



No one knows great rides like CTC groups. **Sue Coles** of CTC South Hampshire describes a winter classic

Watership Down



Watership Down isn't only a haven for rabbits like those in the book of the same name by Richard Adams. It is also home to some of the best cycling Hampshire has to offer. Situated in the North Wessex AONB among the chalk hilltops of the North Hampshire Downs, surrounded by dry valleys and woodland, it provides quiet roads, great scenery and picturesque villages with friendly pubs.

The terrain is anything but flat. When the Romans arrived at the top of what is now Chute Causeway, they realised that even they could not continue in a straight line, i.e. down into the combe and up the other side. So they did a sharp left turn and continued along the top of the ridge searching for a more benign crossing of the hills. The views from here are stunning. It is also home to wildlife and if you are lucky you may see red kites.

A winter warmer

Cyclists have long recognised the area as ideal cycling country and once a year it is the venue of a winter classic – the Watership Down 100km. The Watership Down was

first run in the mid 1980s and despite its early January date, it has run every year since. The weather is obviously variable. Stories of the epic flood-and-ice year have passed into cycling folklore. Mudguards are vital. Winter tyres are recommended and some riders will need lights.

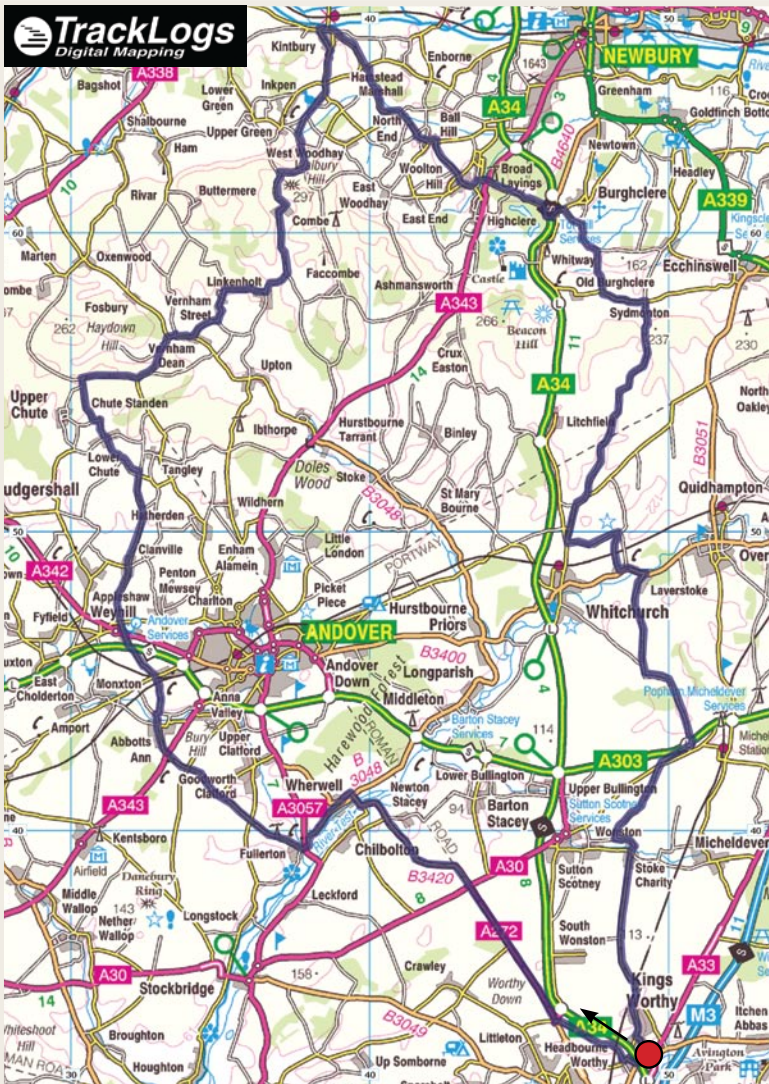
There are two routes that run on alternate years. The route described here is the 2008 route. The 2009 route will be similar and take in the same hills. The ride starts from Kings Worthy near Winchester and takes an undulating route to Lower Chute and the Hatchett Inn for refreshments (included in entry price). If the weather is fine, riders can sit outside. Not bad for early January. If the weather is poor the log fire in the pub can be hard to leave. The Hatchett Inn is the only manned control but the route sheet mentions other pubs on route.

On leaving Lower Chute the route climbs gently up to Chute Causeway, along the Causeway followed by an exhilarating descent of Conholt Hill. It then meanders through the Downs before ascending Walbury Hill



(Main) The Hatchett Inn is a good refreshment stop

(Above) Approaching the top of Watership Down on an October ride



Route directions

- START: Jubilee Hall, Kings Worthy, Nr. Winchester (GR SU492323).
- L from Jubilee Hall, under A34
- R (Bedfield Lane). L at T
- 1st R, then at O 3rd exit A272
- At staggered X with A30 SO on B3420
- FL at White Lion PH
- L on A3057
- 1st R and continue to X where SO
- SO at X with A343
- Thru ABBOTS ANN to T
- R and 1st L
- SO at staggered X
- Under A303 and SO at staggered X with A342. SO at next X.
- L at X in 3½ miles to LOWER CHUTE
- Pass HATCHET INN on R
- Continue thru CHUTE STANDEN
- Bear R & continue to T
- R along Chute Causeway
- L at T & descend Conholt Hill
- R at T, then 3rd L by George Inn
- 2nd R in 1½ miles
- L at T, and L at next T
- Follow hairpin bend to R and ascend WALBURY HILL
- R at top, then 3rd R, then R at T
- Pass Crown & Garter PH on R
- Continue to X in KINTBURY
- R along main street
- 1st R, and in 1½ miles 2nd R
- Continue to Ball Hill sign and then 4th R, immediately after garage
- Continue to A343 where SO
- Over A34. L at T
- Pass Carpenter's Arms PH on R
- 1st R after pub
- R at T. R at next junction and immediately R again
- L at T. R at X & ascend WATERSHIP DOWN
- Descend – care, gated road – and R at T
- L at T and immediately L. Then 1st R
- Pass WATERSHIP DOWN PH on R
- L at T onto B3400
- Continue to LAVERSTOKE and take 1st through road on R
- Stay on thru route, under A303
- R at T and L in ½ mile
- L at T. SO at staggered X
- R in 3 miles by King Charles PH
- Under former railway bridge, then 2nd L up Nations Hill
- Descend to T and R to JUBILEE HALL

ABBREVIATIONS: T = T junction, F = fork, R = right, L = left, SO = straight on, O = roundabout, X = cross roads, sp = signpost.

FACT FILE Watership Down

DISTANCE: 108 km (67.5 miles).
CLIMBING: 1,292 metres (4,238 feet).
AVERAGE TIME: 5 ½ - 6 hrs.
TERRAIN: Undulating with a couple of steep climbs, mainly on minor roads. No off-road.
WHEN: 2nd Sunday in January (Sunday 11th January 2009).
MAPS: OS Landrangers 185 and 174.
START/FINISH: Jubilee Hall, Kings Worthy, Nr. Winchester.
BIKE SHOPS: None on the route!
FOOD & DRINK: The Hatchet Inn, Chute; The George, Vernham Dean; Crown and Garter, Inkpen; Carpenter's Arms, Burgchlere; Watership Down, Freefolk. No cafés on route.
MORE INFORMATION: Sue Coles 01962 864479 events@southhamptshirectc.org.uk, www.southhamptshirectc.org.uk

(highest point on route at 280m). The route then leaves the chalk and descends into the sands and gravels. This is an easier stretch but not long after leaving Burgchlere the route starts its climb of Watership Down. It's a stiff climb – maybe a walk for those on fixed. The route then takes an undulating route back to Kings Worthy.

The event itself is always popular and so we insist on advanced entries. The Hatchet Inn is small and can only cope with about 120 riders.

The North Hampshire Downs contain a myriad of quiet roads and so it's an ideal destination for a short break. Many of the pubs – including the Hatchet – do accommodation. If you are there between March and December, try to visit the Sandham Memorial Chapel in Burgchlere. Owned by the National Trust it houses the murals of Stanley Spencer inspired by his experience of the First World War.

Who we are

We are CTC South Hampshire and are split into two main groups roughly covering Winchester and Southampton. Both groups offer day and half-day rides with evening rides in the summer. There is also an easy-rides group within each section. In addition to the Watership Down 100km, we also organise the Winton 200 and 100km in mid June, again starting from Kings Worthy. You are welcome to join us on any of our rides. For a full list, see www.southhamptshirectc.org.uk.

Submit a route

If you want to submit one of your local group's favourite rides, write or email the editor – details on page 80 – for advice on how to go about it. Each one printed wins a boxed set of three Cassini historical maps of the area of your choice. To see the whole range, visit www.cassinimaps.com. For more information, call 08452 300 952.

