

Introduction

The Avon Valley Path is a 34-mile, long-distance walking route that takes you from Salisbury – one of the most beautiful cathedral cities in England – to Christchurch Priory and the sea. It was opened in 1992 and runs from Wiltshire due south through Hampshire to finish in Dorset. The Path is named after the river whose course it follows. Please bear in mind that this route can become seriously waterlogged from December to May.

The Path has been divided into five sections, each providing a really good day out. Choose between water meadows buzzing with wildlife or high chalk downland with exhilarating views, peaceful village pubs or a sophisticated cathedral city, or relaxing with a picnic while watching the grazing Forest ponies or beside a still trout lake. Keep an eye out too for the flash of blue as a kingfisher speeds by, or the slender body and brown fur of the elusive otter.

The Avon Valley is a very special place; it has a greater range of habitats and a wider variety of flora and fauna than any other chalk river in Britain. The broad flood plain of the lower valley mainly comprises hay meadows and pastures dissected by drainage ditches and streams, which frequently flood during the winter, and this flooding has possibly saved the area from intrusive development.

Wetland wild flowers thrive, such as water avens, meadowsweet and tubular water-dropwort. In the more acidic areas look for tormentil, Devil’s-bit scabious or meadow thistle. Nearly seventy species of aquatic plant and twenty-four species of fish have been recorded, including barbel and salmon. The valley is of national importance for birds, particularly over-wintering wildfowl such as white-fronted geese and Bewick swans, lapwing, golden plover and black-tailed godwits. The lakes around Ringwood play host to ducks, great crested grebe, cormorants and many other species of bird.

In spring the valley supports huge numbers of breeding lapwing, redshank and snipe and in the summer the reedbeds and scrub are alive with reed buntings, blackcaps, sedge warblers, reed warblers and the rare Cetti’s warbler.

Special care should be taken to avoid disturbing sensitive species, especially wildfowl and ground-nesting

birds such as lapwing, redshank and snipe. Walkers with dogs are particularly requested to keep them under close control during the nesting season (April to July), or when wildfowl are present.

The river and its water meadows dominate this route. You pass mills, weirs and sluice gates along its length. Water meadow channels were cut to carry water on to the pasture and then drain it off again. Keeping a steady trickle of water through the grass roots during the spring protected them from frost and resulted in a valuable earlier crop of grass or hay. The man employed to manage this critical water flow was called a ‘Drowner’.

There is the magnificent city of Salisbury and the Norman town of Christchurch where you can visit antique shops, sample local crafts and food or even stay for a night or two. There are also some charming villages such as Odstock, Hatchet Green and Mockbeggar, where you can explore the village churches and twisting lanes, stop for a rest at welcoming pubs to sample the local beer or learn some local lore.



History

In Salisbury, the skyline is dominated by the medieval cathedral’s soaring spire. Built in just 38 years, it is a magnificent example of early English Gothic architecture, and stands in the largest medieval close in Britain. Within this elegant close, you can find the most perfect example of Queen Anne architecture, Mompesson House.

Just past Charlton Dairy Farm, look across the valley to Trafalgar House, splendidly situated on a plateau overlooking the broad valley. It was built in 1814 as a mark of gratitude for Horatio Nelson’s victory and was given to his brother, the first Earl Nelson.

Further south at Downton is Parsonage Manor House, once the home of Sir Walter Raleigh’s mother and brother. Two hundred and fifty years later a portrait of Sir Walter, painted in 1588, was discovered hidden behind oak panelling. It subsequently became the first purchase of the National Portrait Gallery and is the best-known portrait of him.

The beautiful priory in Christchurch is famous for the Miraculous Beam. It is said that during early building work, one mysterious carpenter was never seen to take refreshment or collect his pay. One evening a wooden beam was found to be too short, but the next morning the workmen found to their amazement that it had grown to the proper length overnight and had already been placed in the correct position. The mysterious carpenter did not appear after this and it was assumed by everyone that he must have been Jesus Christ helping to build his own church, which thus became known as Christ’s Church of Twynham, later Christchurch.

There were few ports more suited to smuggling than Christchurch. It was surrounded by gently shelving beaches, with few rocks, and good paths and roads inland to the major cities – and it was also close to the French coast. A huge variety of contraband was smuggled including silk, cloth, lace, soap, tobacco, spirits, pearls, cards, gloves, tea and even French refugees escaping from the French Revolution in 1790.

How to follow the Avon Valley Path

AVON VALLEY PATH
Salisbury 5 miles

The route stretches between Christchurch in Dorset and Salisbury in Wiltshire.

The route is well sign posted with the logo of a bridge on a green arrow.



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Maps

This leaflet does not provide navigation details. The route is shown on the following Ordnance Survey maps:-

Explorer OL22 (New Forest)

Explorer 130 (Salisbury & Stonehenge)

The route is indicated on these maps with a green diamond and the name of the route (Avon Valley Path).

Further information and a detailed route description is available on the web:

www.hants.gov.uk/walking/avonvalley

Publications

For information about the other ten long-distance walks or for leaflets about the following, tel: (01962) 870500, or visit your local Hampshire County Council Information Centre or Tourist Information Centre.

- Long-distance walks
- Finding Your Way
- Guided Walks
- Accessible Countryside in Hampshire
- Discover Hampshire
- Defence of the Realm

Living River Project

The Avon Valley Path is part of the Living River Project. It aims to improve areas for wildlife and provide opportunities for you to explore the river.

Your river is special... if you would like to get involved, please contact the Living River Team on 01722 334856.

The Living River project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Useful websites

- www.hants.gov.uk/walking
- www.hants.gov.uk/countryside
- www.visit-hampshire.org.uk
- www.traveline.org.uk
- www.metoffice.co.uk

Useful contacts

- Hampshire County Council Information Centre Winchester 01962 870500
- Met Office (weather information) 0870 900 0100
- Traveline (bus information) 0870 608 2608

Tourist Information Centres (TICs)

- Salisbury 01722 334956 www.visitsalisbury.com
- Christchurch 01202 471780 www.visit-dorset.org.uk
- Ringwood 01425 470896 www.thenewforest.co.uk

Recreation & Heritage Department

Hampshire County Council, Mottisfont Court, High Street, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 8ZF

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Other long-distance walks



- 1 Avon Valley Path
- 2 Clarendon Way
- 3 Solent Way
- 4 Test Way
- 5 Hampshire Millennium Pilgrims' Trail
- 6 Oxdrove Way
- 7 Wayfarer’s Walk
- 8 South Downs Way National Trail
- 9 Staunton Way
- 10 Hangers Way
- 11 St Swithun’s Way

walking in Hampshire

Avon Valley Path

A 34 mile long-distance walk from Salisbury to Christchurch

Hampshire

Salisbury to Downton

Distance: 8 miles Time: 3-4 hours

The Avon Valley Path begins in the county of Wiltshire at the statue of The Walking Madonna by Elizabeth Frink, which stands near the north porch of the magnificent medieval Salisbury Cathedral; its landmark spire is the tallest in Britain and is visible for miles around, guiding travellers into the city.

The cathedral was built on a marshy site where five rivers – the Wylfe, Avon, Ebble, Nadder and Bourne – all converge. Surrounding this awe-inspiring cathedral are the massive ancient walls and serene lawns of The Close where you will find the charming Mompesson House, a 13th century banqueting hall and two outstanding museums, the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum and the Wardrobe Military Museum.

Leave The Close by the South Gate (Harnham Gate) and cross the River Avon via Harnham Bridge, built in 1245. Then past The Rose and Crown Inn, or perhaps stop for an early rest at this half-timbered 13th century inn, as the view across the river to the cathedral from the riverside lawns is outstanding.

Continue along Bishop’s Walk and up Harnham Hill and then over the open chalk downland of Homington Down towards Dogdean Farm, before dropping down to the River Ebble and the pretty village of Odstock. Stop for a break at the renowned Yew Tree pub or visit St Mary’s churchyard where the rose-covered grave of Joshua Scamp lies. Then the Path takes you south of the village of Nunton.

The Path winds around the foot of Clearbury Down from which you can clearly see Clearbury Ring, an Iron Age hill fort, past the curious octagonal Round House and through Charlton All Saints; it then runs alongside the water meadows where you get your first sight of the intricate irrigation system used to ‘drown’ the meadows. At the 17th century New Court Farm, turn left over the bridge and follow the causeway through the meadows and into Downton.

Accommodation: Salisbury TIC 01722 334956

Refreshments: The Bull, Downton 01725 510374
The Kings' Arms, Downton 01725 510446
The White Horse, Downton 01725 510408
Rose and Crown Hotel 01722 399955
Yew Tree 01722 329786

Places of Interest: Salisbury Cathedral 01722 555120
Old Sarum 01722 335398

Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum 01722 332151

Public Transport: Downton: Wilts & Dorset X3, Pulseline 01722 336855

Downton to Fordingbridge

Distance: 7 miles Time: 3-4 hours

Downton is the oldest town on the Avon Valley Path. The route travels up the High Street to Moot Lane, where there are the remains of a Norman castle and an impressive 18th century landscape garden, in the centre of which is a man-made mound, now called the Moot. Continue past Moot Farm and climb up to the top of the ridge. Take a break here to look back at the views of Salisbury Cathedral’s spire, Downton and Clearbury. Now descend through woodland and cross into The New Forest National Park and Hampshire before reaching Hatchet Green, a typical New Forest village with thatched cottages overlooking the green where the Forest ponies graze. Continue alongside a wonderful avenue of lime trees that lead to a Georgian mansion, Hale House, and the church of St Mary with its splendid Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

The Path then turns west to the village of Woodgreen where Palaeolithic material has been found. Follow the road around the medieval earthwork castle at Castle Hill, where there are superb views across the Avon Valley and to Dorset. Then the Path turns west across the water meadows to the suspension bridge at Burgate Manor Farm, where kingfishers skimming low over the water are a common sight. The bridge was replaced in 1950 after being destroyed by a tank during the Second World War. The Path then crosses the disused Poole to Salisbury railway line and on into Fordingbridge town.

Accommodation: Ringwood VIC 01425 470896

Refreshments: Horse & Groom, Woodgreen 01725 510739

Places of Interest: Breamore Manor House & Museum, nr Fordingbridge 01725 512468

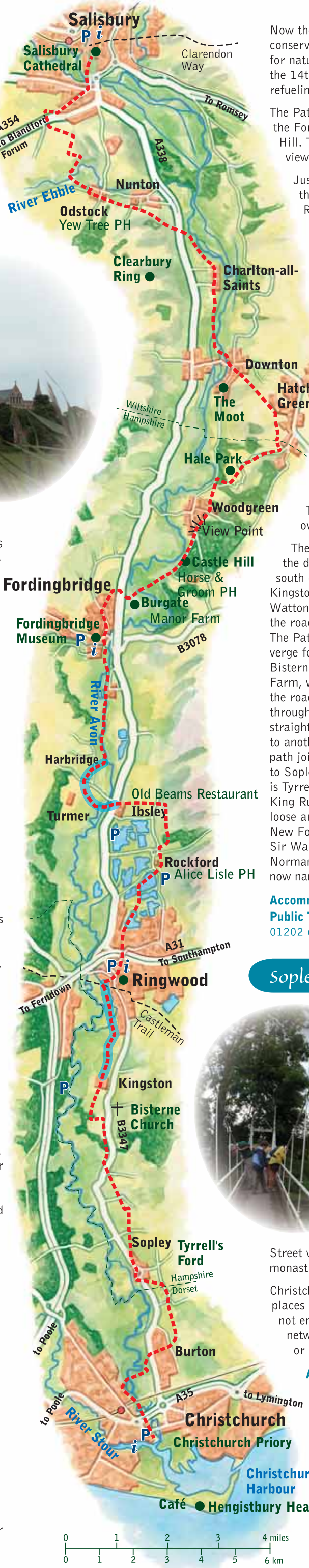
Public Transport: Fordingbridge: Wilts & Dorset X3 01722 336855

Fordingbridge to Ringwood

Distance: 9 miles Time: 4-4.5 hours

Fordingbridge grew up as a market town on a fording point, and despite being surrounded by so much water, it suffered several devastating fires. It has a magnificent seven-arched stone bridge spanning the River Avon. In the 18th century the town was renowned for its textile industry.

The Path passes down the centre of the town and through St Mary’s churchyard, which has some fine examples of medieval craftsmanship, and then heads south along the west bank of the River Avon before looping away past the small hamlets of Harbridge Green and Turner.



Now the Path turns east and again crosses the water meadows, which are a conservation area where no fertilizers or pesticides are used. They are a Mecca for naturalists. Continue onwards to the handsome bridge at Ibsley. Nearby is the 14th century thatched Old Beams Restaurant, conveniently placed for a refueling stop.

The Path crosses the main road then leads to Ibsley Manor Farm, returning to the Forest at the village hall where it climbs through paddocks to Summerlug Hill. The Path turns south through heathland where there are magnificent views of the valley, to Mockbeggar and Moyles Court.

Just past the pub at Rockford, named after Alice Lisle, the Path turns off the road onto a bridleway. From here, it leads between the lakes towards Ringwood, following a stream for some of its length. At the end of Kingfisher Lake, the Path leads through an estate and continues under the A31 trunk road into Ringwood.

Accommodation: Ringwood VIC 01425 470896
Refreshments: The Old Beams Restaurant 01425 473387
Alice Lisle Inn 01425 474700

Places of Interest: St.Martin’s Gallery, Ibsley 01425 489090.
Ringwood Town & Country Experience, Blashford 01425 472746
Public Transport: Ringwood: Wilts & Dorset X3, X34, X35, X36, 175, 176 01202 673555

Ringwood To Sopley

Distance: 6.5 miles Time: 2.5-3 hours

Ringwood is a bustling town, with a market attracting large crowds every Wednesday. Walk through the centre of the town past the church where the route heads west, passing Monmouth House, where the Duke of Monmouth was held prisoner before being taken to the Tower of London to be beheaded; then leave West Street by a bridge over the mill stream.

The Path passes Bickeley Common, and on to the disused railway line where it continues south over the water meadows to Kingston North Common. Walk past Wattons Ford before rejoining the road at Bisterne Church. The Path uses the main road verge for a short distance past Bisterne Manor to North End Farm, where a track leaves the road and turns south through some woods. Walk straight across open fields to another road, where the path joins a stream leading to Sopley. West of the Path is Tyrrell’s Ford. In 1100, King Rufus was killed by a loose arrow while hunting in the New Forest. The shot was fired by Sir Walter Tyrrell, who then fled to Normandy, crossing the river at the ford now named after him.

Accommodation: Ringwood VIC 01425 470896
Public Transport: Sopley: Wilts & Dorset 175 01202 673555

Sopley to Christchurch

Distance: 3.5 miles Time: 2-2.5 hours

Sopley is a charming village with a mill that is now a restaurant. Close by on a mound is the 13th century church of St Michael and All Saints which has a fascinating oak beam interior. The Path passes the 17th century Woolpack Inn and enters Sopley Park by the Clock House and the old well.

Continue on, crossing the fields to Staple Cross, and once past The Lamb Inn, follow the stream to Burton through a housing estate to the B3347. After this, the route returns to the calm of the water meadows, home to numerous water birds. Look across the valley for views of St Catherine’s Hill and its Bronze Age barrows. The Path crosses the river at the weir by the Water Works, passes under the railway line, and turns right to a row of cottages. At the end of this row it continues to the High Street with the Priory directly ahead. The Path ends at this splendid medieval monastic priory, built in 1094.

Christchurch is a historic town with a strong smuggling history and many places of interest to explore, including Place Mill and Constable’s House. Why not enjoy a picturesque walk by the river or even take a boat trip using the network of ferries. Take a break in one of the cafés, restaurants and pubs, or browse in the shops before finishing with a walk to the nearby harbour.

Accommodation: Christchurch Tourist Information Centre 01202 471780
Refreshments (small selection): The Fisherman’s Haunt, Winkton 01202 477283 The Woolpack Inn 01425 672252

Places of Interest: Priory Church 01202 485 804
Red House Museum & Gardens 01202 482 860

Public Transport: Christchurch: Wilts & Dorset m2, 121,123, 175, 176 01202 673555
Transdev Yellow Buses 1a,1b, 1c,3a 01202 636060

- P Parking
- PH Public House
- i Tourist Information
- Trail (walkers only)
- Sometimes flooded