



Alton and the Worldhams

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

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Refreshments: East Worldham, Alton

Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Country town, villages, easy field paths

In Brief

This walk unites the interesting country town of Alton with two historic sister villages in the surrounding countryside. The walk takes you across quiet fields and meadows, giving you ever-varying views of this hop-growing part of East Hampshire. Two medieval churches are directly on the route, all spiced with historical anecdote.

For refreshment, the town of Alton has a large number of inns, such as the *Crown Hotel* and the *Swan*. Restaurants abound, especially those with Turkish cuisine – Alton has strong cultural links with all things Turkish. In East Worldham there is an excellent inn, the *Three Horseshoes* (for booking or enquiries, ring 01420 83211).



This walk is written from the standpoint of arrival by train at Alton Station. However, you can also arrive by car, parking in the villages (e.g. by East Worldham church) or in the town where there are many car parks as well as roadside parking. Although not quite on the route, the town centre is definitely worth exploring, for its shops and for the Curtis Museum.

There are two crossings of the A31 dual-carriageway trunk road which require patience and care. Consequently, this walk is not suitable for the very old or the very young, or for your dog (of any age).



There were no nettles when this walk was planned, so shorts can be worn.



The paths are generally across grass or on well-made tracks but boots are necessary in the wetter seasons because some of the soil may be claggy in parts.

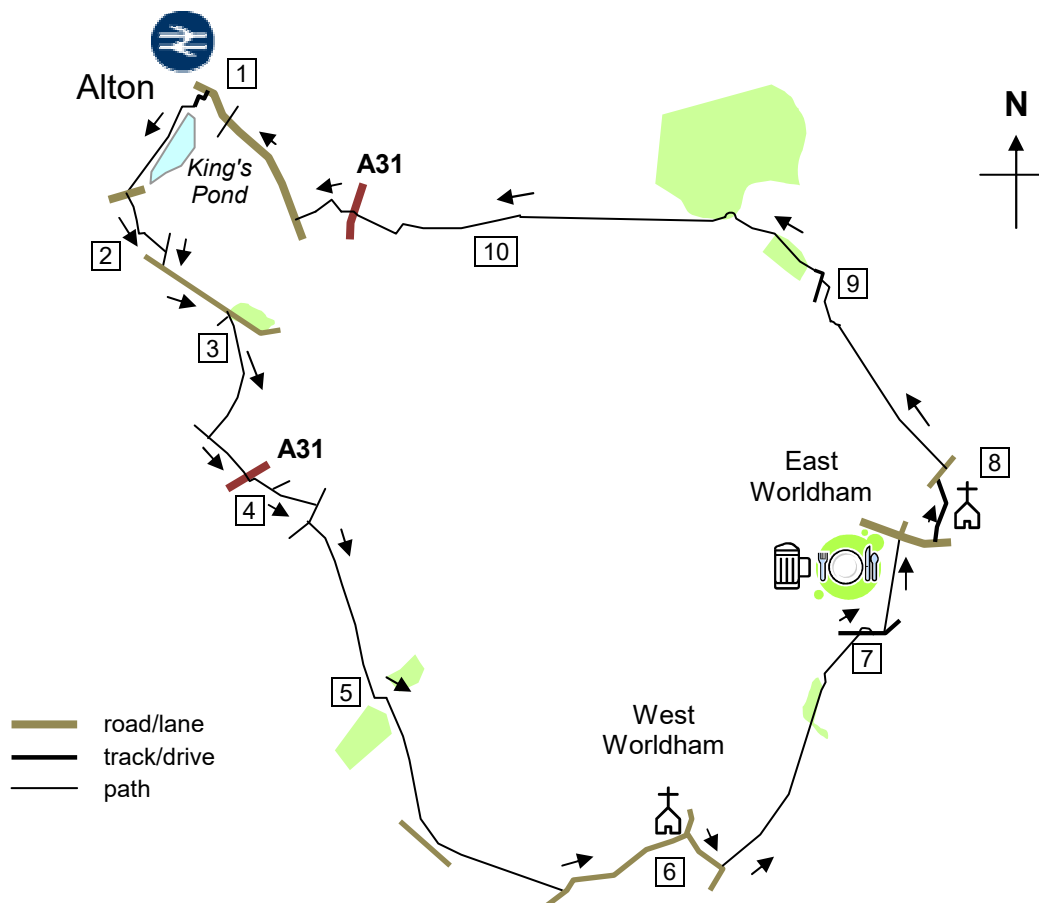
For details of the station and alternative car parks, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk


Saxon Alton goes back at least to the year 700 when its name "aewielltun" meant "farmstead by a spring". Appropriate as Alton is a source of the River Wey. The Curtis Museum in the town holds a fascinating account of its early history. The Railway in Alton is a life-link, making this a town where British Rail was revered. It is also a terminus of the newly-restored steam Watercress Line.

The Battle of Alton was an early victory of Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads over the Royalists during the First Civil War in 1643. (The "English Civil War" was really a series of wars between 1642 and 1651.) As the Roundheads under Sir William Waller approached the town, Royalist commander, the Earl of Crawford, inexplicably fled with his cavalry to Winchester, leaving Colonel Boles to defend with infantry alone. Boles made a rather heroic stand but was utterly overwhelmed. (Musket holes can still be seen on the door of St Lawrence's Church.) This victory spurred the Roundheads to making further gains, such as at Cheriton (see that walk in this series).

Since 1867, Alton was always associated with the grisly murder of Fanny Adams, an eight-year-old who went for a September spree with her sister and a friend in the Flood Meadows. A seemingly respectable 24-year-old solicitor's clerk named Frederick Baker offered the other two girls three ha'pence for sweets and took Fanny away. Alton was crime-free and Fanny's absence did not cause any concern till late evening. Details of the murder are distressing to recount: organs and small pieces of Fanny were scattered around a wide area and parts of her body were still being found days later. Baker was arrested but reacted calmly. Only a few traces of blood were found and no one has explained how he cut the body up with only a small knife. He was hanged, but that mystery still haunts this ghastly affair. Tinned mutton issued to seamen in 1869 was tastelessly compared to the remains of Fanny. Since then, the euphemism for "Sweet F.A." has lingered on in the lingo.



If you are starting at Alton railway station, with your back to the entrance, turn **left**, follow the pavement for around 100m, turn **left** down a flight of steps and **left** on the main road.

- 1 From Alton railway station, walk down the main road, under the railway bridge, and continue for just 80m. Turn **right** on Waterside Court, a quiet cul-de-sac leading to some private tenements. *The stream running in a culvert on your right is a branch of the River Wey.* At a T-junction, turn **right** and, in 10m, **left** on a tarmac path. A metal barrier leads to the King's Pond, an oasis of green, popular with families. Keep **right** and follow the water's edge on a well-made path, part of the *Wey Walk*. At the far end, cross a main road, Lower Turk Street (*Alton has a strong Turkish connection*) to a flight of steps.
- 2 At the top of this long flight of steps, your path continues and eventually ends at a residential road. Turn **right** on this road and, in 100m, at a T-junction, turn **right**. At a second T-junction turn **left** on Windmill Hill. Follow this road for 300m to where it begins to descend and curve left.
-  **Leave** the road here by turning **right** into a driveway. Keep **left** on a path through a modern kissing-gate, into a field with views ahead.
- 3 Your path runs along the top right-hand side of a sloping field and, after a corner, keeps straight ahead to another kissing-gate. Go down steps into a large field. Your route is **right** along the top of the field and, in nearly 300m, **left** in the corner, leading down towards the main road. Go over a stile and steeply down steps. You have to cross the main A31 trunk road to a fingerpost on the other side.

You need a lot of care and patience to cross this road. Being a dual carriageway, it has a central strip but it allows a speed of 70mph! **Cross singly or in pairs.**
- 4 Go up steps on the other side, a fraction left, through a modern kissing-gate. Immediately, at the corner of a fenced enclosure, keep **right** on a wide grass path with the building of *Kiln House* on your left. At a T-junction, by a grand converted oast house (*Alton was renowned for hop growing*), turn **right** on a tarmac drive. In only 50m, go **left** over a stream and over a stile into a meadow and keep ahead to go over another stile. Your path veers right on a mown grass strip, passing the back of the open lawn of *Trunchaunts*. Stay beside the hedge on your left, ignoring a 2-plank bridge on your left. After a gap, keep ahead along the left-hand side of the next field. At the end, after a small 2-plank bridge, shift **right** to continue in the same direction alongside the next field.
- 5 As you approach a copse on your right (Wild Duck Copse), your path continues in the same direction, but in the adjoining pasture on your left, on the other side of the hedgerow. So, just before the copse, turn **left** over a plank bridge and a stile. Turn **right** in the pasture and continue straight ahead to go beneath power lines. In the far corner of the pasture, go over a stile, or through an awkward double metal gate, and bear **left** to take a path which continues ahead diagonally across the next field, heading for a copse on the far side, to reach a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane. *{Take great care here as the traffic approaches you from the right via a blind bend which is only 10m away.}* In about 400m you reach the village of West Worldham. On your left is the historic Manor Farm and the medieval church of St Nicholas.



This tiny church, squashed up beside a Tudor farmhouse, is an unspoilt survivor. The south door and most of the walls are unchanged from the year 1200 when the present church was built. A wooden Saxon church was purchased by William of Wykeham, founder of Winchester College, and the new church was built by Richard De Annecy. The church was probably divided between the parishioners and the friars who occupied an adjoining house, because three altars have been found. Inside, the unusual diamond-lattice window shows a parrot, a dove, a robin, a lamb and a mermaid, the latter being part of the coat of arms of the Reverend Nicholas Mason who defied the authorities by using the forbidden Book of Common Prayer in 1645.

6 At a road junction, turn **right** as for *Hartley Church, Oakhanger*. (*Hartley Mauditt is an abandoned village about 800m along the road. Its church of St Leonard, opposite a large lily pond, is one of the sights of this area, best visited later by car.*) In 150m, at the next road junction by a fingerpost, go **left** over a robust (but squeezable) stile. Proceed straight over the meadow and through a small rusty metal gate. Continue in the same direction across the next field, soon going over a stile and a bridge with rails. Go straight across the next field, under power lines, crossing over a 2-plank bridge. Now follow a good clear path across a crop field which will lead you up a bank to a fenced pasture. Turn **left** here as directed by a yellow arrow. Follow the fence until it ends at a tarmac drive next to some farm buildings.

7 Turn **right** on the drive, going up and down a bank to get round the automatic metal gate *. Continue 50m along the drive or the grassy bank, till you meet a fingerpost just before a house. Go **left** here on a narrow path beside the tall brown wooden fence of the house's garden. Go over a stile, across a small pasture (*home to a tame friendly sheep*), over a stile, across a rather claggy horse pasture, over a stile, and down concrete steps to the main road in East Worldham. Your route is right along the road, but the *Three Horseshoes* is 100m on your left. (* *Thin walkers who accidentally walked down the side of the crop field, avoiding the stiles and the claggy field, were just able to squeeze through the wire fence at the bottom.*)



The "Three Horseshoes" is a good Fullers pub. Walkers declared it a lovely pub with excellent bar food.

East Worldham goes back to the Old Stone Age but its entry in the Domesday Book is not too clear. It may be "Werildeham" after a change of spelling. The village was in the possession of a certain Geoffrey de Venuz from Norman times and it was held by the de Venuz family for 250 years. East Worldham lay partly in Woolmer Forest, where hunting took place and a medieval hunting lodge has been excavated on nearby King Johns Hill (see the "Kingsley" walk in this series).


Having turned **right** on the main road, go 150m and turn **left** on a tarmac drive, at a sign for the church, which you reach in 50m.



East Worldham church of St Mary dates from the 1200s. The effigy in the south wall was rumoured to be that of Philippa, wife of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer. (See also the "Ewelme" walk in the Chilterns in this series.) This was based on the "wheel" badge on her chest, "Roet" (or "rouet" in modern French) being her family name. It is now believed to date from about a hundred years later.

8 With the church on your right, take the tarmac path, passing some cottages on your right. At the end, turn **right** on a tarmac lane. In 50m, turn **left** on a footpath. Your path leads straight across the crop field, passing under wires, heading for a marker post in the middle of the field. The green badge with the "tree" symbol reminds you that you are on part of the Hangers Way. Keep straight on, serenaded by skylarks, heading for the

centre of a copse on the far side, just to the left of a house with a brown roof. When you reach the corner of the copse, take a narrow path through a gap in the fence, running beside a stream on your left. You pass a converted oast on your left and traverse a modern coppice. Your path turns left over a bridge.

-  9 At a T-junction, turn **right** on a cinder track which shortly bends left to meet a stile. Go over the stile (or duck easily under the metal barrier) and keep straight ahead, avoiding a path on your right. Your wide path runs under trees with cedars and a woodland on the left which reveals a secret lake and soon bluebells in season. As you come out into a field to a 3-way fingerpost, ignore a path right and keep straight on, passing under power lines. Your path veers slightly **right** towards a hanger (tree-covered hill) where you meet a fingerpost. Turn **left** along the edge of the hanger. At the next corner, your path takes a left fork across the centre of the field as directed by a yellow arrow on a post. The path is long and straight and visible into the distance, but in case it is ploughed over and hard to make out, simply continue straight ahead. In about 250m you reach an isolated fingerpost in the middle of the field. Keep **straight ahead** here, in the direction of a presumably “missing finger”, ignoring the path that forks right uphill. You cross a green vegetation border into the next field. Cross this field (which is also ploughed up and unclear in some seasons) until at the far side you will spot a fingerpost slightly to your right, which confirms you were on the correct path.

- 10 At the fingerpost cross into the next field and continue straight ahead along the bottom edge of a large sloping meadow. After around 300m, in the corner, go down a narrow path which runs between fields and under power lines. A stile leads you down to the A31 trunk road.

Again, you need a lot of care and patience to cross this road. There is a central strip as a refuge between carriageways, but remember traffic can approach at a speed of 70mph! **Cross singly or in pairs.**

At the other side, find a signpost and take a path past a superfluous stile. You pass industrial units on your right before the path curves left to join a residential road. At the top, turn **right** on the main Wilsom Road into Alton. In under 500m, after the railway bridge, on your right is the station where the walk began.

If you are returning by train, turn **right** up the flight of stairs to arrive back at the railway station.

Getting there

By car: **Alton** is easily reached on the A31 from Guildford and Farnham, from which it is clearly signed. You could park on a Sunday in the Station Car Park (£3.50 charge on Sundays) or in one of the residential roads traversed in section [2](#), e.g. postcode **GU34 2SD**.

The simplest way to East Worldham, postcode **GU34 3AR**, is probably via the A31 and Alton. Come off the A31 at the very big roundabout with the first sign for Alton, onto the B3004. Turn **left** in 300 yds as for *Bordon*. and **left** again in 0.8 mile as for *Bordon, Kingsley*. East Worldham is in 2 miles.

By train: frequent trains from London Waterloo via Woking and Farnham, journey time: just over an hour.