

ALRESFORD DROVE

The Watercress Way

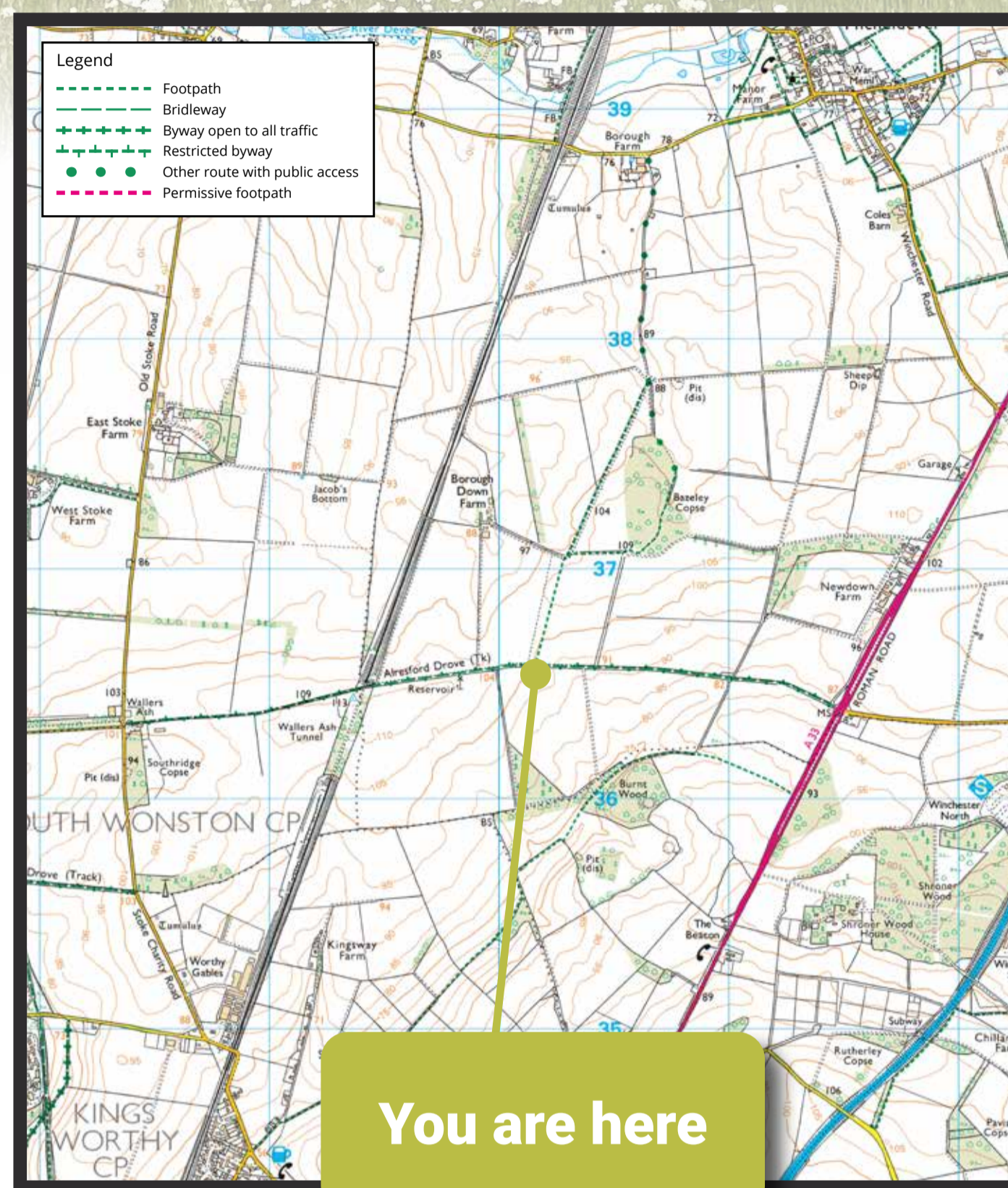
The Watercress Way is a long-distance trail, created by a charitable trust in 2016. Its name reflects the boom in local watercress production that followed the construction of the Mid-Hants 'Watercress Line' Railway and the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway. The charity's vision was to link the routes of these disused Victorian railways with existing rights of way through beautiful Hampshire downland and river valleys. This section is the Alresford Drive, which leads west for three kilometres towards South Wonston. The Watercress Way continues north from there to Sutton Scotney and Wonston. To the east of here it links into other droveways to reach Alresford, before looping back west and north through Kings Worthy.



Ancient Routes and Lunways Inn

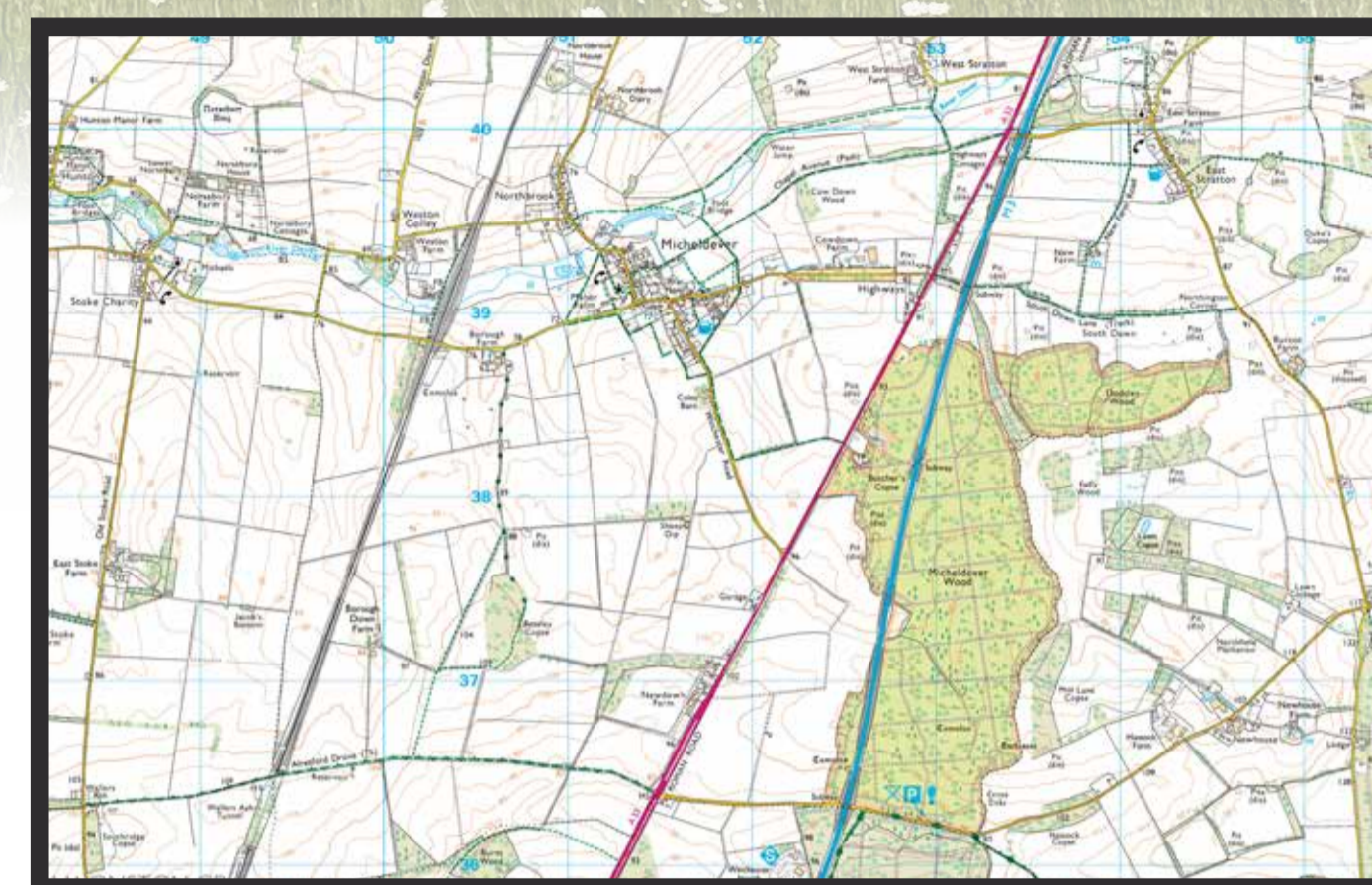
Droves are ancient trackways that were used to lead livestock such as cattle, sheep or swine to market, until it became possible to do so by rail. They were unmetalled (hard surfaces would have damaged the animals' hooves) and sometimes hedged to prevent animals straying. Evergreen trees such as yew were used to signal their location and ponds were sited at regular intervals for watering the animals. Their routes avoided inhabited areas, resulting in rural trails that are a haven for people and nature today.

The A33 follows the route of an old Roman road from Winchester to Silchester, which is why sections of it are so straight, although it deviates from the original line in places. It fell into disrepair until it was restored as a turnpike between Winchester and Popham in the 1750s. The Alresford Drive continues over the A33 at the crossroads just east of here, becoming the road to Northington (from which you can access Micheldever Wood). An early 19th century milestone at the crossroads marks the distances to Winchester (5 miles) and London (58 miles).



Locals remember Lunways Inn, which stood at that crossroads for centuries until razed by fire in 2004. It had lost most of its trade after the A33 was bypassed by the M3, and the site was later purchased by the Plymouth Brethren. The inn's name came from the Lunway – a prehistoric ridgeway track that leads here from Old Sarum near Salisbury and continues via Totford towards London. Lunway meant the road to London, from the Old English 'Lunden(e)weie'.

The inn therefore stood at an intersection of ancient routes, serving drovers from as far away as the West Country and Wales on their way to Hampshire's market towns and beyond. Alresford was renowned for its fairs and markets, held at different times of the year for trading livestock – particularly sheep; it was a prosperous wool town for many centuries.



Bazeley Copse



The footpath adjoining the Alresford Drive here provides a stunning view across the fields to Micheldever; you can see St Mary's Church in the distance. The path branches to the right through Bazeley Copse and then rejoins the main footpath, or keep to the straight sunken track and enjoy the chalk downland meadow on the unploughed triangle west of the copse. The main path heads north for a kilometre to Borough Farm (and its handsome 17th and 18th century barns), then joins the road towards Micheldever.

In the Iron Age, small dwellings and animal enclosures dotted the land all around Bazeley Copse. The meadow triangle exists because it is protected as a Scheduled Monument; archaeological excavation revealed flint cobbling, rammed chalk flooring, pits and ditches, indicating a Late Iron Age (c. 1st century BC) settlement site. This was overlaid by a three-roomed Roman building.

Other fieldwork has shown evidence for Iron Age settlement and agriculture over a far wider area here. A banjo enclosure was identified just west of Bazeley Copse. Named after their shape, these enclosures had a long entranceway that may have been used for funnelling livestock inside; the interior may also have contained one or more roundhouses. Banjo enclosures are classed as heritage assets because they are generally rare, although particularly prevalent in Micheldever parish. There is similar evidence at Micheldever Station to the



north, and east within Micheldever Wood. Norsebury Ring hillfort (three kilometres to the north), would have acted as a communal centre during the Iron Age for people to meet, perform ceremonies, trade, and take shelter in times of trouble.

Wildlife

Deer are often seen running across these fields; also look out for kites or buzzards circling overhead. In spring, bluebells carpet the ground within the cool shade of Bazeley Copse, and sweet bullaces can be found along the footpath towards Borough Farm in summer. A rich diversity of other native plants and insects survives here at the relatively undisturbed boundary of Micheldever parish. This area was traditionally sheep downland. Highlights include:

- Pyramidal orchids, which fill the chalk grassland and verges between June and July with their pink-purple, densely-packed flowers.
- The common bird's-foot trefoil, also known as 'eggs and bacon'. The yellow, slipper-like flowers can be seen in the grass verges from May to September.
- Ox-eye daisies: from June to September, their large, white flowers cover the meadow alongside the sunken track and margins of Bazeley Copse.
- Sweet-scented wild thyme and marjoram, which attract bees and other pollinators.
- A wide variety of native butterflies. These include gatekeepers – look out for the large, distinctive eyespot with two 'pupils' on each forewing. Small tortoiseshells, joined by small skippers, can be found basking on tall grasses or buzzing between stems. The common blue butterfly is also easy to spot because of its dazzling colour.



If you spot any unusual wildlife, the Dever Society would love to hear from you on admin@deversociety.org.

Find out more about Micheldever parish at:

