



# South Downs Way 1 : Winchester to West Meon or Hinton Ampner walk

Historic Winchester and the South Downs Way. Shorter (via Hinton Ampner NT) and longer (Beacon Hill, and a railway path) options. Return by bus.




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**Length** To West Meon (via the dismantled railway line) 26.1 km (16.2 miles) with 375 meters (1,200 ft) of ascent

Shorter Options

- A) To Hinton Ampner (NT) : 20.9 km (13.0 miles)
- B) To West Meon (via shortcut) : 23.7 km (14.8 miles)
- C) To Exton : 21.2 km (13.2 miles)

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**Maps** OS Explorer OL32 (was 132) Winchester

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**Toughness** 7/10

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**Features** This walk follows the first section of the South Downs Way (SDW) from its start in the historic Cathedral City of Winchester. It heads east, through high rolling farmland with distant though extensive views - as far out as to the Isle of Wight - to a remote rustic country pub. It then ascends the start of the South Downs ridge before a very scenic descent from Beacon Hill to Exton, a small village in the Meon Valley. From there it leaves the SDW, following a disused railway path to West Meon, which has an infrequent bus service back to the start.

Along the way, you follow the SDW past Telegraph Hill (162m), Cheesefoot Head (176m, a bowl/natural amphitheatre), Temple Valley, Gander Down, The Milbury's (a remote pub near Millbarrow Down for lunch), Beacon Hill (201m), and the Meon Valley disused railway line path.

This is a long walk (due to a lack of public transport in this remote area), so there are 3 shorter options:

- A) A shorter winter route to Cheesefoot Head and on to the lunch pub, then leaving the SDW, and heading north along the Monarch's Way to [Hinton Ampner](#) (a National Trust historic house, open daily in summer) for a regular bus back to Winchester.
- B) A longer route along the SDW, to just shy of Beacon Hill, then a shortcut along quiet roads to West Meon for a regular bus back to Winchester, or on to Petersfield (you'll need a different train ticket, as Winchester and Petersfield are on different lines; see below).
- C) Continue further along the SDW, past Beacon Hill, and a picturesque descent to Exton in the Meon Valley. However, this village only has a very limited bus service: currently it runs only on summer weekends.
- Main Walk : Leave the SDW at Exton, and head north along the disused Meon Valley railway line path to West Meon. Railway line paths can be a bit samey after a while (flat and straight, views in winter, a green tunnel in summer). However, West Meon has a good pub to wait in, and a regular - if infrequent - bus back to Winchester (or Petersfield with the more expensive train ticket).

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### **South Downs Way**

This walk is one of 9 stages of the South Downs Way - a 109 mile national long distance path - that traverses the South Downs National Park in South East England.

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### **Walk Options**

For both walks, doing it in reverse is also an option:

- On the Winchester - West Meon walk, taking the bus to West Meon in the morning means you can spend the evening in Winchester without having to worry about the last bus.
- On the West Meon - Petersfield walk, if the bus times in the morning don't fit with your train's arrival times, walk the walk in reverse and take the bus back from Exton or West Meon (but check the bus times beforehand!).

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### **Transport**

Winchester and Petersfield are both main stations, about an hour from Waterloo, with 2 trains an hour. However, they are 25 miles - 2 days walking - apart, with very little in the way of public transport in between.

In addition, these 2 stations are on different rail lines, which only meet up in Fareham (near Southampton), which makes for a more expensive ticket (2017: London-Fareham: £24.40 vs London-Petersfield: £18.20 - both Network Railcard prices), i.e. a ticket to Fareham is valid for both stations if you need to start your journey in one, and finish it in the other

Local Bus services [2021]

Stagecoach #67 : Runs between the 2 train stations, but to the north of the SDW.

- Route: Winchester (station) - Hinton Ampner (£4.50) - West Meon (£5.30 to Winchester, £3.50 to Petersfield) - East Meon - Petersfield Station.
- Mon-Fri (every 2 hours). Last bus from West Meon is 18:45 (to Petersfield) or 18:40 (to Winchester)
- Sat (every 3 hours). Last bus is earlier. No Sunday service.

Stagecoach #37 : QECP Country park to Petersfield

- Mon-Fri: hourly, Sat every 90 mins. Last bus 18:15. Takes 5 mins

# X17 : Exton (on the SDW) to Petersfield. Very rare, 1 on Wednesday only! Use it to catch a bus to Exton, and then walk back.

These seems to change **very** frequently. Check! [Traveline](#).

## Lunch and Tea

### En route Winchester - West Meon

- In **Beauworth**: [The Milbury's](#) (14.8 km/9.2 mi)
- In **Exton**: [The Shoe Inn](#) (21.1 km/13.1 mi), on the SDW, not far from the A 32 "2 buses, twice a week" bus stop. Excellent. Pretty beer garden by the river. The Bucks Head 1 km south in Meonstoke is good too.

### En route West Meon - Petersfield

- At **Meon Springs**: [Bolly by the Bridge at Meon Springs Lodge](#) (8.8 km/5.5 mi)
- In **East Meon**: [Ye Olde George Inn](#) (posher), or the [Izaak Walton](#) (cheaper); (11.6 km/7.2 mi, off route: adds about 3 km to the walk).
- In **Leydene Park**: The Sustainability Centre's [Beech Cafe](#) (13.3 km/8.3 mi).
- In **Queen Elizabeth Country Park**: The [The Beechwood Kitchen at the Visitor Centre Cafe](#) (19.3 km/12.0 mi).
- In **Buriton**: [The Five Bells](#) and [The Nest Hotel and Restaurant](#) (about 23 km/14.3 mi).

### While waiting for the bus

- In **Hinton Ampner**: [The Hinton Arms](#)

- In **Exton**: [The Shoe Inn](#), on the SDW, not far from the A 32 "2 buses, twice a week" bus stop. Excellent. Pretty beer garden by the river. The Bucks Head 1 km south in Meonstoke is good too.
- In **West Meon**: [The Thomas Lord](#), restaurant pub with beer garden. Restaurant priced food.
- In **East Meon**: [Ye Olde George Inn](#) (posher), or the [Izaak Walton](#) (cheaper)

### While waiting for the train

- In **Winchester**: many pubs, and a cathedral - you will not have a problem passing the time waiting for your train
- In **Petersfield**: The Old Drum (walk east on station road, right on Chapel Street) is a restaurant pub. Continue and turn left to the town square for many more options

### Links

- [Meon Valley Railway Line](#) : Almost a folly, even when it was built, was constructed to main line standards, with gentle curves and ascents (i.e. many earthworks and long platforms, much of which still exist today), but little traffic
- "Meon Valley Trail" - the disused line is now an unpublicised walk/cycle trail. See [photos](#)

### Help Us!

After the walk, please leave a [comment](#), it really helps. Thanks!

You can also upload photos to the  [SWC Group on Flickr](#) ([upload your photos](#)) and [videos to](#)  [Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:

### By Car

**Start** SO23 8TJ      **Finish** West Meon, Hampshire

### Help

National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

### Version

Oct-17 [Andrew](#)

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## Walk Directions

Route out of Winchester to the start of the well signposted section of the South Downs Way

The route from station to the start of the SDW is a little convoluted, hence these directions.

1. Exit the train station towards the city centre and *turn right along Station Road*, parallel to the railway line. In 250m ignore a bridge on the right across the railway and bear down left with the road (now called Upper High Street). In 100m a busier road joins from the left (Sussex Street) and in 50m, where Romsey Road joins from the right, *you veer left through the Westgate* further down High Street's right hand side.
2. Ignore all ways off for 320m and *turn right under a narrow covered alleyway by the distinct Buttercross (a spire-like stone monument)*. You pass the tiny St Lawrence's Church on the left hand side and in 70m emerge by a green space on the left, with Winchester Cathedral beyond it, *to veer left towards the cathedral* along a tree-lined path crossing the green.
3. Walk past the cathedral's westerly side and *turn left at the corner of the building through a buttress arch into a passageway, signposted 'Wolvesey Castle and Watermeadows'* to follow a paved path. In 20m you veer right along a road on the right-hand edge of a grassy area. In 150 m keep more or less straight on between the Deanery left and another building to the right, and then veer right with the road towards some half-timbered houses.
4. In 100m, just in front of the houses, *turn right through Priory Gate* and in 30 m *turn left through Kingsgate. Turn left beyond this along College Street*. In 270m, where the road turns right, *keep straight on down a broad tarmac path*, with the walls of Wolvesey Palace on the left. In another 80m, turn left with the path, following the walls, and then turn right to cross two arms of the Itchen River.
5. On the other side keep more or less straight up Wharf Hill to soon pass The Black Boy pub on the right. *Cross the busy B3330* (note that the official start of the South Downs Way is 400m to the left along the road, at the City Mill) and continue in the same direction up along East Hill. In 100m you *fork right along Petersfield Road*, ignoring the left forking Quarry Road.
6. Ignore all ways off for 700m to the end of the road and a first wooden South Downs Way signpost ('Eastbourne 99 miles').

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