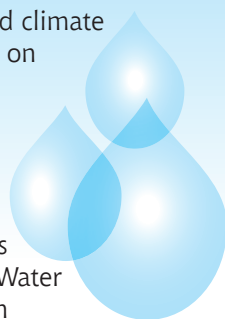


Help look after the brook

- **Take your litter home and clear up after your dog**
- **Think about how you use water**

Lifestyle choices, population growth and climate change are placing increasing demands on our water supplies. In this area, the domestic water supply comes from the aquifers which feed the Letcombe Brook. Thinking about how we use water and reducing usage will help to ensure that there is enough water for us and wildlife in years to come. Thames Water can supply information on how you can save water. www.thameswater.co.uk/save



Please don't feed the ducks as it can be harmful to them and cause:

- Poor nutrition
- Overcrowding and spread of disease amongst ducks
- Unnatural behaviour
- Pollution and environmental damage
- An increase in rats in the area

If you care about the ducks then please do not feed them – allow them to return to their natural habits.

Local information

Letcombe Regis Parish Council

www.letcombe-regis.org.uk

Vale and Downland Museum

01235 771447 www.wantage-museum.com

BBOWT

01865 775476 www.bbowt.org.uk

Environment Agency

Responsible for protecting and improving rivers.
For pollution and flood defence matters call 24 hour emergency hotline 0800 80 70 60.

Letcombe Brook

The Letcombe Brook Project works with local people and organisations to enhance and protect the natural beauty of the brook and to help people appreciate the environment. The project undertakes work to encourage native wildlife, improve the landscape, remove rubbish and alleviate future flooding along the brook. You can learn more by coming on a guided walk/talk or join in a conservation task. The project offers educational opportunities for local schools including river dipping.



River dipping

Letcombe Brook Project

C/o Vale and Downland Museum
Church Street
Wantage
OXON
OX12 8BL
01235 771447
letcombebroom@hotmail.com



Volunteers

Partnership

Letcombe Regis Parish Council
Wantage Town Council
Grove Parish Council
East Hanney Parish Council

Leaflet sponsored by



The Letcombes
Conservation Group

Letcombe Regis
Parish Council

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LETCOMBE BROOK

DISCOVERY TRAIL

Letcombe Regis
and Letcombe Bassett



A 3 mile walk, exploring the brook
through the villages and nature reserve

Discovery Trail

The Letcombe Brook flows through the attractive villages of Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett. These villages are known as spring line settlements as it is here that the brook rises at the foot of the escarpment of a range of chalk hills known as the Berkshire Downs, part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Letcombe was first recorded as 'Regis' in the reign of Richard II (c.1390) but it was once a royal manor of the kings of Wessex, passing to William the Conqueror in 1066.

People settled along the brook as it provided a clean and plentiful source of fresh water. The character of the brook has been shaped and changed by centuries of human endeavour including water collection, farming and milling. Today Thames Water abstracts from the aquifers via a borehole at Childrey Warren and supplies the local area with drinking water.

This trail helps you to explore and discover the brook, which is sometimes hidden from view, as it weaves its way through the villages identifying natural, historic and landscape features along the route.

Distance: This trail follows a linear route and is 3 miles return. The walk starts in Letcombe Regis at the Village Hall car park and continues to Letcombe Bassett where you then retrace your steps to the start.

Accessibility: The trail is on a mixture of surfaced and grass paths, rural footpaths and road. The trail is level until it reaches ⑥ Letcombe Valley Community Nature Reserve where there are steps. Boots are a must in winter as the paths get muddy.

- ☺ There is a café in the Lodge at Richmond Retirement Village and ☺ The Greyhound Inn on Main Street.
- P Parking is available in the Village Hall car park.

Our local place names reflect the presence of the brook

Letcombe – lede in the combe

Wantage – intermittent stream

East Hanney – island of waterfowl

Letcombe Brook

The Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream which is a globally rare habitat: 85% of all the chalk streams on our planet are found in England.

The brook is fed from springs issuing from the chalk rock at Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett. It exhibits the classic chalk stream characteristics of crystal clear oxygenated water, a year round temperature of around 11 °C and a consistent flow of water flowing over a clean gravel bed.

The brook flows northwards through the Vale of the White Horse in Oxfordshire for 12 km where it meets the Childrey Brook, which runs into the River Ock and on into the River Thames.

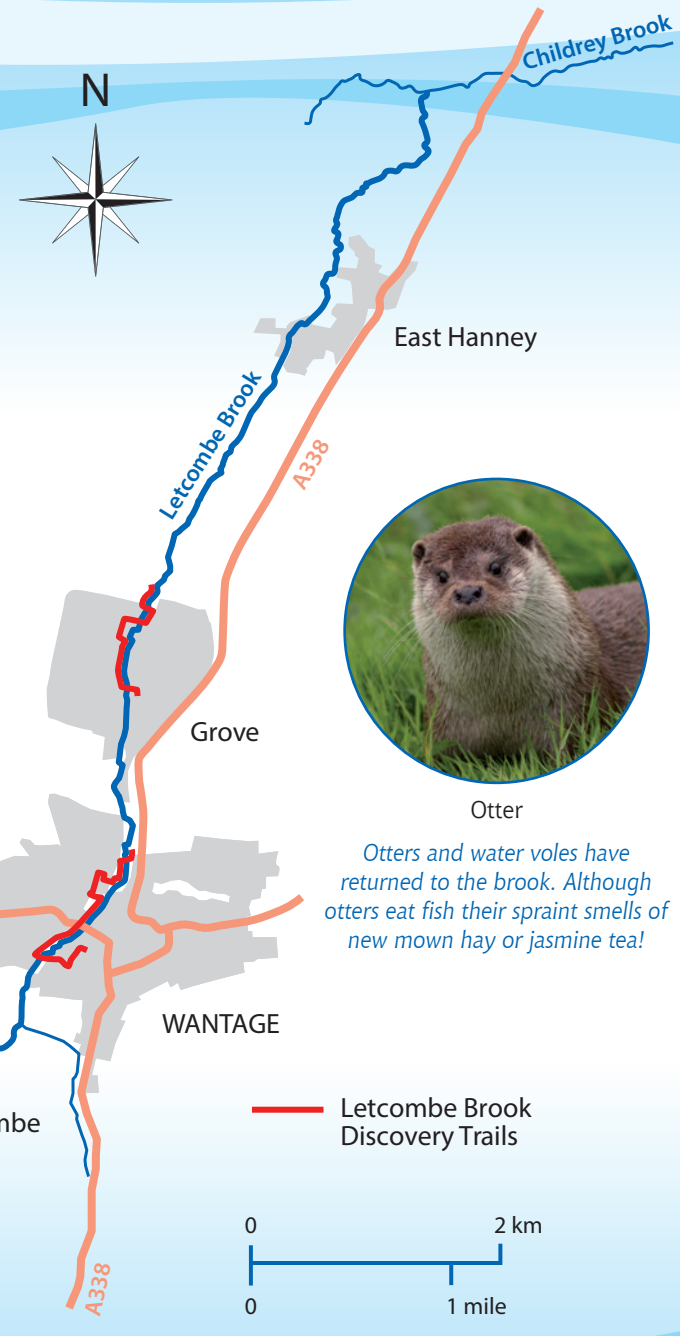
There are over 170 riparian owners of the brook. Rights generally extend to the middle of the brook so there are usually two owners on any stretch.

Other walks: To explore other sections on the Letcombe Brook in Wantage and Grove you can download two leaflets from www.wantage.com/letcombe-brook-project



Kingfisher

The Kingfisher is an expert angler, its diet consists of small fish such as minnows, sticklebacks and bullheads as well as insects.



Otters and water voles have returned to the brook. Although otters eat fish their spraint smells of new mown hay or jasmine tea!

Discover the Letcombe Brook

Starting at the village hall car park, turn right and at the end of the thatched cottage on your left is a footpath. Take this path across the brook to the Millennium Green.

1 Letcombe Brook is a haven for wildlife. Wild brown trout and bullhead feed on invertebrates such as freshwater shrimp and caddis fly larvae. Kingfishers dart along the clear water and water voles and otters have been making a return over the last 10 years as the habitat has improved.

Millennium Green – Letcombe Regis Parish Council purchased the old school playing field in 2007 and registered it as a Village Green to preserve it as a public open space.

Take the path through the green to the road. Turn right and walk a short distance to the church gate.

2 Church of St Andrew

By the front door there are two fine yew trees and to the right of the path is an obelisk dedicated to George King Hipango, a Maori chieftain, who died at Letcombe Regis in 1871, aged 19 years.



From the church gate turn right, passing the village shop and cafe on the left. Go past Castle Gardens and take the footpath on the right by the Dovecote.

Just before the bridge over the brook turn left through a gate which leads through Richmond Retirement Village. Take this path along the brook to the next bridge.

3 Letcombe Brook – During the winter female trout lay their eggs in hollows, known as redds which they make in the clean gravel. The eggs are then fertilised by the male.

Continue to follow the path with the brook on your right.

4 Richmond Retirement Village was opened in 2010 and access along the brook was provided as a result of campaigning by the Parish Council and local residents.

5 Lake and brook – as part of the development a new channel was created on the other side of the lake. This provides a fish bypass and restores the fast flowing chalk stream, whilst retaining the lake. The banks are managed to provide habitat for water voles for burrowing and foraging.



Fish bypass

Meadow

The grass in front of the lake is managed as a wildflower meadow with ladies bedstraw, knapweed and birds-foot trefoil.

Keep straight ahead until the path goes over a board walk to a gate. Go through the gate into the Nature Reserve and cross the surfaced path with handrail and take the grass path that runs alongside the brook. For a closer look at the brook there is a bridge to your right.

6 Letcombe Valley Community Nature Reserve

The reserve is owned by Richmond Retirement Village and leased to the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust. Local volunteers help improve the paths and manage the habitats.

Follow the grass path (which can be muddy) along the brook until you reach a grass bank. Walk up the slope through the kissing gate and along the brook.

7 Modified channel

The brook is wider here and in the winter you can see another channel behind which was part of an old watercress bed.

Where the channel is wide the water slows down and silt settles on the bed. Large woody debris helps to narrow the brook and to channel the flow. This then helps to keep the gravel clean which trout like to spawn in.

8 The Lake was formed by the dam built around 1900 as part of an early domestic hydroelectric scheme for a manor house now replaced by the Richmond Retirement Village.

Watch out for gadwall, moorhens and kingfishers whose arrival is sometimes heard as a shrill whistle. Little egrets have become regular winter visitors upstream from here.

Continue past the lake to a surfaced path for about 25 paces and stop overlooking a steep bank.

9 Meanders

This is a good place to see the brook meandering slowly as it carves its way through the silt. The vibrant green plant in the channel is likely to be starwort.

Continue until you see some steps on the right. Go down these and follow the path for a closer view of the brook.

10 Springs

The bridges cross springs issuing from the chalk and rare Soldier flies have been recorded in this area.

Continue round to rejoin the main path.

11 Chalk downland – on the left is a steep bank which is being managed for wildflowers. Volunteers cut scrub to maintain the grassland for flowers and insects.

Continue to some steps and stop after the first flight at the bench.

12 Track – Between the two flights of steps there is flat terrace which runs along the valley here. In the past this was used as a track between the villages referred to as the Old Bassett Road and as an old drovers road used to bring sheep down off the Downs.

Views of valley – this is a great place to take in the landscape. Here the deeply incised valley was carved out by the erosive force of melt water on the underlying chalk rock, still frozen and therefore impermeable, at the end of the last Ice Age.

Go up the second flight of steps and turn right onto the footpath.

13 Berkshire Downs – on the left you get glimpses of the chalk hills, rich in relics of pre-history featuring the Ridgeway and nearby an Iron age hill fort – Segsbury Camp or Letcombe Castle.

At the end of the footpath turn right down the road to reach the bridge next to the old watercress beds.

14 Watercress beds – Letcombe Bassett was famous for the growing of watercress, and “Bassett Cress” was a familiar cry in Old Covent Garden Market in London.

Retrace your steps up the hill and continue along road until you reach Gramps Hill on the left and into Forsters Lane to the church.

15 Church of St. Michael and All Angels – By the front door is a ‘bale’ tomb, the last resting place of a wool merchant. The semi-circular top with incisions is thought to represent tied-up bales of cloth. The skulls in scallop shells possibly represent a corpse wrapped in a woollen shroud.



Go back down the steps to the lane and turn left to a field gate.

16 View of Devils Punch Bowl – Ahead

In the distance is a dry valley cut at the end of the Ice Age by the flow of water over frozen permafrost and chalk rock below.

Follow the footpath straight ahead and then bear right down a path known as Apple Pie. Cross the Holborn Hill Road and turn right. Shortly on the left is a house called Delamere. Stop at white railings on the left.

17 Source of the brook – at Delamere look over the hedge where you can glimpse the headwater lake. This is one of the main spring heads that feeds the brook and was once a watercress bed. The other main spring head is in a garden in Letcombe Regis.

Continue to the next property on the left.

18 Arabella's Cottage – Thomas Hardy refers to the village as Cresscombe in his work, Jude the Obscure. This pretty thatched cottage down by the brook is where Arabella lived, and where she first met Jude.

Continue down the road past Gramps Hill, until you reach Rectory Lane on your right and take the footpath straight ahead to retrace your steps to 12. Go down one flight of steps and follow the wide grass terraced path back to the board walk at 6.

