

THE ABBOTS MITRE CHILBOLTON AND COTTONWORTH TRAIL, HAMPSHIRE



Moderate Terrain

The Abbots Mitre is a superb traditional village pub serving locally sourced food, a range of local ales and with roaring open fires in the winter months.

A circular pub walk of just over 3 miles, from the Abbots Mitre in the pretty village of Chilbolton in Hampshire. The walking route takes in this picturesque area of the Test Valley, with the villages of Chilbolton and Cottonworth living up to their charming names. As well as exploring the village streets, you will have chance to enjoy two nature reserves, West Down and Chilbolton Cow Common, all in the setting of the Test Valley with plenty of wildlife to discover.

Getting there

The village of Chilbolton is located about 4 miles south east of Andover, and is easily accessed from the A303. The walk starts and finishes from the Abbots Mitre pub on Village Street at the centre of the village. The pub has its own car park.

Approximate post code **SO20 6BA**.

Walk Sections



1 Start to Footpath Crossroads



Access Notes



- 1. The walk is relatively flat with just a few gentle slopes to contend with. The paths across the commons are unmade and can get quite muddy after rain and in winter, so good boots are recommended.*
- 2. There are a couple of sections of walking along the village lanes (about three quarters of a mile in total) which do not have pavements so take care of traffic for these stretches.*
- 3. You will need to negotiate several kissing gates and two stiles on route (both stiles have large gaps in the fencing alongside suitable for most dogs to pass through).*
- 4. Conservation grazing is undertaken at West Down by ponies and at Chilbolton Cow Common by cattle (in the summer months) so take care with dogs.*



Leave the pub car park and turn left along the village road (taking care of any traffic), passing the thatched old post office and then Horseshoe Cottage, both on the right. Follow the village road between a number of pretty cottages.

Some distance further (at a right-hand bend), turn left

You'll find this and many more walks at iFootpath.com. All iFootpath walks are available to download on the iFootpath App, allowing you to follow your real-time progress on the live satellite map as you are walking (no more getting lost!). You can also add your own comments, ratings and photos to each walk. If you notice any changes required to this walk please contact us at walks@ifootpath.com



into Drove Lane, signed for Chilbolton Observatory and Village Hall. Follow this residential lane heading steadily uphill. Continue until you pass the last house on the right. At this point, follow the main road as it bends to the right to become Little Drove Road.

The lane leads you between tall hedgerows. Glance through the gaps in the left-hand hedge and you will be able to see Chilbolton Observatory, the 25 metre white antenna dish being the most obvious landmark. The observatory is a facility for atmospheric and radio research, built partially on the site of RAF Chilbolton which was decommissioned in 1946. The site is at the edge of Salisbury Plain, meaning it has excellent visibility of the horizon, ideal for the research equipment. During the war RAF Chilbolton was used primarily as a troop carrier airfield for parachutists. Part of the allied invasion force of glider-borne paratroopers took off on D-Day from Chilbolton Airfield.

Keep straight ahead, ignoring any roads off to the right. Eventually you will come to the private gateway for Test Valley Farm ahead, with footpaths signed each side. Take the left-hand footpath which runs to the left-hand side of the farm driveway. The path swings first right and then left to pass a fenced paddock on the right. Stay on this narrow fenced path until you reach an obvious crossroads of footpaths, within a small copse of deciduous trees.

1 → 2 Footpath Crossroads to Disused Railway



Turn right here and soon the path swings left. Immediately after this bend, turn right through the gap in the wooden fence to reach the edge of the nature reserve, West Down. Take the grass path which runs diagonally left (at about 10 o'clock).

Follow this path as it bears right and soon you will come to a crossroads of paths, with a tree-trunk bench on the right. Turn left here and cross over the quiet access lane. Take the path which continues directly opposite. The path soon forks; take the right-hand branch which leads you through the trees and then to a more open section of downland.

West Down is an elevated area of chalk downland grassland, mixed secondary woodland and scrub, and is of conservation, historical, and industrial archaeological importance. The most important habitat is the downland, which forms these slopes that run down to the River Test. The impoverished chalk soils support high numbers of butterflies and small flowering plants.

At a staggered crossroads, turn left and then right to maintain your direction (heading for the magnificent views across the Test Valley ahead). Pass through the kissing gate (note: there may be ponies grazing this section of the down) and follow the path ahead, leading you downhill. Make your way to the bottom left-hand corner where a kissing gate leads you out to the road.

Cross over the road with care and take the narrow footpath opposite (signed for the Test Way). Follow this path alongside the curved brick wall on the right and you will emerge to a signed T-junction with a permissive path, a disused railway.

2 → 3 Disused Railway to Cottonworth Village



Turn right here, signed for Andover. Follow the path over a stream and through the trees to the left you will be able to make out the course of the River Test. Soon, the River Test swings right and passes under the disused railway path. Take a moment here to enjoy the views should you wish; you may be lucky enough to spot birds within the reed beds alongside the river.

Keep ahead along the permissive bridleway which leads you past a vehicle barrier. Soon afterwards, look to the left and you will be able to make out the remains of the sidings/platform from the old railway. This rail line was known as The Sprat and Winkle Line and was opened in 1865, connecting Andover and Romsey. There are at least three theories of how the line got its name. Winkles may have once been found in the mud flats of the River Test; a Sprat and Winkle could have been the name of a type of railway coupling; or the line was used for transporting illicit goods and to deter the inspection guards the goods were buried in sprats and winkles!

The path leads you under a height restriction barrier to become a residential access lane. At the end of the tall hedge on the left, take a moment to glance back over the property gates. You will be able to see the roof of the old Fullerton Station, now converted to a private residence. Keep ahead along the lane and you will emerge out to a T-junction with the main road.

Turn right along the grass verge (taking care of the traffic) and after a short distance turn right again into the side road signed for Wherwell, the village road which leads you through Cottonworth village.

3 → 4 Cottonworth Village to River Test

Follow the village road (taking care of any traffic as there is no pavement) for some distance. Tucked away next to the river in Cottonworth there is an old roman villa which archaeologists seem to think was an old water mill, powered by the river. There are also signs of farming and perhaps vineyards in certain areas. Today Cottonworth is again home to a vineyard, producing Cottonworth Sparkling Wine.



Continue over the old railway bridge (another remnant of a branch of the old Sprat and Winkle Line) to leave the village of Cottonworth behind and enter the village of Wherwell. Continue past Freelands Cottages on the right and, further along, the pretty cottage of Westmill (also on the right). Immediately after this, turn right onto the signed bridleway which leads you onto a boardwalk over the River Test.

4 ➡ 5 River Test to End



Take some more time here to enjoy this glorious setting over the River Test. The shallow chalk river flows for 40 miles down towards Southampton and is renowned for its excellent trout fishing. The valuable fly fishing rights are highly prized by landowners meaning that access to the banks of the river is very restricted, so this vantage point is a rare treat. The shingle beaches and islands provide havens for wildlife; look out for herons, trout, kingfishers and cormorants.

At the end of the boardwalk pass through the kissing gate to enter Chilbolton Cow Common (note: there may be conservation cattle grazing here in the summer months). Dogs are welcome on the common as long as they are kept under strict control. The 48 acre common dates back to 1284 and is managed by the parish council. It is one of the richest floral sites within the Test Valley with 265 plants having been identified including the yellow flag iris and the southern marsh orchid. Recently owl nesting boxes have been installed and barn owls and tawny owls are common sights at dusk.

Stay on the main stone path, part of the Test Way, which winds ahead across the common. The path leads you over a footbridge across another branch of the river, the perfect place for a little paddle (although please respect the signs and stay out of the river during the bird nesting season).

Continue on the path and, just before you reach a single small wooden post, swing left to reach a crossroads with the access drive for the thatched white cottage on the left. Cross over the drive and continue on the grass path opposite.

The path leads you under small sets of power lines and over a small concrete bridge to reach a stile. Cross this stile and keep ahead. Soon you will join a narrow path between the gardens of village properties. At the end of the path, cross the stile and you will see the Abbots Mitre directly opposite for some well-earned hospitality.

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.

Remember...the best way of following our walking guides is to use the iFootpath App (iOS and Android) where you will have all the information in the palm of your hand and see your exact location on the live map as you travel

