PUBS WORTH THE WALK

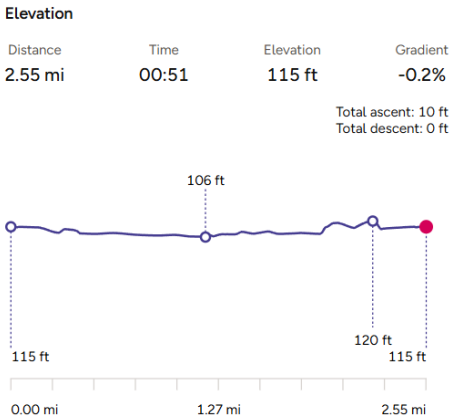
The Three Cups Inn Pub Walk

Wonderful River Test walk, Common Marsh, 2.5 miles

OVERVIEW

Beginning in the attractive market town of Stockbridge, the route quickly escapes into the open flood meadows of Stockbridge Common Marsh — a rare publicly accessible stretch of the River Test floodplain owned by the National Trust.

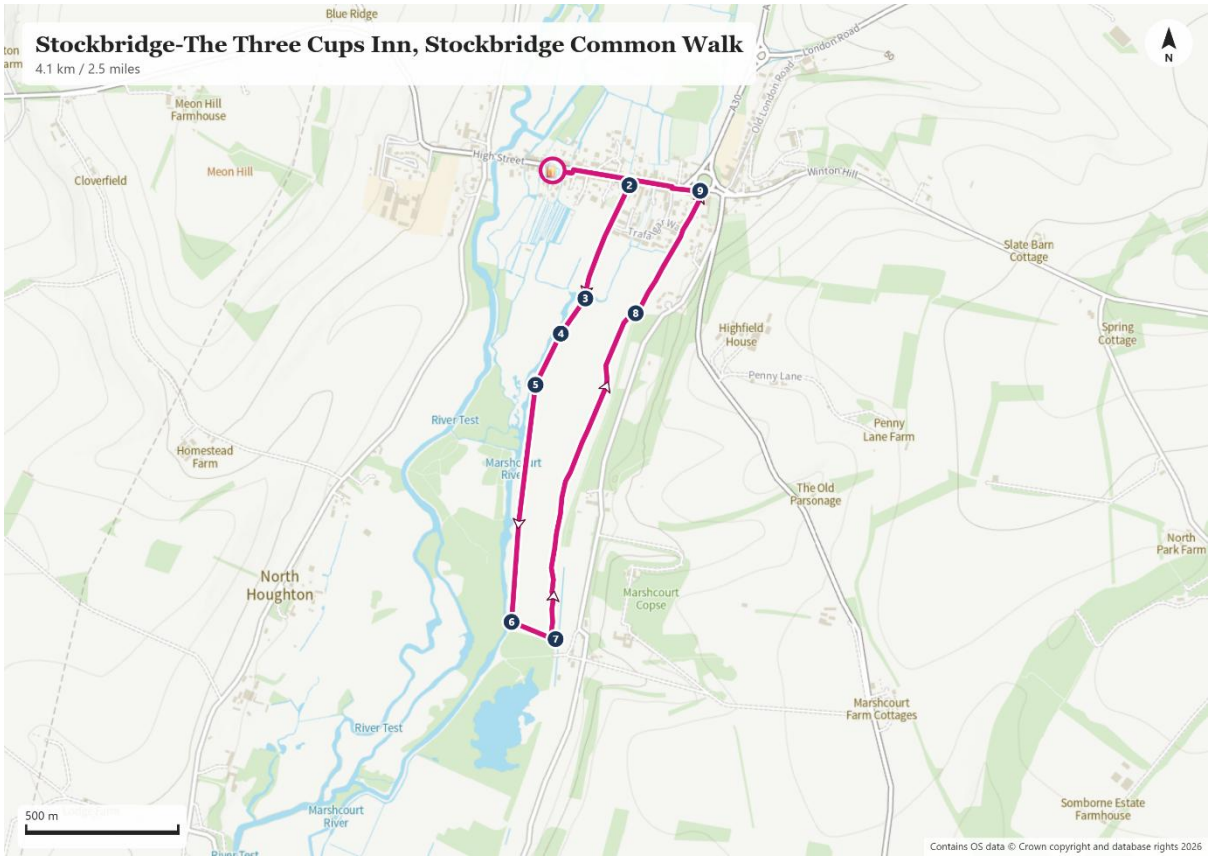
The River Test flows beside the route in clear, gliding channels, its famously pure water threading through reeds, wildflowers and grazing marshland that support an extraordinary range of birdlife and aquatic species.



In many places along the Test Valley, access to the river is surprisingly restricted, hidden behind private fishing land and country estates. Here, walkers can stand directly beside the water's edge, watching brown trout holding steady in the current while swans, moorhens and dragonflies move quietly through the reeds.

Start/Finish	**The Three Cups, High Street, Stockbridge, SO20 6HB**
Parking	Car park at the side/rear of The Three Cups.
Grid Reference	SU 354 351
What3Words	///fortunate.herbs.variation
Distance	2.5 miles / 4 km **Time** 1.5 hours **Ascent** 10 ft / 3 m
Paths/Terrain	Some pavements, then grassy tracks, likely to be muddy in wet weather: the flood plain of the River Test.
Difficulty	Easy
Public Transport	Infrequent local bus services. Note that the nearest taxi firms are based in Andover, which can make local short journeys expensive.
Toilets	Public toilets close to the Three Cups.
Other Pubs Nearby	**White Hart** at the gateway to Stockbridge is a really good Fullers pub. **The Boot Inn** at Houghton is excellent, and in Broughton the **Tally Ho!** and **The Greyhound** are good too. **The Mayfly** is right on the River Test at Fullerton, a brilliant spot, and just a few miles from Stockbridge.

DIRECTIONS



1. This is one of the gentlest and most quietly rewarding walks in Hampshire. Begin at The Three Cups, turning right on to the High Street in the centre of Stockbridge, one of Hampshire's most attractive small towns, and perhaps the capital of the River Test valley. The High Street itself is worth slowing down for before setting off, lined with independent shops, cafés, galleries and fishing tackle shops.
2. After c.200m you'll see a stream running close to the pavement, and a footpath for the Common to the right, just before (at the time of writing) The Little Whisky Shop. Follow the path towards the Common along the side of the Little Whisky Shop.
3. This is the approach to Stockbridge Common Marsh, a popular walk from the town. Owned by the National Trust, this peaceful stretch of wet meadow and riverside marshland provides one of the rare opportunities to properly experience the River Test at walking pace — close enough to watch trout holding motionless in the current, kingfishers flashing downstream and the river's famously clear water sliding through beds of ranunculi and reed.
4. The bridge that accesses the marsh from Stockbridge was built in the 1950s by soldiers doing their National Service. If you look closely, you can see where the men made their mark on the bridge while the concrete was still wet.
5. After the bridge, remain on the National Trust riverside path. This is the finest section of the walk. The path hugs the River Test through open meadow, with uninterrupted views of the clear chalk stream flowing beside you. Trout, grayling and occasional salmon can be seen in the clear waters. The characteristic chalk stream plant life and the fast-

running flow over gravels offer the perfect conditions for these fish to live. Many trout anglers visit the River Test from across the globe during the spring and summer, providing a vital source of income for the valley.

6. Continue south along the riverbank path through grazing land and marsh. Livestock often graze here as part of the long-established commoning tradition that still shapes the marsh landscape today. The area's ecology depends heavily on this gentle management approach, a tradition that has been in place since the 1300's.
7. After around a mile along the riverside, the path gradually bends away from the water's edge into open meadow.
8. After a short distance of around 175 yards/160m, you will come to the Common Marsh boundary fence. Go through the pedestrian gate onto the Test Way, turning left along the footpath and cycle route.
9. The route straight ahead now offers wider views across the Test Valley, with the marsh stretching away beside you and Stockbridge gradually reappearing ahead. Depending on the season, the meadows may be filled with buttercups, floodwater, grazing cattle or mist rising from the river. The walking remains beautifully easy throughout.
10. As you approach the National Trust Lion's Den Car Park on your right, rather than flowing around to the left and back the way you came into town, follow the car park exit route. This will take you towards a road called Trafalgar Way, and emerges at a roundabout at the top end of Stockbridge High Street.
11. Before turning left to begin your return along the High Street to the Three Cups, consider visiting The White Hart on the roundabout, a lovely pub with excellent staff!

And there you have it: no steep climbs, no navigational drama, no exhausting mileage — simply one of England's loveliest rivers experienced slowly, quietly and properly on foot.

NOTES

Understanding the Test Way: A Gentle Word of Advice

Walkers often arrive in Stockbridge assuming the Test Way is a classic source-to-sea river trail — the sort of long-distance path that hugs the water from its first trickle to its tidal end. It's an easy assumption to make. The name invites it after all. The River Test is famous. And this stretch across Stockbridge Common Marsh is exactly the kind of open, accessible riverside walking people hope for.

But the Test Way isn't really a river path at all. It's Hampshire's **Test Council** long-distance route, designed to showcase a broad sweep of downland, villages, and valley landscapes. So, ***think 'Test Council Way' rather than 'River Test Way'.***

The river appears, disappears, reappears, and often stays hidden behind private fishing beats. In truth, access to the Test is limited along much of its length — not because the river is unfriendly, but because it flows through one of the most intensively managed chalk-stream environments in the world.

None of this makes the Test Way a lesser walk. It simply means it's best understood for what it is: **a county-shaped journey, not a river-shaped one.**

If you want the river story, you can absolutely have it — you just need to approach it differently.

1. A walk that starts at the real source

While the Test Way starts at Inkpen Common, it's nowhere near the source of the River Test. The true source of the Test lies near Ashe and Overton. So, a satisfying river-focused walk could look like:

Ashe → Overton → Laverstoke → Whitchurch → Longparish where the Test Way actually meets the River Test**.**

This route follows lanes, permissive paths, and riverside sections that feel far more intimately connected to the Test than the early miles of the official Test Way. From Longparish you can either continue downstream on local paths or join the Test Way where it finally settles into the valley proper.

It's the closest you'll get to a genuine "birth of the river" experience.

2. Places where the River Test *is* accessible

Despite its reputation for exclusivity, the Test does offer some superb public access points — places where the river is open, visible, and part of the landscape rather than tucked away on private land.

Here is the best of them:

• **Stockbridge Common Marsh (National Trust):** A rare stretch of open chalk-stream wetland where the river meanders, and sparkles in full view. Perfect for gentle walking, birdwatching, and understanding the Test as a living system.

• **The Mayfly, Fullerton:** One of the great riverside pubs of southern England. The Test runs directly beneath the decking, clear enough to watch trout holding in the current. A superb place to appreciate the river's character.

• **Chilbolton Cow Common:** Wide, open access land where the Test flows through meadows and shallow channels. A favourite with families, naturalists, and anyone who likes a river they can actually see!

• **Mottisfont Abbey (National Trust):** Beautiful riverside paths, historic water meadows, and some of the most photogenic stretches of the Test open to the public.

• **Romsey:** The river widens and slows as it approaches the town, with accessible paths, bridges, and glimpses of the Test at its most gentle.

A final thought

The Test Way is a fine long-distance path — varied, scenic, and full of quiet Hampshire character. But if you walk it expecting a continuous riverside trail, you may spend more time wondering where the river has gone than enjoying the journey.

Treat it instead as a valley-and-downland route with occasional, beautiful encounters with the Test, and it becomes exactly what it was designed to be.

And if you want the river itself? Start at the source, follow the water where you can, and make time for the places — like Stockbridge Common Marsh and The Mayfly — where the Test reveals its full, clear, chalk-stream magic.