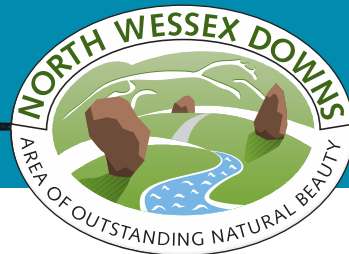


# Wayfaring



[www.northwessexdowns.org.uk](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk)

Wayfaring is a journey of exploration inspired by the chalk landscape and ancient routes of the Icknield Way. Find out more at [wayfaring.org.uk](http://wayfaring.org.uk)

The Icknield Way



## What is the Icknield Way?

The **Icknield Way** is thought to be the oldest road in Britain. It consists of prehistoric pathways that extend from Dorset to Norfolk although it is more of a corridor than an exact path. It was probably a route for travellers and traders.

It may have been named after the Icení, a tribe who were based in East Anglia from the Iron Age onwards.



## Did you know...

...up until about 9000 years ago people could walk across to Holland without crossing sea so the route may have originally extended into continental Europe?

It was not made into a Roman road and so much of the route is made up of pathways which are today very similar to how they were thousands of years ago and which can still be followed right across England.

**Basildon Park** is at an important point on the route, right next to the most likely crossing point of the Thames.

## The Landscape of the Icknield Way

The route follows some of the most amazing landscapes in England.

It links the **Peddars Way National Trail** in Norfolk, the **Ridgeway National Trail** through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) the North Wessex Downs AONB and the **Wessex Ridgeway** through the Dorset AONB.



## The Icknield Way and Chalk

The route roughly follows the **chalk escarpment** that stretches across the south of England. The chalk was laid down 150 million years ago when this area was covered by a warm sea. The tiny algae in the sea formed microscopic plates of calcium carbonate known as **Coccoliths** which built up over millions of years.

Chalk soaks up water like a sponge and then delivers it up as sparkling, clear chalk streams. Prehistoric travellers and settlers followed the chalk because it was well drained and yet there was a reliable supply of clean water from the streams. Either side of the chalk were heavier soils and it was easier to walk along the chalk ridge.



Coccoliths



## Why are chalk streams important?

Our chalk streams have characteristic features that support special wildlife habitats and species. It is the quality of the water as well as the gravel of the riverbed that make chalk streams so precious for many rare species.



### Did you know...

...80% of the world's chalk streams are in England and most of these are in the south?

They provide unique habitats for wildlife including many rare species and we have a special responsibility to look after them.



Grayling

Water vole

## Art and Performance along the Icknield Way

The poet and novelist **Edward Thomas**

(1878-1917)

wrote "The Icknield Way" in 1911. He was one of our earliest nature writers and

he mixed facts, details and routes with personal observations and reflections. He too was unsure where the route begins and ends, he felt:

"The way is more important than the destination"

"There is nothing at the end of the road better than may be found beside it."

He loved the open landscape, which he saw as a refuge from the pressures of everyday life.

He died in the First World War in 1917.



© Edward Thomas Fellowship



### Did you know...

...the route is peppered with ancient sites associated with ceremony;

where people have shared meaningful times together in these places - a bit like outdoor performance art?

To download the full set of factsheets and lots of other useful resources: [www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources.html](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources.html)

## Sources and Further information

[www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk](http://www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk)

[www.icknieldwaytrail.org.uk](http://www.icknieldwaytrail.org.uk)

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/)

**Chalk links Factsheets** : [www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources/landscape-2.html](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources/landscape-2.html)

**Chalk Streams** [www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/habitats/chalk-streams](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/habitats/chalk-streams)