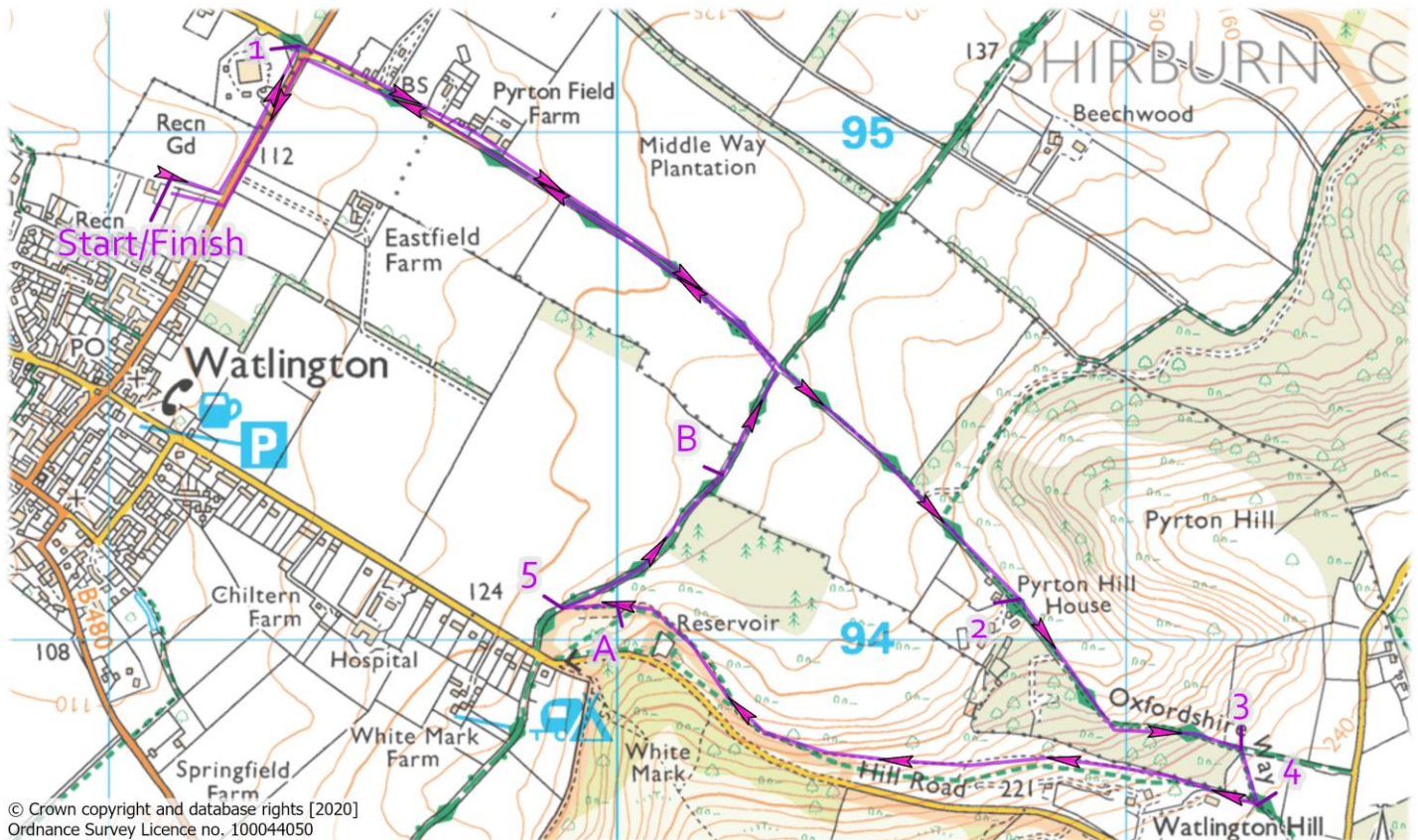


Watlington circular - chalk pits and ancient routes
By Annette Venters, Chilterns Conservation Board

Summary

This walk begins takes in some wonderful Chilterns scenery including rolling chalk downland, beech woodlands and ancient pathways. It follows a stretch of the Oxfordshire Way up towards Christmas Common, returning via the chalk pits and a stretch of the Ridgeway National Trail. The historic market town of Watlington is well worth exploring on your return.

- Length:** 4.2 miles
Terrain: Moderate walking on unsurfaced paths and lanes with one long steep climb
Accessibility This is a stile-free walk with three gates
Start & finish: Watlington Recreation Ground car park, Shirburn Road, Watlington OX49 5BZ. Grid ref: SU 691 948
Food & drink: Pubs and café in Watlington (but note restrictions due to Covid). None on the walk.
Maps: OS Explorer 171, Chiltern Society 9
Parking: Watlington Recreation Ground car park OX49 5BZ
Local transport: There is a local bus service running between Oxford and Watlington, see <https://bustimes.org/services/11-oxford-watlington>



Route

Leave the car park and turn left to follow the footpath along the B4009 Watlington Road (you can also cut across the recreation ground to meet the road at the far corner). After 300m you will see Station Road on your right.

Waypoint 1 - Cross over the Watlington Road with care to join Station Road (also the route of the Oxfordshire Way). Follow this quiet track enjoying the lovely views of the hills ahead.

Waypoint 2 – At the end of the tarmac lane continue ahead on the bridleway which climbs steeply uphill, with lovely views of Pyrton hill to your left. After 530m take the footpath on your right, through a metal gate.

Waypoint 3 – Follow the path across the field to the hedgerow, looking out for the footpath on your right with a metal kissing gate.

Waypoint 4 – Go through the gate and follow the path down the wooded hill. It is narrow to start with then broadens out, with woodland rising up each side. Towards the bottom of the hill there is a path off to the left leading to the old chalk pits, an area of open grassland (take this path if you wish to detour to the chalk pits, otherwise continue ahead). Continue until you reach a metal gate which takes you on to the Ridgeway National Trail.

Waypoint 5 – Turn right on the Ridgeway and follow it back to Station Road. Turn left on Station Road and retrace your steps back to the Recreation Ground.

Points of Interest

Watlington is an ancient market town with many 16th century and Georgian buildings. Its unspoilt traditional feel makes it a popular location for filming, including many scenes from *Midsomer Murders*. The Chiltern Hills rise just behind the town, with the Ridgeway National Trail and the Oxfordshire Way just half a mile away. There is a good selection of independent shops in the town, along with a café, deli and two pubs.

A Watlington Chalk Pit: This area of open grassland, now a nature reserve, was once a chalk quarry used by the local community. Chalk was an important natural resource and was used in many ways. It was mixed with clay to make bricks, it was burned and converted into lime which was used in mortar and cement, for whitewash and household cleaning. Lime was also spread on the fields. So, historically, this was an important and busy place. In summer the grassland is rich in flowers and insects.

B The Ridgeway National Trail: The Ridgeway has been described as Britain's oldest road and is part of an historic corridor thought to have connected the Dorset coast to the Wash. It is now an 87 mile National Trail running from Avebury to Ivinghoe Beacon.