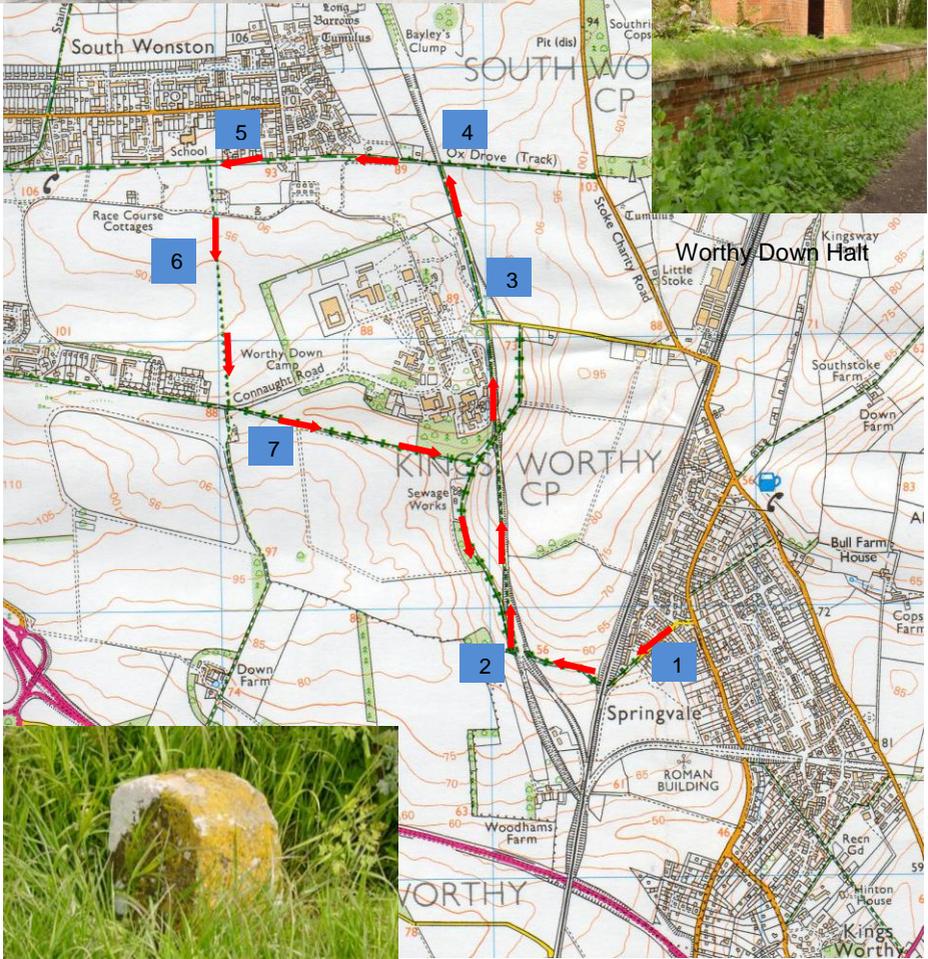
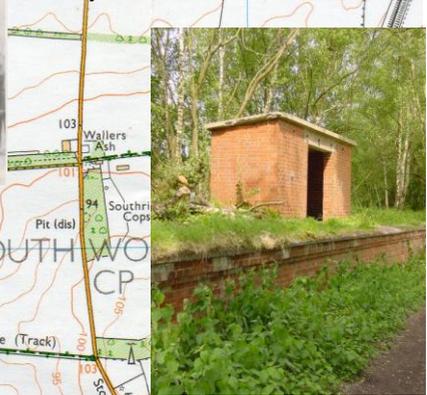


Worthy Walk 5 : Around the Down

This month's walk takes us from Tesco Express to South Wonston and back on a circular route around Worthy Down camp. Approx. 4 miles (6.4 kms) using public footpaths.

An RE8 aircraft "comes to grief at Worthy Down c 1918



Boundary Stone

Worthy Walk 5 : Around the Down

1. From Tesco Express walk towards the railway line along Hookpit Farm Lane which peters out into a farm track after the height restriction barrier. Go under the railway arch and follow the track until you pass beneath 2 further arches.

2. Now join the disused railway line by either the steps up the embankment on the right or the ramp to the left. Once you've ascended the bank turn left. You now have about a mile of perfectly straight, level, easy walking. *The Worthy's Conservation Volunteers have worked hard to ensure a diversity of habitats, create vistas and even provide a few seats for you.* You will cross a bridge and go under a bridge.

3. Once under the bridge you will begin to see brickwork to your right. If you explore around here you will discover what remains of the Worthy Down Halt on the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway. *The halt was made during World War 1 to service the needs of the nearby Royal Flying Corps aerodrome but had minimal use after 1918 until the build up to the invasion of Europe in June 1944. There were improvements made for the vast increase in traffic and this would have been a very busy place. The halt closed in 1960 and the freight line in 1964.*

4. Continue beyond the halt until you reach an embankment across the track, walk up it and turn left. You are now on the line of the Ox Drove which marks the northern edge of the parish of Kings Worthy. Continue in a straight line for about half a mile.

5. Go past the Recreation Ground and at its far end turn immediately left through a gap in the hedge. The path takes you beside an arable field but soon crosses a track to a gap in the hedge opposite. *Here you should see a stone in the grass with some initials carved on it - this marks the boundary between South Wonston (formerly part of Headbourne Worthy) and Kings Worthy.*

To the west (towards the conspicuous water tower beside the A34) the first buildings you see are Race

Course Cottages, evidence of yet another activity in this area. Worthy Down was a popular horse racing venue for about 300 years (approx. 1590 - 1896). Winchester Races enjoyed royal patronage and one of the most prestigious prizes was the Royal Plate granted by George the Second. The Hampshire gentry and Winchester townspeople flocked to the races in great numbers, even more with the coming of the railways in the 1840's. This was a highlight of the Winchester social calendar and the races happened right here!

6. Through the gap in the hedge, head uphill across the large field until you reach a tarmac road (Connaught Road) which gives access to the army camp. *In 1917 an officer of the Royal Flying Corps came to inspect Worthy Down, which then still possessed the grandstand of the former racecourse. He observed that the country round about was 'quite ideal for forced landings and that the undulation is not enough to prejudice its use as a landing ground'. Later airmen might have had cause to disagree but Worthy Down became one of the major military aerodromes in this country. The base served the Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Air Force and the Fleet Air Arm between 1917 and 1960 before transferring to the Royal Army Pay Corps.*

7. Cross the road and take the left hand track across a grassy field and then between a copse and horse paddocks. You join another track where you turn right past former sewage works. Keep walking all the way back to Tesco (beneath the several rail bridges). *As you go you will notice, and will probably already have seen others, a very substantial concrete structure, squat with small windows. This is one of a collection of 20 or so World War 2 "pill box" defences hurriedly put in place to protect Worthy Down Airfield when there was a real threat of invasion from Europe in 1940/1.*

Should you wish to find out more about the pill box defences, the racecourse or the aerodrome, the Local History Group has booklets about these - please phone 881917 for more information.