gate and go through a kissing-gate beside it. Avoiding another kissing-gate ahead, go **left** on a wide track, another encounter with the old Spratt and Winkle railway.

- 4 Continue until there is a large metal gate across your path and here fork **right** in the direction of a yellow arrow, on a path between fields. At the top, go through a kissing-gate to continue straight ahead between more fields. Finally the path bends right down to a road opposite Fullerton Manor. Turn **left** on the road and follow it past the start of the village of Fullerton. At the first road junction, turn **right** on a lane signposted *Longstock*.
- 5 Follow this quiet lane, much used by horse riders, for some distance. After 600m, just before a left bend, ignore a byway on the right. [If you know the Adventurous Walks books, you may know that there is an optional excursion here to Danebury Hill, an ancient hillfort. You will need the OS map. A visit is highly recommended, either now or by car after the walk.](#) Soon you pass a welcome sign for Longstock. On your right is Longstock Park and you have the use of a smooth grass verge. On the left soon is the entrance to the Water Garden.

*The Longstock Water Garden was formed when this part of the River Test was dredged in 1870. It was acquired in 1946 by a certain John Lewis (yes, that one) who lived and died at Longstock Park and built the garden as it is now. It is now managed by Waitrose. The garden is open on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the warmer months from 2–5. Longstock Nursery, also managed by Waitrose, has a café and is open every day 9–5.30 (10–4 Sundays).*



After a slight incline, you pass the entrance to Longstock Park by a grass triangle with a magnificent black walnut tree. Pass some cottages and, immediately opposite the entrance to Longstock Nursery, turn **left** on a track, signposted as a footpath.

- 6 This pleasant grassy path goes downhill and zigzags right-left through a gap to run along the right-hand side of a hedge. Where you reach houses, keep straight ahead on a track to join a lane ahead at the start of the thatched village of Longstock. Turn **left** and walk along the road of this amazing village, passing one thatched cottage after another. On your left you pass the *Peat Spade Inn* and your route is **left** here on The Bunny. However, first it is worthwhile continuing a little further past more thatches to the church ([the excursion to Danebury Hill comes out here](#)) and back to the inn.



*The Peat Spade Inn must be one of the few buildings here that is not thatched (like the Victorian church). This is a restaurant and hotel rather than a pub, with a string of accolades. With the angler's shop outside, and being next to the Test, it draws the well-heeled fly fisher. Undoubtedly cosy inside, it also features an open-air fireplace on the side porch with benches, perfect for warming the feet or, you might think, for a sausage sizzle.*

## Leg 2: Longstock to Wherwell 7 km=4½ miles

- 7 Returning to the *Peat Spade Inn*, go down the lane beside it known as The Bunny. It runs beside a side stream of the Test and there is a place where you can wade or paddle to the other side. The lane crosses the main Test river and if you pause here you will see on your left the Eel Traps and a

small hut, a picturesque scene. Continue along The Bunny, now lined with willows. You pass over two stream with sluices and you reach a bridge over the old railway. Turn **right** just before the bridge on a narrow path and turn **left** on the disused railway, going under the same bridge.

- 8 You will be following this straight easy route for 3 km, all the way to the *Mayfly*. [Mar 2024: there has been a lot of forestry work giving the route a temporary rather scruffy appearance; also several big trees are down across the track due to high winds and you have to be quite agile to scramble over them.] On the way, you see glimpses of the Test river and its side streams on your left. The main road gradually pulls away as you pass under a metal bridge. The road comes close again and you pass under another metal bridge. Finally, the *Mayfly* comes into view on your left as you go under a brick bridge. Turn immediately sharp **right** along a wall to a road. The West Down car park is on the opposite side of the road and your route is that way. However, for a drink or other refreshments, you may like to visit the *Mayfly*. For this, turn **right** and **right** again on the main road (careful!) over the bridge across the Test. The entrance to the pub is through the car park and over a little wooden bridge.



*The Mayfly is the only pub in the district to have a frontage directly on the Test river. Food is described in chalk on a large board and changes daily. You can also buy hot drinks and cakes or sandwiches. The pub opens at 11 am every day with food served from 11.30 to 9.00 pm.*

- 9 After possible refreshment, return to the West Down car park, go across the entrance to the car park, up three steps and through a small swing-gate.

**P** Immediately take the **left** fork, going up over West Down just to the left of the line of trees ahead. (There is a convenient wooden bench here with good views.) You pass another bench, this one of metal. At the bottom, bear **left** to the main road. Turn **left** on the main road and, in only 10m, turn **right** on a footpath.

- 10 You are in a small garden near the river with an excellent bench seat. The footpath goes **right** between hedges with the Test and more gardens on the left. (As you pass a wooden gate, note the horse sculpture in the garden on the right.) The path leads through a swing-gate into a playing field. Keep to the **left** and exit through the second swing-gate near some thatches. The Test now flows in open land on your left. Keep **right** beside a thatched dwelling (even the *modern* houses are thatched in these parts) and go out by a large wooden gate into the Cow Common parking area in Chilbolton. (It is worthwhile going right on Joy's Lane to look at the first row of cottages which are especially picturesque. The *Abbot's Mitre* pub and general stores are at the top of Joy's Lane, to the left.)



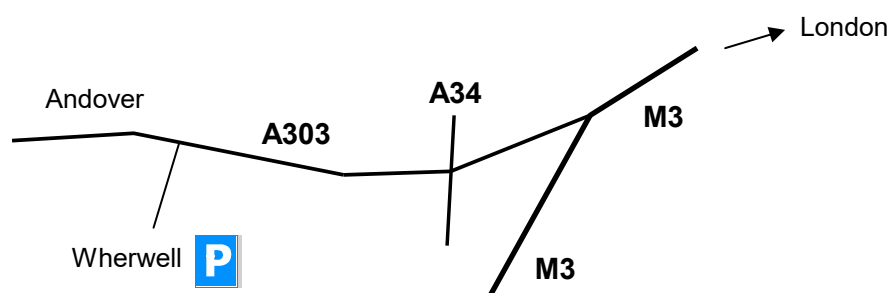
- 11 At Cow Common, turn **left** on a gravel drive past a large wooden gate and, 15m after, fork left on a path between posts across the grass [Apr 2024: flooded: walkers are managing to cross but keeping dry is impossible: you can try placing carrier bags over your boots!]. You come to a shallow loop in a side stream of the river Test, which is a favourite paddling area for families, and

cross it via a bridge. Continue across the pasture, keeping right and thereafter keep ahead in a straight line on the main path. At the far side, you reach a noticeboard and a swing-gate, followed by a very long bridge that runs across a spectacularly wide section of the River Test (*see picture at start*). Continue to a road and turn **right**, soon arriving back in the village of Wherwell where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car: Wherwell is supremely easy to get to as it is signposted south off the A303 just east of Andover. The A303 branches off the M3 just west of Basingstoke. In fact, it is little more than a hour from London.



By bus/train: bus 79 from Andover station . Check the timetables.

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