

Chalk Stream Challenge

Information for Group Leaders



Contents:

- Background information
- What is so special about chalk streams?
- Challenge information and routes

Background information

The chalk streams that feed into Hampshire's iconic Test and Itchen rivers are some of the greatest hidden treasures in the county. With only around 200 existing worldwide, and most of these in England, they provide an ecologically rare home for a whole host of wonderful wildlife, including species like water vole, brown trout, southern damselfly, water crowfoot and the endangered white-clawed crayfish.

These streams go by many names, from brooks and rivulets to sources and headwaters. Those that only flow during the wet winter months have other names again, winterbournes.

Our streams also have another story to tell, one of a landscape shaped by centuries of human activity: fields are marked with patterns from old water meadows and riverside structures speak of trades ranging from gin distilling to paper production. Today many of these historic industries continue, with our area famous for watercress growing and fly fishing.

With support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, [Watercress and Winterbournes](#) is telling the story of this vibrant past and building a bright future. This five-year Landscape Partnership Scheme brings together local communities and 16 organisations to restore and celebrate the Bourne Rivulet, Candover Brook, Cheriton Stream, Pillhill Brook, River Arle, Upper Anton, and Upper Test.

Learn more about the wider scheme at www.hiwwt.org.uk/winterbournes

Two of the scheme's volunteers have used the opportunity to develop the Chalk Stream Challenge to help engage youth groups with some of the wonders of chalk streams. They have created suggested routes for groups to explore within the scheme area. All of the routes chosen are 'off road' but in easy reach of public transport, parking and refreshment and toilet facilities.



What's so special about chalk streams?

Sometimes described as 'England's rainforests', chalk streams only occur where chalk bedrock meets the Earth's surface. Globally rare, there are only around 200 in the world, with 85% of these found in the UK in southern and eastern England.

Much of northern and central Hampshire is formed from chalk, a sedimentary rock created over 100 million years ago from the shells of tiny sea creatures called coccoliths. It is porous, so rainwater can percolate through it directly into the ground, where the chalk layer acts as an aquifer. As a result of this slow percolation, water levels on chalk streams tend to rise and fall much more slowly than other rivers on a non-porous base (traditionally, bridges over chalk streams tended to have flatter arches compared to bridges over other streams).

As the water emerges from this chalk aquifer in the form of springs, it is pure, rich in minerals and remains at a fairly constant temperature year round. This enables diverse aquatic plants to grow, which in turn, along with the good water quality, supports many invertebrate and fish species.

Some of the headwaters include winterbournes, streams that naturally run dry by late summer when low rainfall has not recharged the aquifers.

Chalk streams and rivers have been used and modified throughout history to support our water supply, agriculture, industry in the form of mills or watercress beds, transport links and fishing, to name a few. Today, they are at risk from climate change overwarming the water, from the over abstraction of water (water has to be pumped back into a river to keep it flowing) which means winterbournes are drier for far longer than they otherwise would be, and from direct pollution through chemicals and silt finding their way into the water course due to modern farming practices and road or footpath runoff.

Today, our local rivers the Test and the Itchen are famed for their trout and salmon fishing, both of which need an abundance of mayflies which in turn rely on the clear stream waters. They are also famed for watercress growing and the challenge routes pass cress beds old and new.

Chalk Stream Challenge badge

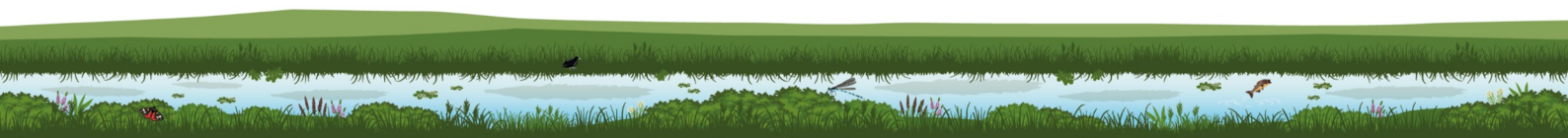
Details of the Chalk Stream Challenge badge can be found in the document **How to earn your badge**. You are welcome to share this document with your group, so they can help decide which activities to take part in.

- Everyone needs to complete Section 1
- Under 7s need to complete at least one other part from sections 2, 3, 4 and 5
- 7 – 11 year olds need to complete at least two other parts from sections 2, 3 and 5 and one other part from section 4
- Over 11s should complete at least two other parts from sections 2, 3, 4 and 5

Certificates are available to download via the challenge page on the website.

Fabric challenge badges can be ordered via the order form, which is available to download via the challenge page on the website.

For older children, it would be useful for them to have a notebook and pencil to hand so they can record their findings and observations.



Our suggested routes

Booklets for the following can be downloaded separately:

- The River Arle, Alresford (headwater of the Itchen)
- The Upper Anton at Charlton Lakes, Andover (headwater of the Test)
- The Upper Anton at Rooksbury Mill, Andover (headwater of the Test)
- The Upper Test, Whitchurch (headwater of the Test)

Each booklet includes a guide for each route along with an accompanying map. Useful websites relevant to the area are also included. Public spaces, roads and rights of way are used throughout and most routes have access to public transport, toilets, playgrounds, picnic areas and cafes.

An OS Explorer map would be useful for looking for local industry and heritage features and expanding the trails. Field guides on flowers, birds, plants and water life are useful but not necessary.

Spotter sheets can be downloaded on the following:

- Chalk stream animals
- Chalk stream plants
- General spotter sheet

We will add more spotter sheets as and when we can.

The following [Wildlife Watch](#) spotter sheets may be of interest, but remember not all species will call a chalk stream home:

[Freshwater Fish](#)

[Duck Detective](#)

[River Bird Spotter](#)

[Goose and Swan Detective](#)

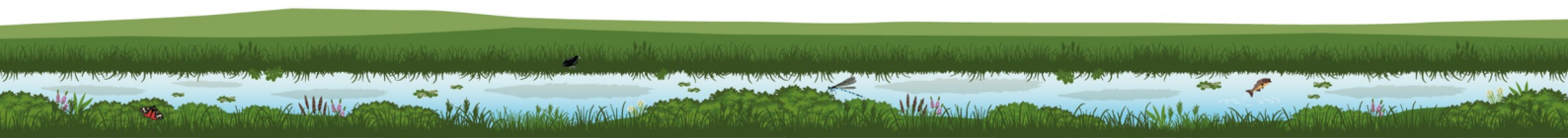
Download these and more at www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/activities

You can also find a number of educational videos on the [Wessex Rivers Trust](http://www.wessexrt.org.uk) website: www.wessexrt.org.uk

River dipping sessions

Our Watercress and Winterbournes Education Officer, Tracy Standish, can help your group discover more about the geography and river life of your local chalk stream. If you would like to arrange a session as part of your Chalk Stream Challenge please get in touch via email: tracy@wessexrt.org.uk

For groups outside of the scheme area, you are welcome to get in touch to see how we can help you with your learning across the Wessex region.



Chalk Stream Challenge disclaimer

We hope you enjoy using our challenge pack of ideas. Please read and take note of the following advice:

Remember walking by streams and rivers can be dangerous and hazards can change all the time. We suggest the challenge is completed as a group activity and feel it is particularly suited to uniform (e.g. Scouting and Guiding) and other youth groups. As a group activity, you are advised to take part in the challenge (the activities and the walk) with responsible adults. Our suggested ratio for working with groups by water is 1 adult to 6 children, please adhere to the guidelines set out by your governing body.

We strongly advise group leaders walk their routes twice: once to plan their session more thoroughly and decide which activities to incorporate into their group earning the badge (some activities could be carried out in your normal meeting place); and the second time to ensure the planned route is still accessible (this should be in the week prior to the session taking place). We also advise a risk assessment is completed prior to the activity, in line with your governing body guidelines. If you need help preparing your risk assessment, please get in touch - we have highlighted some of the main hazards in the table below.

We have provided some ideas of walking routes - these are suggestions only. Alternatives can be used if they are checked beforehand, risk assessed and are suitable for the completion of the badge. When planning your route, we advise you seek permission from the relevant landowner(s) beforehand, to let them know when you will be onsite and to check they are happy for you to use the site as a group. For routes we have suggested, we have highlighted the landowner in the useful websites section and you can find their contact details on their websites. We have also made them aware that we have suggested these routes to groups.

If using one of our suggested walking routes, we have checked these and consider them to be suitable for this activity. However, we cannot be responsible for a change in a footpath or road, whether the local facilities are available when you visit, the conditions, the car parking options and charges or traffic.

Our routes were last checked: Winter 2021

If you have any questions or comments about the challenge badge or our suggested routes, please contact Tracy Standish, Watercress and Winterbournes Education Officer via email: tracy@wessexrt.org.uk

Helping you stay safe

When learning in nature we need to be aware of natural risks such as:

Weil's disease	Sanitise or wash hands thoroughly before eating or leaving the site. Go to doctors immediately if you become unwell two weeks after being around water. Note: Weil's disease is a serious water born disease that can kill if not treated. Presents as flu like symptoms up to 2 weeks after being near water.
Deep water	Adult supervision at all times, and a throw rope available. Note: risk of drowning can occur in shallow water as well as deep water.
Stings and bites including ticks	Wear long trousers and be vigilant when walking around on site. For further information on ticks and Lyme disease please visit Lyme Disease Action .
Slips and trips	Take care when moving around the site and accessing the river (if you choose to do so) and wear sturdy, sensible footwear - flip flops are not ideal for river dipping, welly boots, water shoes or old trainers are better.
Strangers	Adult supervision at all time and keep together as a group.
Dogs	If dogs approach, keep together as a group, keep still, and adults will move the dog away.

