

Watership Down Trail

A 24-mile circular trail exploring the landscape immortalised in Richard Adam's classic novel "Watership Down"



Anna Dillon (c) NWDAONB Partnership



A waymarked walking trail

Ordnance Survey Explorer
Map 144 (Basingstoke, Alton
& Whitchurch)

Rail enquiries:
www.southwesternrailway.com

Nearest Pubs:
Echinswell closed Mon & Tues
Freefolk and Whitchurch

Public Toilets:
Whitchurch Bell Street car park

Around & About Whitchurch:
www.whitchurch.org.uk

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is undoubtedly among Britain's most beautiful landscapes.

The third largest of our protected landscapes, covering an area of 1,730 square kilometres, this is a visibly ancient landscape embracing the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs, dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments, secluded wooded areas and sheltered chalk river valleys.

The North Wessex Downs form a surprisingly remote, expansive and tranquil landscape in the heart of southern England, the Downs are somewhere to be treasured and enjoyed by all; a truly special place, protected for you.

Whitchurch, Gateway to the North Wessex Downs: Your route will take you past ancient broad leaf woodland, across wide sweeping downland and up to the high chalk ridge and the top of Watership Down.

Along the trail you will pass some of the actual book locations; the ancient Harroway where *Efrafa* is located at the 'crossing point of two bridle paths', Nuthangar Farm, Watership Down and Hampshire's famous River Test chalk stream where the rabbits made their way to safety on a raft.

The open chalk and flint downland at the start of the walk records human activity from the neolithic period through to the age of steam; this is a landscape crossed by ancient tracks and country lanes where millennia of itinerant chapmen or pedlars once plied their trade. You will enjoy long views across agricultural fields to the chalk ridges; listen out for the call of the skylark high above the fields heralding your approach.



Waypoint OS Grid Ref: SU

Follow in the footsteps of Whitchurch resident and author Richard Adams as you explore his beloved North Wessex Downs.

1 46331 48919

The trail begins at Whitchurch Railway Station. Exit onto Station Road, turn right and then take the footpath on the right just beyond the bus

2 46183 48867

stop, keeping the industrial unit to your left. At the bottom of the slope turn right at **2**, continue under the foot tunnel and then follow the field edge north away from Whitchurch. A dog leg takes you into an adjoining field on your left; continue ahead (north) above the former

3 46245 49535

Didcot-Newbury-Southampton railway cutting to a T junction at **3**.

The DNSR line operated between 1882 and 1964 and was the first to employ a steam-powered mechanical digger in its construction.

4 45667 49464

Turn left crossing over the A34 and at **4** turn right; pass through Down Farm and then crossover the Harroway taking the path opposite.

The Harroway, or 'Old Way' in Old English, is an ancient trackway thought to be at least 5,000 years old. From the early Middle Ages through to the 19th century, the pathway served as a drove road to the prosperous market town of Andover and the famous Weyhill Fair; from here the path continued over the open expanse of Salisbury Plain and onto Stonehenge and ultimately the Devon coast.

5 45229 50832

Continue ahead to a crossroads of paths at point **5**, turn right and continue ahead.

Bradley Woods ancient broadleaf woodland rising over to your left is designated an important site of interest in nature conservation.

6 46121 50926

At the end of the second field, just before the A34, turn left through a hedgerow at **6** and follow

7 46217 51422

the field edge, passing under the A34 and continuing ahead to the junction with Newbury Road at **8**.

8 46365 51432

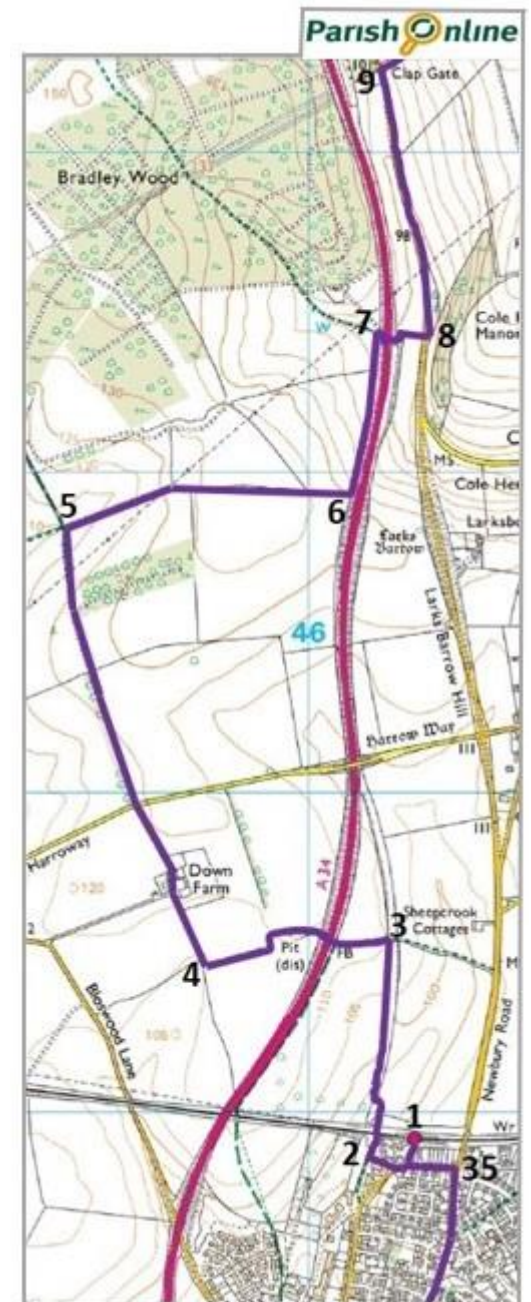
Turn left and walk along the side of the road listening out for fast moving traffic.

9 46227 52275

Look out for the layby on your right and just beyond that a fingerpost at **9**; turn right onto the Portway Roman Road.

Connecting the former Roman settlements at Silchester and Old Sarum, Wiltshire, the Portway is often associated with the Roman Empire, but may in fact predate the Roman occupation of Britain.

Continue along this path for approximately 1¾ km, eventually reaching a junction with a tarmacked lane at **10**.



10 48013 53238
11 48304 54437
12 48677 55182
13 48419 55622

Turn left and follow this very attractive single-track lane for approximately 2¼ km passing Hare Warren Copse on your left and the Downs rising on your right.

Pass by Hare Warren Cottages and Farm and continue along the lane. A short distance beyond the farm on the left is a small layby and fingerpost. Follow the wide path under the pylon line and uphill between fields.

Take the footpath going diagonally off to the right. If you overshoot this path and arrive at the ruined livestock shelter, retrace your steps.

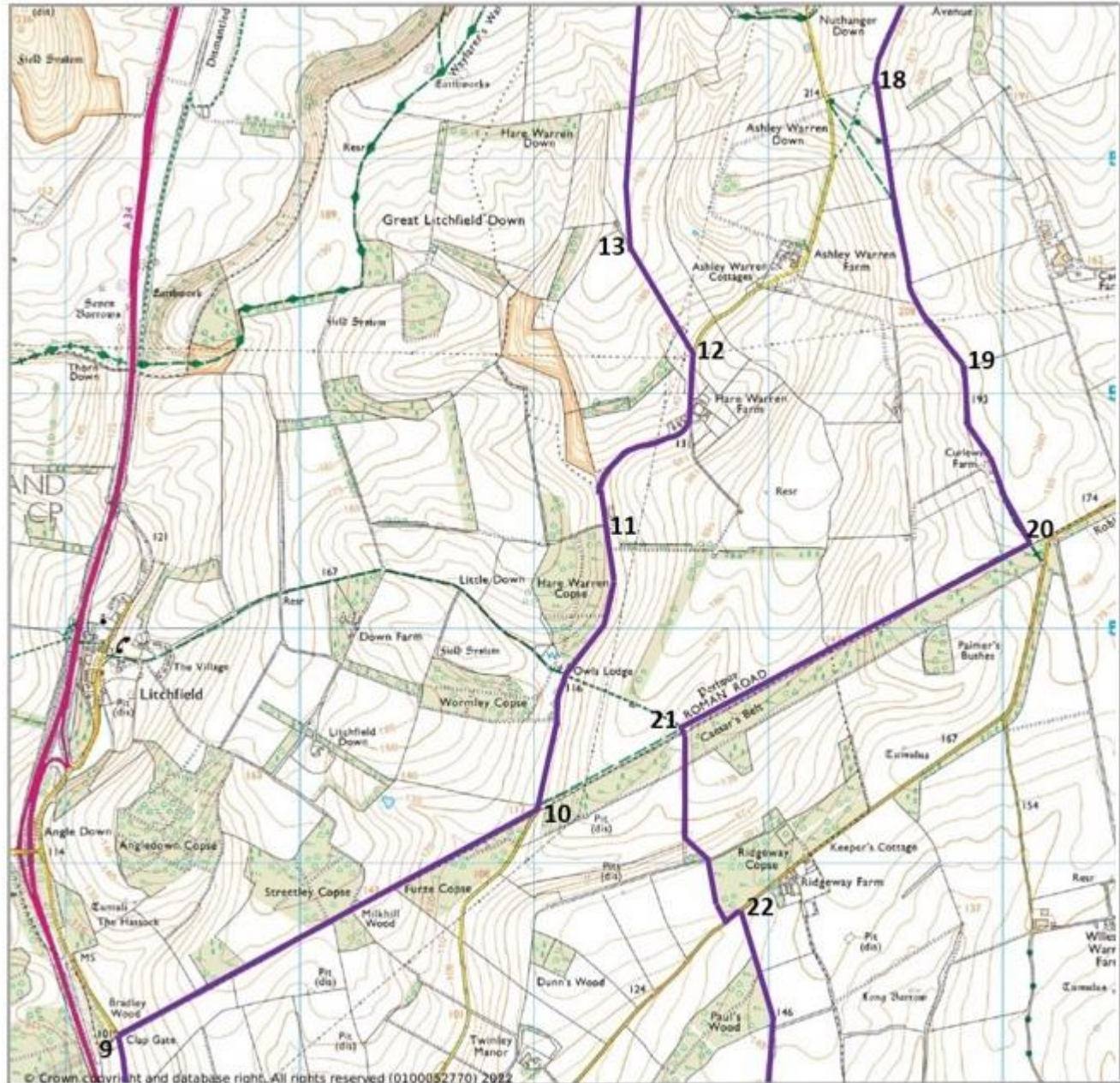
Continue ahead across open downland taking in the big skies and open vistas. Listen out for the skylarks hovering above the fields.

Pass a small belt of trees keeping the trees and hedgerow to your right.

As you approach the ridge, the Wayfarers Trail goes off to the left.... to visit Ladle Hill Iron Age Hill Fort & tumulus follow this path and then retrace your steps.

The surrounding area is rich in Iron Age burial mounds, enclosures, and field systems. Further to the west lies another hill fort called Beacon Hill.

On rejoining the path, turn left to follow the hedgerow and continue to follow the path as it swings right ahead of trees at **14**.



14 48453 56850

Continue to follow the Wayfarers path.

15 4884956611

Just beyond point **15** you have the option to take the attractive path on your left that heads steeply down the scarp slope before joining the lane at Sydmonton. Turn right at the lane to rejoin the trail at **A**. To avoid the optional route, continue ahead at **15** to the junction with the lane. Turn left and follow the lane.

16 49164 56606

A 49212 57714

Continue ahead at the crossroads. The road bends to the right at **B** and just before a house at **C** turn right into a field.

B 49418 58803

C 49585 59066

Follow the tree line on your right.

D 49685 58522

Book location **1** - You arrive at Nuthanger Farm. Turn left onto the lane and then right. Continue ahead past book location **2** to the lane and book location **3**.

E 49848 58426

F 49857 57905

Turn right along the lane to **A** and then left to retrace your steps uphill to the Wayfarers Trail at **16**.

16 49164 56606

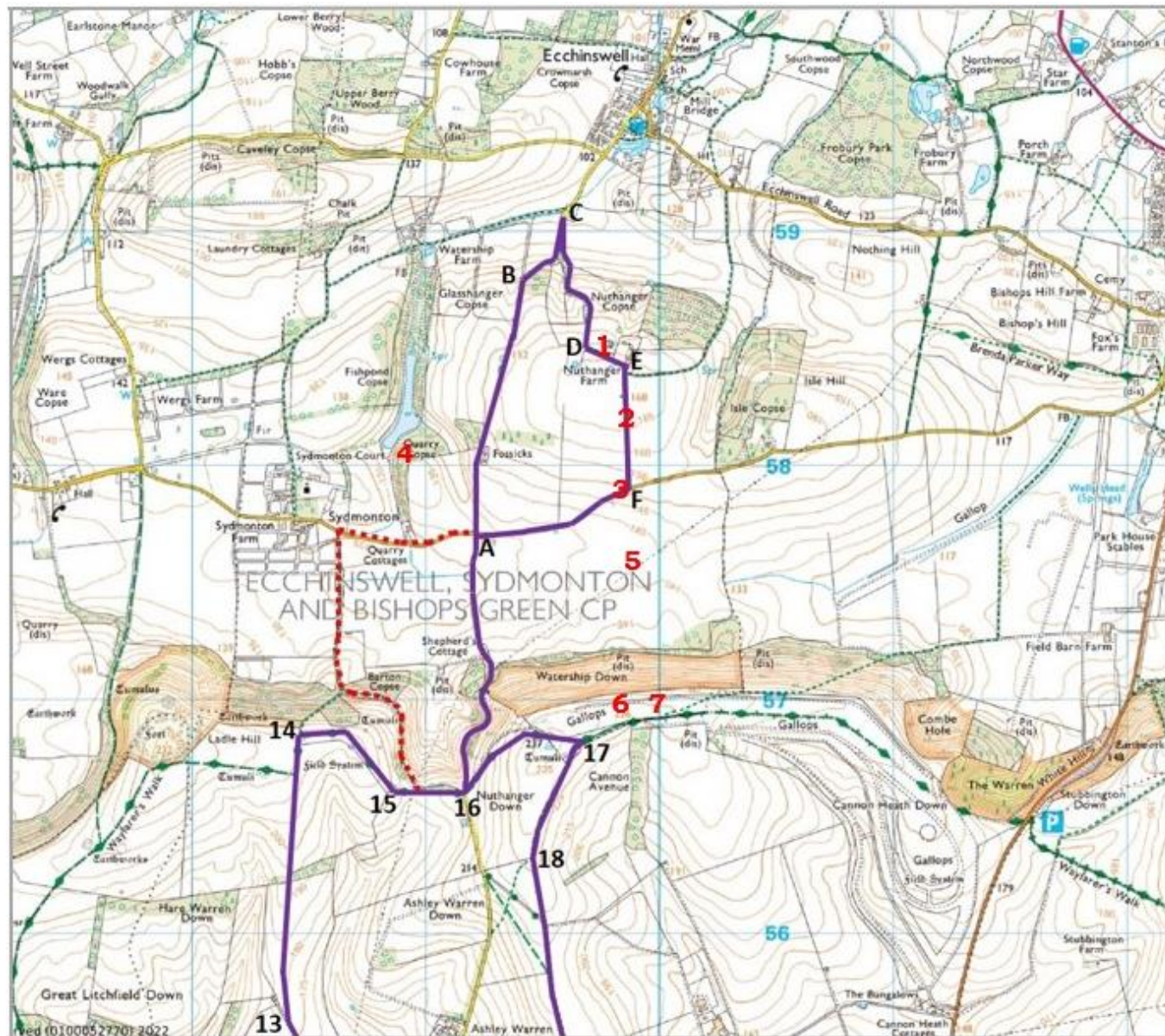
Turn left, following the path to **17**. Continue ahead to visit book locations **6** and the rabbit's warren at **7**.

17 49690 56835

A huge beech tree once stood at the NE corner of the wood, the roots of which, was the site of the rabbits' warren in the novel (7). Unfortunately, it was destroyed by a storm in 2004, but a new tree has been planted there, protected by a wooden fence with "Hazel", "Bigwig", and "Fiver", roughly carved into its boards. A plaque commends Richard Adams, for his love of the Down and all its inhabitants.

18 49451 56319

Retrace your steps to **17** and turn diagonally left to follow the path as it skirts around



the edge of a wooded tumuli before swinging south following the field edge along the top of Nuthanger Down.

Continue ahead crossing over a farm track and continuing to follow the path south between hedgerows for approximately 2 km.

Pass under the pylon line featured in the book.

19 49833 55101 Continue to follow the bridleway ahead, passing around Curlews Farm and before rejoining the Portway Roman Road at point **20**.

20 50115 54361 Turn right and continue ahead along the field edge towards point **21** keeping the belt of ancient woodland, known as Caesar's Belt to your left.

From chapter 30, 'A New Journey':

“Where the roman road crosses the downs, the line is marked by Caesar's Belt, a strip of woodland as straight as the road, narrow indeed but more than three miles long. In this hot noon-day the trees of the Belt were looped and netted with darkest shadow. The sun lay outside, the shadows inside the trees. All was still, save for the grasshoppers and the falling finch song of the yellow-hammer on the thorn.”

21 48629 53577 At the junction of paths at **21**, crossover the stile on your left and continue ahead through the clearing between the belt of trees to join the well-defined footpath heading south between hedgerows.

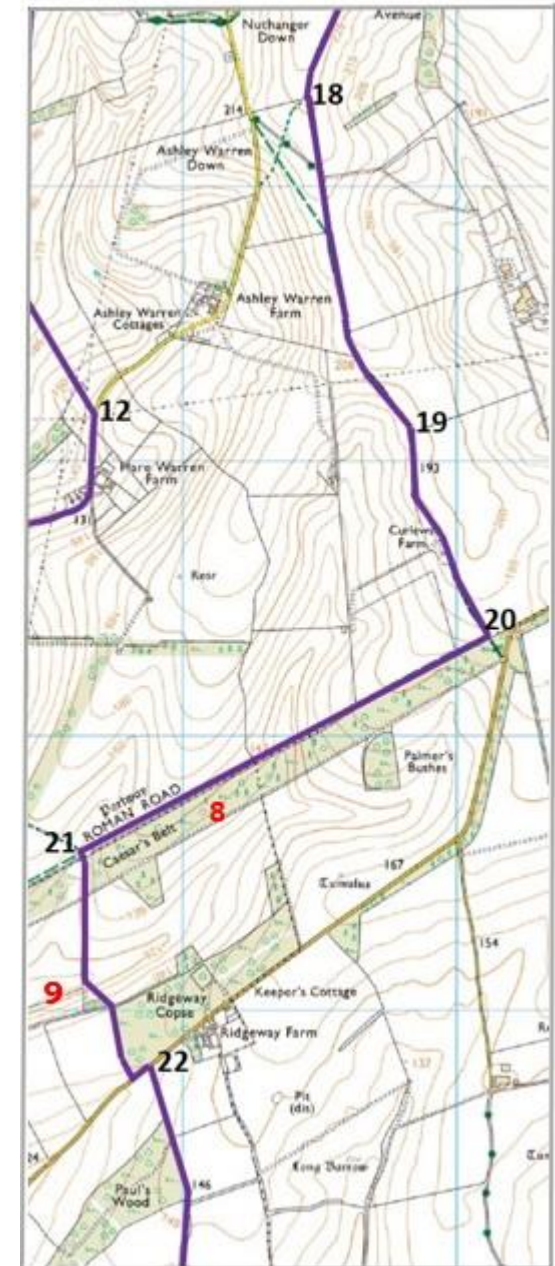
Ahead on your right towards the bottom of the slope is book reference **9** and just beyond that, at the bottom of the hill is the start of Ridgeway Copse.

The public right of way swings to the left away from the farm track and follows the field edge in front of the copse. Almost immediately you turn right to cut through a short stretch of the copse before emerging back onto the well-defined farm track to the junction with the busy Cole Henley to Kingsclere road.

BEWARE, LISTEN and LOOKOUT for FAST MOVING TRAFFIC.

22 48878 52798 Take care crossing over the road and turn left to walk approx. 100 metres along the grass verge before taking the lane on your right leading to Whitnal Farm.

Continue ahead along the lane for approximately 1½ km. At the top of the lane, pass by Whitnal Farm and farm buildings on your right.



23 48969 51461
24 49666 51341
25 49790 50840

Just beyond the farm, turn left onto the right of way and when the path forks, take the right fork to join the byway at **24**. Turn right following the hedgerow to the junction with the ancient Harrow Way at point **25**. Book location **11** - You have now reached the location of Efrafa, the warren controlled by the formidable dictator General Woundwort and his militaristic band of Owsla.

“Efrafa grew up round the crossing-point of two green bridle-paths, one of which (the east-west) was tunnel-like, bordered on both sides by a thick growth of trees and bushes.”

Please note, although book locations 12 – 17 are indicated, these are on private land with no public access.

25 49790 50840
26 48419 50013
27 48500 49406
28 48591 48781

Turn right, continue ahead and at the junction with the lane, turn left. Continue ahead to crossover the “iron road” (railway line) that features in the story and at the junction with the B3400, turn right if you wish to visit the Watership Down Inn, Freefolk (five mins walk).

29 48577 48437

To continue the trail, crossover the road and take the path opposite. Cross the River Test and walk ahead to the top of the field, turning right at the field boundary. Continue ahead across fields to emerge by the brick bridge at Bere Mill.

30 47602 48179

Cross the bridge, follow the lane ahead and then turn left through a kissing gate. Continue straight ahead; pass through another kissing gate and follow the field edge to eventually emerge onto a residential road (The Green).

31 47039 48093

32 46738 48265

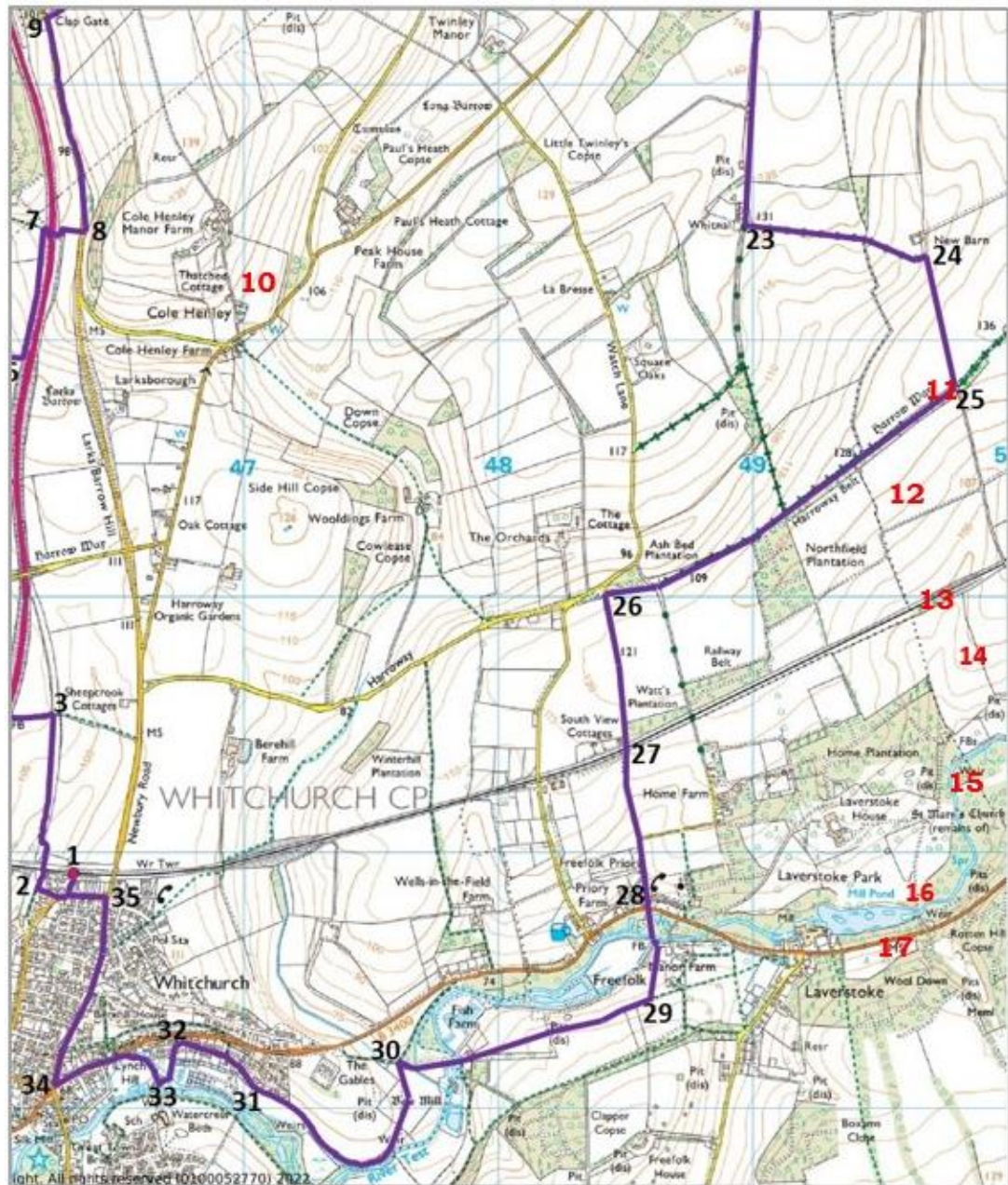
Where the road swings right, turn left onto the path and continue ahead to Town Mill. Turn right to follow the lane by a side stream and at the main road turn left for the town centre pubs and cafes.

33 46656 48093

34 46250 48088

35 46451 48814

At the town square turn right to walk up Newbury Street and at Station Road turn left for Whitchurch Railway Station.



Watership Down –Book Locations

1. Hazel and friends attempt to free Clover and the other caged rabbits from a farm building a little to the NE of the main entrance to Nuthanger Farm.
“Nuthanger is like a farm in an old tale.... The house may be two hundred years old or it may be older, built of brick, with a stone-faced front looking south towards the down. On the east side, in front of the house, a barn stands clear of the ground on staddle-stones; and opposite is the cow-byre”.
2. The vegetable sheds explored by Hazel and Pipkin on their reconnaissance trip have gone, but they would have been to the side of the footpath near to point 2.
3. Late on in the book, Hazel, Blackberry and Dandelion lure the farm dog up the Down from Nuthanger Farm. Blackberry is left on the edge of the field near the road;
“Now Blackberry, he said, this is where we leave you. Lie close and don’t move. When the time comes, don’t break too soon”.
4. Where the rabbits saw the *“great, grey fisher-bird that paddled and stabbed in the sedge”*.
5. The *“iron tree”* (pylon line).
6. Hawkbit discovers the abandoned holes in the thorn-tree thicket; the rabbits consider these unsatisfactory for their warren.
7. The rabbits established Watership Warren at the NE corner of the beech hanger, just south of the Wayfarers public right of way. The great beech was sadly destroyed in a storm in 2004; a new tree has been planted to mark the spot.
8. The combe where Bigwig met the fox.
9. The copse where the fox struck.
10. General Woundwort was born in a burrow outside a cottage near Cole Henley.
11. The ancient Harroway. The centre of Efrafa, Woundwort’s concentration camp was the Crixia, *“at the crossing point of two green bridal paths, one of which (the east to west) was tunnel-like, bordered on both sides by a thick growth of trees and bushes”* The Near Hind Mark holes that Bigwig was assigned to when spying in the warren, are a little to the SW of the crossroads.
12. *“Go straight to that ash tree in the hedge,’ he said, ‘and take all the does you can pick up on the way. Get through to the other side and I’ll be there as soon as you are.”*
The ash tree is sadly no longer there.
13. The roadless railway arch.
14. Marks the place where Kehaar attacks General Woundwort.
15. The plank bridge.
16. The punt came to rest at the brick bridge with the mill pond beyond. Hazel hoped the group could recuperate here, but the ground was too wet and was too close to *“a road busier than they had ever known”* (B3400 - Rotten Hill the road into Laverstoke).

