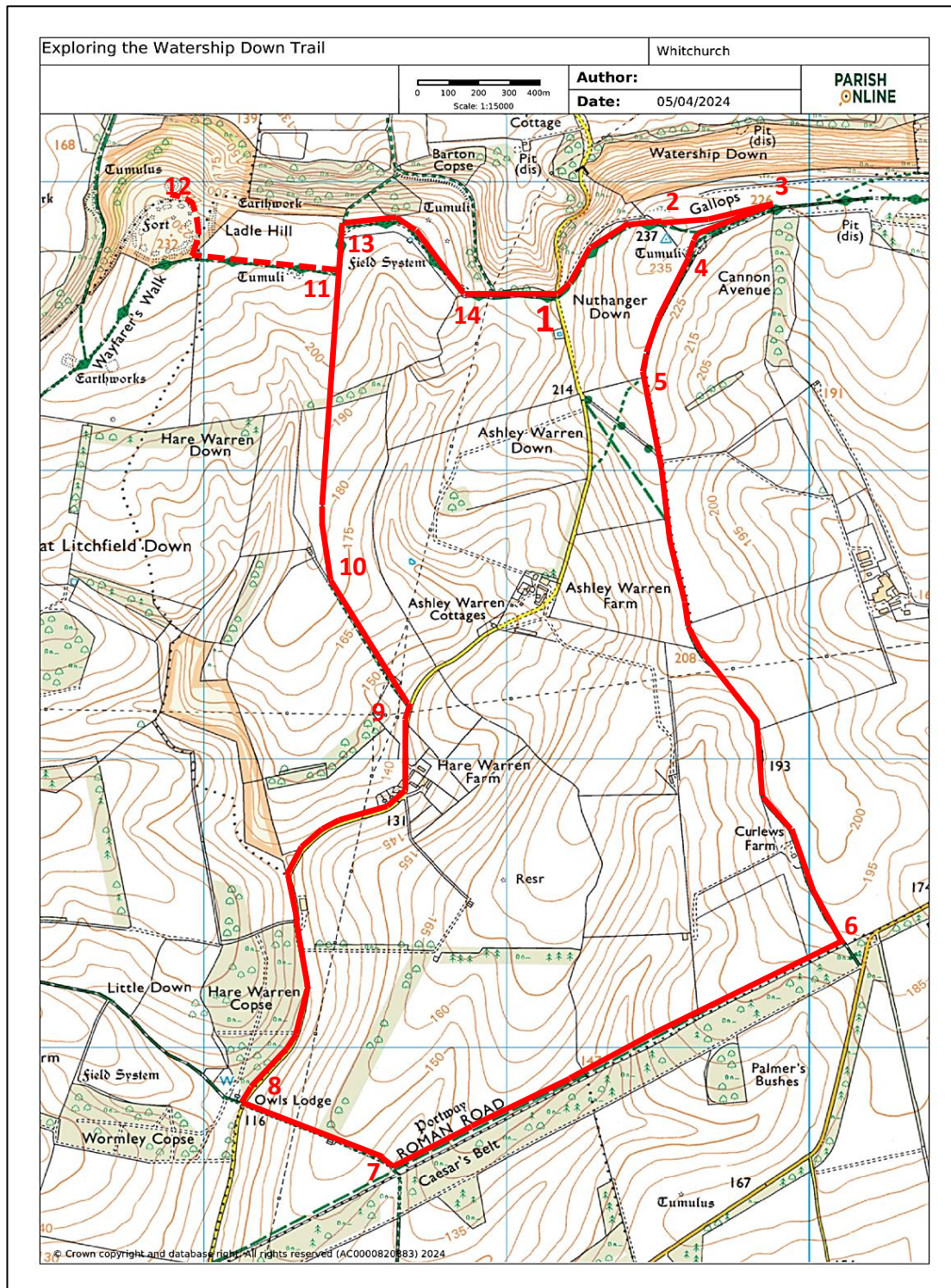




Exploring the Watership Down Trail

(6 miles with optional 1 mile detour to Ladle Hill)



This walk covers a section of the Watership Down Trail, a 24-mile circular trail that explores the landscape celebrated in Richard Adam's classic novel "Watership Down". Maps and directions for the full trail route are also available at whitchurch.org.uk/what-to-do/. This shortened circular route covers some of the northern section of the full trail.

The starting point for the walk is a layby on the northern edge of Nuthanger Down, on the road from Cole Henley to Ecchinswell, **OS grid reference SU 492 566**. Waypoints and their grid references, which are numbered on the map, are included in the walk directions, so you start at **WP1: 492 566**.

From Chapter 19: It was different from the meadow copses they had left: a narrow belt of trees, four or five hundred yards long but barely fifty wide; a kind of wind-break common on the downs. It consisted almost entirely of well-grown beeches. The great, smooth trunks stood motionless in their green shade, the branches spreading flat, one above another in crisp, light-dappled tiers. Between the trees the ground was open and offered hardly any cover. The rabbits were perplexed. They could not make out why the wood was so light and still and why they could see so far between the trees. The continuous, gentle rustling of the beech leaves was unlike the sounds to be heard in a copse of nut-bushes, oak and silver birch.



From **WP1** you will see fingerposts and waymarking disks showing Watership Down Trail indicators in three directions – a farm track to the west, the road going steeply downhill to the north and a gate and footpath to the east. Take the path to the east, with the wooded slope on the edge of Nuthanger Down on your left-hand side.

After passing through a gate, at **WP2: 495 568** you enter Watership Down; continue ahead eastwards along the Down; this area, known as The Gallops, is used for exercising racehorses from the nearby stables in Kingsclere and the countryside area north of the Down. Walk as far as **WP3: 499 569**.

A huge beech tree once stood at the NE corner of the wood, the roots of which formed the location of the rabbits' Honeycomb Warren in the novel. 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.

Turn back towards **WP2**, but soon bear left, keep to the edge of a wooded tumuli and pass through a gate at **WP4: 496 567**. Follow the path onwards as it swings south, following the field edge along the top of Nuthanger Down.

Continue ahead via **WP5: 449 563**, cross over a farm track and continue to follow the path south between hedgerows for approximately 2 km. Pass under a pylon-line (the iron trees described in the book). Continue to follow the bridleway ahead, passing around Curlews Farm and then join the Portway Roman Road at **WP6: 501 544**. This is just before you meet the Cole Henley Road; look for a fingerpost and right turn, to continue ahead on a path with the belt of ancient woodland known as Caesar's Belt to your left, and a field edge on your right.

From Chapter 30: "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."

Follow this path for 1.5 km, to reach **WP7: 449 154**; at this point the route for the **full** Watership Down Trail turns left, over a stile, continuing to the south. However, for this shorter loop, take the path diagonally up to the right, continue past a disused milking shed and descend to meet the road at **WP8: 481 538**. At this point, our route rejoins the Watership Down Trail. Turn right onto the road and follow it, passing Hare Warren Copse on your left. Continue along the road, which bends to the right, passing by Hare Warren Cottages and Farm.

A short distance beyond the farm on the left is a small layby and fingerpost **WP9: 487 552**. Turn left up this wide path, under the pylon-line and uphill between fields.

At **WP10: 484 556**, 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, and 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 at **WP11: 484 567**.

To visit Ladle Hill Iron Age Hill Fort and tumulus follow this path to the left; soon, where the field on your right ends, you'll reach a dewpond; turn through the adjacent gate into the fort, and continue ahead, stopping at **WP12: 479 569**. The view from here is stunning. 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, and Highclere Castle is just visible in the trees to the right of Beacon Hill. Below you is Sydmonton, and Watership Down is to the right.

Retrace your steps to **WP11**, where you turn to the left to follow the hedgerow, and then turn right through a gate at **WP13: 485 568**. Continue ahead, passing another dewpond on your right.

At **WP14: 488 566** you reach a wide track. Turn left along the track, and in a few minutes, you'll arrive back at the start point **WP1**.



Path between WP9 & WP10

.....