

ALRESFORD

Millennium & Alre Valley Trails

Alresford is a beautiful Georgian town, one of Hampshire's finest. Famous for its watercress, specialist shops, old-fashioned inns, and the Watercress Line steam railway. Alresford (pronounced Allsford) is also renowned for its lush scenery and riverside walks. A lovely place for strolling, there is plenty to see in the town and by its attractive riverside.



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The Millennium Trail

Look out for the display boards around the trail with details of what to see and local history. Don't forget some seeds for the ducks!

The Station Yard

The Millennium Trail begins in the Station Yard. The railway came to Alresford in 1865 and gave the developing watercress industry access to markets in London and beyond. Watercress remains a significant local industry and is celebrated at the annual Watercress Festival on the third Sunday in May. The steam trains running along the Watercress Line are a major tourist attraction. Next to the bridge is the Goods Shed, it has a visitor information point and railway gift shop.

→ Leave Station Yard and walk down Station Road to the diagonal path, opposite the toilets, leading into the churchyard on your right. The plaque on the wall of the public toilets refers to its improbable role in the Cold War's Portland Spy Ring. Turn left into the churchyard towards the church tower and west door.



Churchyard

The tower is the oldest part of Alresford's parish church of St John the Baptist **1**. Above the door is a small Saxon rood, a sculpture of Christ. Opposite are the graves of four French Napoleonic prisoners of war and one of their wives **2**.

→ Continue on the path towards the junction of East, West and Broad Streets.

East Street

Although the Millennium Trail does not take you along East Street **3** it is worth a visit to see its beautiful colour-washed Georgian architecture. At the end of the street is The Old Sun Inn, which for 20 years was the home of John Arlott, the journalist and broadcaster.



→ Ahead of you is:

Broad Street

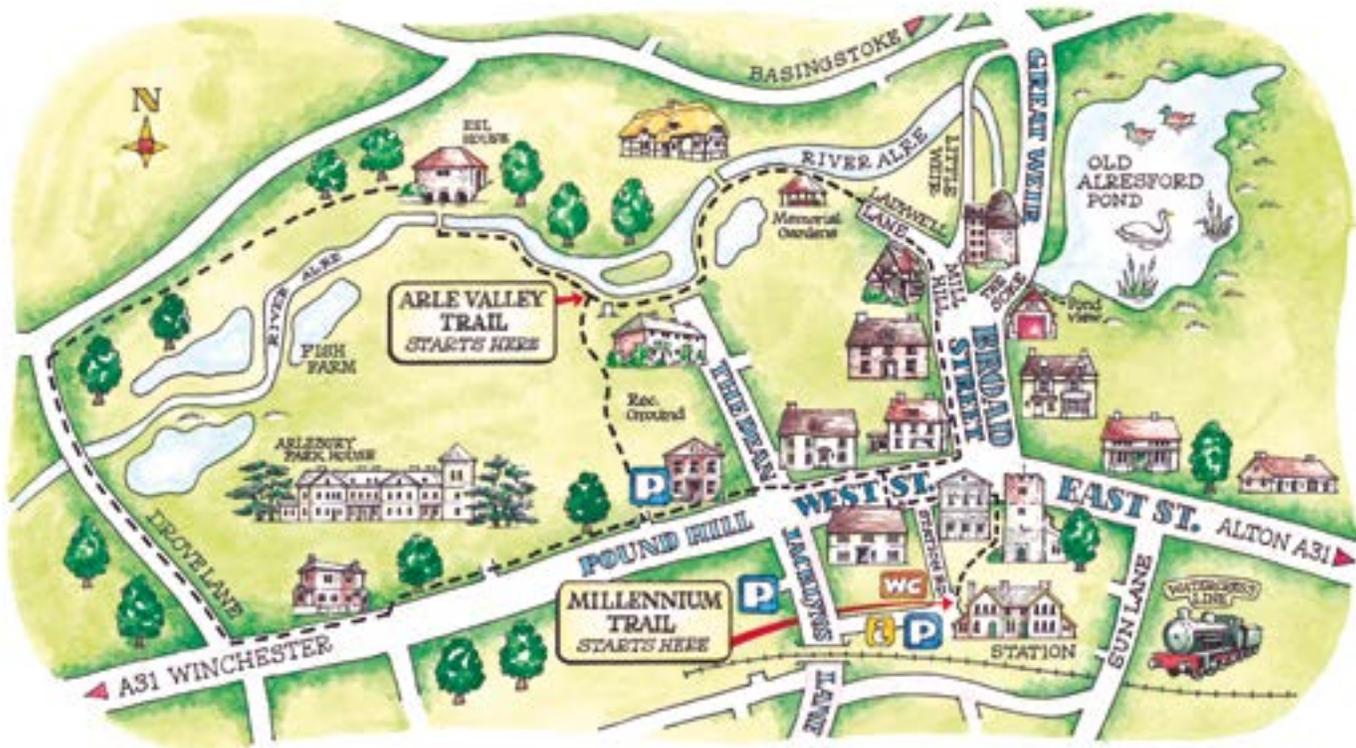
One of Hampshire's finest street scenes **4**. Essentially Georgian, it was laid out at the beginning of the 13th century by Bishop de Lucy, who built a town called Novum Forum, Latin for 'New Market'. Alresford is mentioned in the Domesday Book and for many centuries the new town was a prosperous wool centre. A market hall probably stood in the centre of the road at the top of Broad Street **5**.

There have been markets and fairs in Broad Street for 800 years and as many as 32,000 sheep were penned at one time at the annual fairs held in the 19th century. Broad Street still hosts a market every Thursday.

Most of Broad Street's houses **6** and **7** have been destroyed by fires over centuries. After the last major fire in 1689 they were rebuilt; elegant Georgian brickwork was laid over the original Norman cellars. Although No. 43 looks brick-built, it is a timber-framed building faced with less weighty, mathematical tiles. Note the false window, perhaps to avoid window tax, over the front door. No.50, opposite, was the headquarters of the 47th Infantry Regiment, US Army from 1943 to D-Day 1944.

At the bottom of Broad Street is the old fire station **8**, built in 1881. A small diversion past the fire station, towards The Globe pub, and then down the footpath immediately to the right takes you to Old Alresford Pond **9**.





DID YOU KNOW?

Near the pond you can see the commemorative tablet to Capt. Robert Cogswell, USAF, who saved Alresford from disaster by diverting his B17 Flying Fortress with full bomb load to the east of the town shortly before it crashed.



10

The pond came into being at the end of the 12th century when Bishop de Lucy built the Great Weir and created not only a fishpond but a head of water to drive the many mills to be built downstream. From this area the Bishop once boarded his boat to cross the pond to his palace at Bishop's Sutton. (Retrace your steps)

→Bear left at the bottom of Broad Street.

Mill Hill

The houses in Mill Hill have a chequered history. Near the top on the left is Old Timbers 10; the central part dates from the 14th century. Together with its neighbour, they are possibly Alresford's oldest houses. Note the old Insurance Company firemark on the



11



12



13

front of Old Timbers. Further down on the left were workhouse tenements and the overseer, William of Wykeham, lived next door at Wykeham House. At the bottom on your right is the Town Mill 11, which was rebuilt in the 1890s and fitted with modern turbines instead of paddles. (Retrace your steps)

→Turn into Ladywell Lane, opposite the trail board.

As you walk down the lane, 12 you will see the springs that flow all year round. Can you spot the wild watercress 13? At the end of the lane is the fine, red brick, early 18th century Arle House, once the home of a master tanner.



→Take the footpath that leads off the right side of the lane.

To the right of this stretch of footpath is an area now reserved for wildlife. Through the trees to the right you will just glimpse Weir House, once the home of a local benefactor, Sir Francis

Lindley. As you reach the end of this stretch of the footpath, on your left is the Memorial Garden **14**, given to the town by Sir Francis in 1951. This area is still used for family picnics. The site of the original open-air swimming pool can be seen edged in brick.



The River Alre

Just past the garden, the footpath runs alongside the River Alre (sometimes spelt 'Arle') for some 200 metres. Looking ahead you will see the

thatched, timber framed Fulling Mill **15**, which spans the river. Built in the 13th century it used water-driven hammers to work raw cloth into a useable material. As you pass the mill, the bed of the river joins Pinglestone Road – an ancient highway which has run along this riverbed for centuries. This presents a good opportunity to see

the large variety of plants and wildlife, bettered only by the stretches of the river in the Alre Valley Trail **16**. Birds range from the ever-present ducks to the elusive Kingfisher.



→At the end of the path you will reach the bottom of The Dean **17**. At this point you can take a short cut back to town by walking up The Dean. To continue on the Millennium or Alre Valley Trails, turn right and follow the river along the footpath.

Bordering this part of the river are some fine horse chestnut trees and also some alders from which Alresford is thought to take its name. The Saxon name translates as 'a ford where the alder trees grow', and the name of the River Alre was derived from this. Look out for the grave of Hambone Jr. **18**, canine friend of American soldiers billeted near Alresford prior to D-Day in 1944.



→150 metres from The Dean you will reach a kissing gate. This is where the 1.6 mile Alre Valley Trail leaves the Millennium Trail to continue down the valley. (Turn over for information on the Alre Valley Trail). To continue on the Millennium Trail, pass through the gate and cross Arlebury Park Recreation Ground towards the building at the top of the hill.



Arlebury Park

You are now in Arlebury Park Recreation ground **19**. As you climb the slope past the skateboard park and children's play areas you will see, on your right, Arlebury Park House. Built in the 18th Century and once the 'big house' of New Alresford, today it is private apartments. Looking back to the north, there is a splendid view across Fob Down and Old Alresford parish church can be glimpsed through the trees to your right **20**.



→When you reach the main gates to the recreation ground, turn left. Here the Alre Valley Trail, which runs along The Avenue, rejoins the Millennium Trail. Please turn over for information on how to continue your walk by taking the Alre Valley Trail.

DID YOU KNOW?

Alresford was briefly touched by the Civil War on 29 March 1644. The Royalists retreating from the nearby Battle of Cheriton set fire to houses in East Street. The flames were quickly extinguished by the Parliamentarian Army.

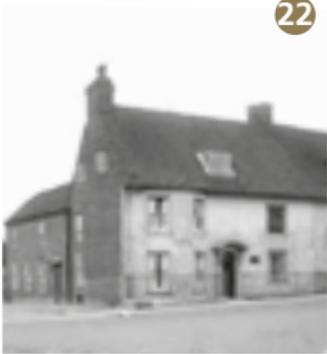




21

Millennium Trail continued Pound Hill

At the end of The Avenue you will walk down Pound Hill **21**, former site of a 'pound' for stray animals. It was also the location of the Hurdle House where hurdles for the sheep markets were stored. As you cross the top of The Dean, immediately on your left is the original Perins School building **22**. Founded in 1698, the town's secondary school remained here until 1910 when it moved to its present site at the beginning of The Avenue.



22

In the remaining walk up West Street you will notice a number of small lanes associated with Alresford's brewing trade. At one time the town is reputed to have had over two dozen pubs. Two old coaching inns, The Bell and The Swan remain.

→ At the pedestrian crossing the trail ends, perhaps a good time to explore the town's shops or go for a drink or a bite to eat.

Alresford is home to the Mid-Hants Steam Railway-the Watercress Line. Why not spend a day in the UK's watercress capital and ride the route the crops once took to market?

image © Gilbert Yates



The Alre Valley Trail (optional diversion)

Within a three-mile radius of St John's, the parish church, there are some 60 miles of paths and tracks. Many of these are hundreds of years old. The Alre Valley Trail gives you an opportunity to see some of the lovely countryside that surrounds Alresford.

→ Following on from the Millennium Trail, you begin this walk by the gate at the bottom of Arlebury Park recreation ground. Follow the footpath going west along the bank of the river.

As you walk along the river you will cross a number of small streams flowing under the footpath. They are now used to take water to the adjacent fish farm, but in earlier times one of them, called Ram Stream, led water to an intake chamber from which a ram pump kept Arlebury Park House supplied.

At the end of this stretch you will reach the Eel House.

→ Follow the footbridge around the Eel House.



Eel House

Built in the 1820s and recently restored, this is where eels were trapped on moonless autumn nights, as they undertook their once in-a-lifetime migration to breed **a**. The Eel House sluices still control the water levels in the river and the nearby fish farm.

The Eel House sitting astride the river **b**, can be viewed externally at all times but it is also open to the public on certain public holidays and Alresford Watercress Festival day **c**.

For details of the Eel House opening days see towntrust.org.uk or town notice boards

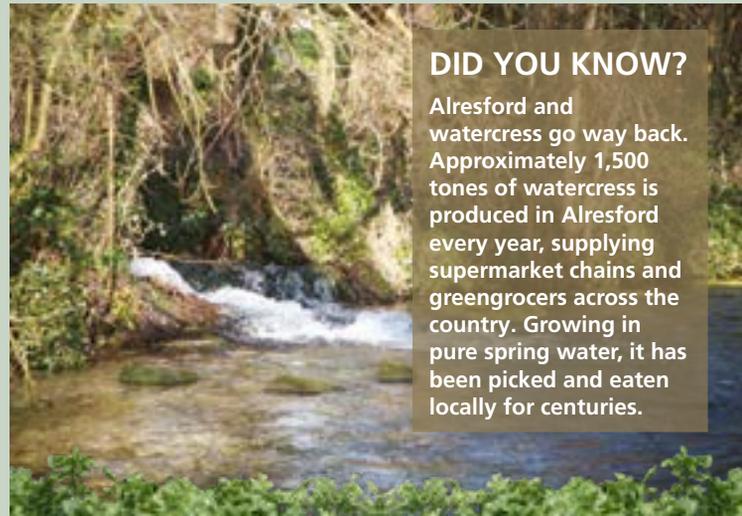


You have now crossed the parish boundary and are in Old Alresford. As you climb up the slope you reach an area called New England. The remaining cottage on your left is known as New England Cottage and was built in 1700. In 1891 it was occupied by agricultural labourers from the Arlebury Estate.

As you walk beyond the cottage and new development you will see a footpath next to the drive on your right. For a great birds-eye view of Alresford and the upper Alre Valley you can climb the slope and cross the road. At the high point, some 100 metres into the vineyard, you can look back over the town with panoramic views of the roof-tops of Alresford and the tower of St John's Church **d**. If you continue on this route you will join a series of paths and tracks that allow extensive walks in the countryside to the north. (Retrace your steps back to the Trail).



On your left you will get glimpses of the 18th century Arlebury Park House. **e** Many of the ponds of the Alre Valley are of recent construction, but the oldest date back to the 18th century when they were created for the pleasure of the owners of Arlebury House.



DID YOU KNOW?

Alresford and watercress go way back. Approximately 1,500 tones of watercress is produced in Alresford every year, supplying supermarket chains and greengrocers across the country. Growing in pure spring water, it has been picked and eaten locally for centuries.

→ You have now reached Drove Lane. Note there is no pedestrian path and please take extra care on the first section where, as you turn left, visibility is limited.



About 200 metres down Drove Lane you re-cross the river and on your right is Barn Meadow **f**. This is a good place to spot waterbirds, especially during migration periods in Spring and Autumn. Birds of prey hunt here all year round.

The river here was used in the Second World War by tanks practicing river crossings. It is also one of the possible sites of the 'ford over the river where the alder trees grow' from which Alresford takes its name.

→ A further 350 metres brings you to Winchester Road, formerly a turnpike (toll) road. Turn left here, back towards the town.



At the junction are the lodge and gates, which were once the main entrance to Arlebury Park House.

The remainder of the trail follows the footpath on The Avenue, gifted to the town by the Bishop of Winchester for recreational purposes in 1869. In spring-time the many beds of daffodils **g**, line the way and in summer the two lines of 114 mature limes give you pleasant shade. Part way along, you will pass The Old Toll House **h**, a fine red-brick hexagonal building that was originally the tollhouse for the Winchester to Alresford turnpike.



A little further down you will pass the front gates of Arlebury Park House with its fine Cedar of Lebanon trees a renowned (and often noisy!) heronry.

→ Rejoin the Millennium Trail at the gates of Arlebury Park Recreation Ground.



Useful Information

Travelling to Alresford

Alresford lies just off the A31 between Winchester (7 miles) and Alton (12 miles).

If using SatNav key in New Alresford or SO24 9JG. Follow the brown and white tourist signs to the Watercress Line. The Millennium Trail begins in the Station Yard where parking is available. Buses run at least hourly from Alton and Winchester.

Public transport

Bus route information from travelinesw.com or arrive in style on a steam train with watercressline.co.uk.

Parking and Bicycle

SatNav postcode SO24 9EP.

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Facilities & accessibility

Your first 2 hours parking at Arlebury Park Recreation Centre (SO24 9EP) are free, but don't forget to print your free ticket at the machine. There are limited electric vehicle charging and cycle parking facilities at Arlebury Park. There are car parks at the station (SO24 9JG) and Perins School (Jacklyns Lane, SO24 9JJ). Limited free on-street parking is available in West Street, Station Road and Broad Street. All our car parks are Pay and Display and free on Sundays and Bank Holidays (check signage for details).

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