



South Dorset Ridgeway: Osmington or Dorchester to Abbotsbury walk

Long ridge walk with stunning views over Purbeck, the Isle of Portland, Chesil beach and Lyme bay. Travel by bus.



Length Osmington to Abbotsbury: 21 km / 13 miles with 1450 feet / 450 m of ascent

Dorchester to Abbotsbury : about 16km / 10 miles

Optional but recommended 2km visit to St Catherine's Chapel at the end, or 5km to Chesil Beach as well

OS Maps OS Explorer 15 (Purbek and South Dorset)

Toughness 6 out of 10 (mainly the length)

Walk Notes The South Dorset Ridgeway (SDR) is a ridge walk along a treeless line of hills with stunning views of the Dorset Coast, the Isle of Portland, Lyme Bay, and Chesil Beach (a long spit with a lagoon behind it).

The walk starts in the small village of Osmington, and finishes in historic, and very pretty Abbotsbury, which has a Sub-Tropical Gardens (well worth a visit), a Swannery, St Catherine's Chapel (picturesque, on a hill overlooking the town and the bay), Chesil Beach, and a nice pub to wait for your bus in.

The SDR is the new name for what used to be a "short cut" section of the South West Coast Path (which has now been diverted to follow the coast, to include the Isle of Portland). The paths are good, the route is easy to follow and well waymarked.

Half way along is a short, well signposted, diversion to use a new pedestrian bridge over the A34 (which wont be on older OS maps)

A little further, there are views inland (north) to Maiden Castle, an ancient monument.

The next landmark is the Hardy Monument NT (Hardy as in 'Kiss me Hardy' of Nelson fame, not 'Thomas Hardy' the writer) at a nice viewpoint near the summit of Black Down (780 ft, 242m). The monument, a tower is closed as of 2014, as the NT don't own the adjacent car-park! The Isle of White, and Devon can be seen from top (850 ft) - 90km away.

Once you reach the coast above Abbotsbury, there are several interesting options - continue along the ridge above the coast, or head down in the town to the Tropical Gardens, the start of Chesil beach, and St Catherine's chapel.

Note. The path at Corton Hill has been repaired. There is a new bridge over the dual carriageway in the middle of the walk which may not be shown on older OS maps.

Walk Options

Dorchester to Abbotsbury

If coming from London, start from Dorchester station, walk to the ridge passing Maiden Castle, an impressive Iron Age hill fort (English Heritage, free), walk the best bit to Abbotsbury, visit St Catherine's and the beach, then catch the X53 bus to Weymouth for the train home

St Catherine's Chapel and Chesil Beach

At the end of the walk, there is an optional 2km loop to visit St Catherine's Chapel (highly recommended), or 5km round trip if you continue to Chesil Beach (the north end of the spit, always open, recommended) for a swim.

Continue north west along the Ridgeway

Instead of dropping down off the ridge to Abbotsbury, you can continue north west along the ridge (above the coast, marked as a SWCP alternative on OS maps) - a stunning walk. A bit close to the road in places, but still stunning views of Lyme bay. The X53 bus runs along the road, so transport is easy.

Travel by Train

Train travellers can travel to Weymouth. Catch the X53 to Osmington, walk to Abbotsbury, and then catch the X53 bus back to Weymouth

You could also split the walk into 2 halves by starting from Dorchester or Upwey stations. Walk to the ridge to join the walk near its mid-point, continue on to Abbotsbury, then catch the X53 bus via Weymouth to Osmington, and do the 1st half of the walk back to the mid-point from there.

Chesil Beach

Don't even think of walking along the 14 mile (23 km) spit at Chesil Beach.

Why? It a nightmare of shingle walking over 180,000,000,000 pebbles. It hard going over the shingle, and once you start, there's no way to cut it short. Most of the spit is closed from April to August inclusive due to nesting birds (from the "Dragon's Teeth" anti-tank block at the north west end of Fleet Lagoon) and there are also closures due to an army firing range (at the south east end of the Lagoon). The Isle of Portland causeway section is always open. If you [do decide to walk, check in with the reserve warden's](#) (more so you can help them - they are interesting in nature sightings, and any problems you encounter as bits of the reserve are rarely visited, which is a hint in itself)

Transport Trains go from London Waterloo and take about 3 hours. Consider Advance fares, or occasional SWT Promotions, e.g. £15 day trips in summer 2014.

X53 Bus : Abbotsbury - Weymouth (station) - Osmington

The start and finish of the walk are linked (via Weymouth Station) by the regular direct year round "CoastlinX53" bus service (not Winter Sundays between Weymouth at Osmington, £6.50 day ticket, Abbotsbury to Weymouth: £3.50). Check the times before travelling. Sometimes its 2 hourly!.

In theory, you could get a Dorchester or Wemouth 'plusbus' train ticket (about £2 return extra), and get a local Weymouth - Upwey - (the ridge) - Dorchester bus to somewhere near the ridge around the center of the walk.

Eat No refreshments at all during the walk without at least a 1km detour each way on an already long walk.

Abbotsbury at the end has 2 nice pubs - The Swan, and the Ilchester Arms.

Links

- [Hardy Monument \(NT\)](#)
- [Chesil Beach \(spit\)](#)

- [Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens](#) - highly recommended
- [Maiden Castle \(Ancient Monument, English Heritage\)](#) - On the Dorchester Station Link. Impressive Iron Age hill fort, one of the biggest in Europe, but abandoned around the time of the Romans. [Wikipedia has more information](#) Free entry, always open.
- [CoastlinX53 Bus Service](#) - Google Search

Chesil Beach

Don't even think of walking along the 14 mile (23 km) spit at Chesil Beach [\[wikipedia\]](#) [\[geology\]](#) [\[nature reserve\]](#), which runs parallel to the coast between the Isle of Portland cauesway and Abbotsbury, with the brackish Fleet Lagoon behind it.

Why? It a nightmare of shingle walking over 180,000,000,000 pebbles. It hard going over the shingle, and once you start, there's no way to cut it short. The west and mddle of the spit is closed from April to August inclusive due to nesting birds (starting from the "Dragon's Teeth" anti-tank blocks at the north west end of the Lagoon) and there are also closures due to an army firing range (at the eastern end of the Lagoon). The lagoon side of the spit is always closed (fragile environment) - stick to the crest of seaward shore. The eastern end of the spit is always open.

If you do decide to walk it, [check in with the reserve warden's](#) (more so you can help them - they are interesting in nature sightings, and any problems you encounter, as bits of the reserve are rarely visited, which is a hint in itself)

Current thinking is that the beach isn't a true spit (or 'tombolo') caused by deposition of pebbles washed along the coast by tides, but a barrier beach (or 'shoal') instead.

The South West Coast Path does not go along Chesil Beach, but along the land side of the lagoon behind it. It a lovely walk, but does not compare to the nearby coast or ridge walks.

The spit is best viewed from the hills above Abbotsbury (or the Subtropical Gardens), or from the Isle of Portland's hill. It's also well worth a visit for a (short) walk. Access:

- East: DT4 9XE. By the Isle of Portland Causeway. Large cafe. Regular buses (Weymouth - Portland). Parking: £1/hour, cheaper in winter.
- West: DT3 4LA. Abbotsbury's beach, past the Subtropical Gardens. Parking £3 (per day only, when the cafe is open). Small cafe.

Abbotsbury

[Abbotsbury](#) is a picturesque historic village with some special tourist attractions:

- [Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens](#) - very highly recommended. DT3 4JT. £12.50. Free with HHA membership. 2-4-1 with Gardener's World annual scheme.
- [The Swannery](#)
- St Catherine's Chapel ([English Heritage](#), [wikipedia](#)). The chapel was built by abbots as a pilgrim chapel but survived the dissolution, as it was deemed a useful beacon. It certainly provides impressive views out to sea and around. Modern day visitors still offer prayers to St Catherine there, including one for a good husband (?!). Free entry (when open), but worth a visit for the view alone.
- Chesil Beach Spit ([wikipedia](#), [geology](#), [nature reserve](#)). The town's beach is at one end of the 10 mile long Chesil Beach spit. It's a shingle (pebble) bar with a brackish lagoon behind it, attached to the coast at either end. Continue on past the tropical gardens to the car park DT3 4JT. Cafe (summer only). Parking £3 when the cafe's open. The spit is closed Apr-Aug (so open Sep-Mar). Left is the start of the spit, right is the "beach level" SWCP route.

Pubs

- [The Swan Inn](#) DT3 4JL, [01305-871249](#)
- [The Ilchester Arms](#), DT3 4JR, [01305-873841](#)

Help Us! After the walk, please leave a [comment](#), it really helps. Thanks!

You can also upload photos to the [SWC Group on Flickr](#) ([upload your photos](#)) and [videos to Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:

By Car **Start** Osmington, Dorset **Finish** Abbotsbury, Dorset

Map Walk This walk **requires** an OS map and a compass or GPS for navigation. You can print out OS maps using the link above.

Help National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

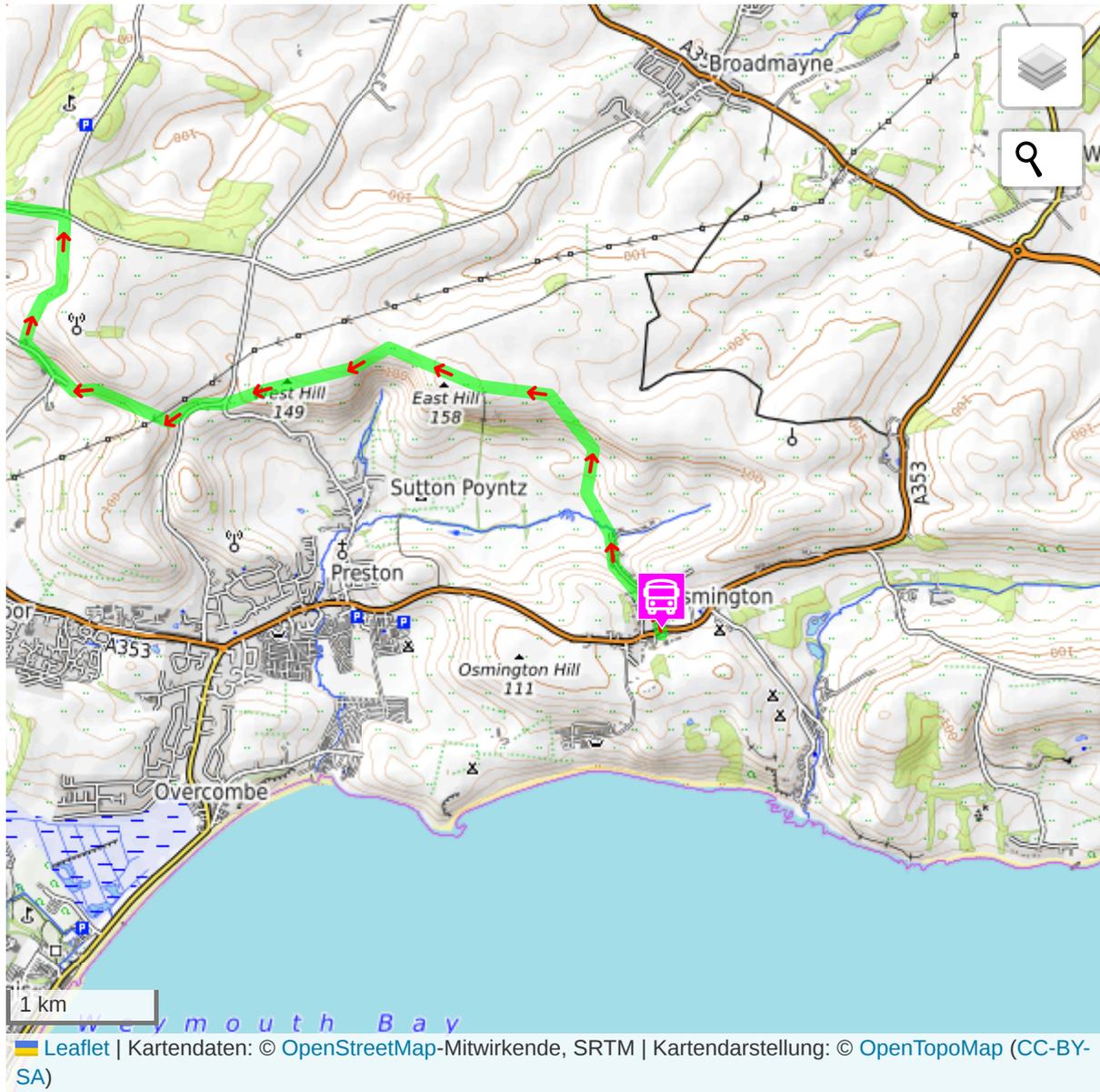
Version Apr-17 [Andrew](#)

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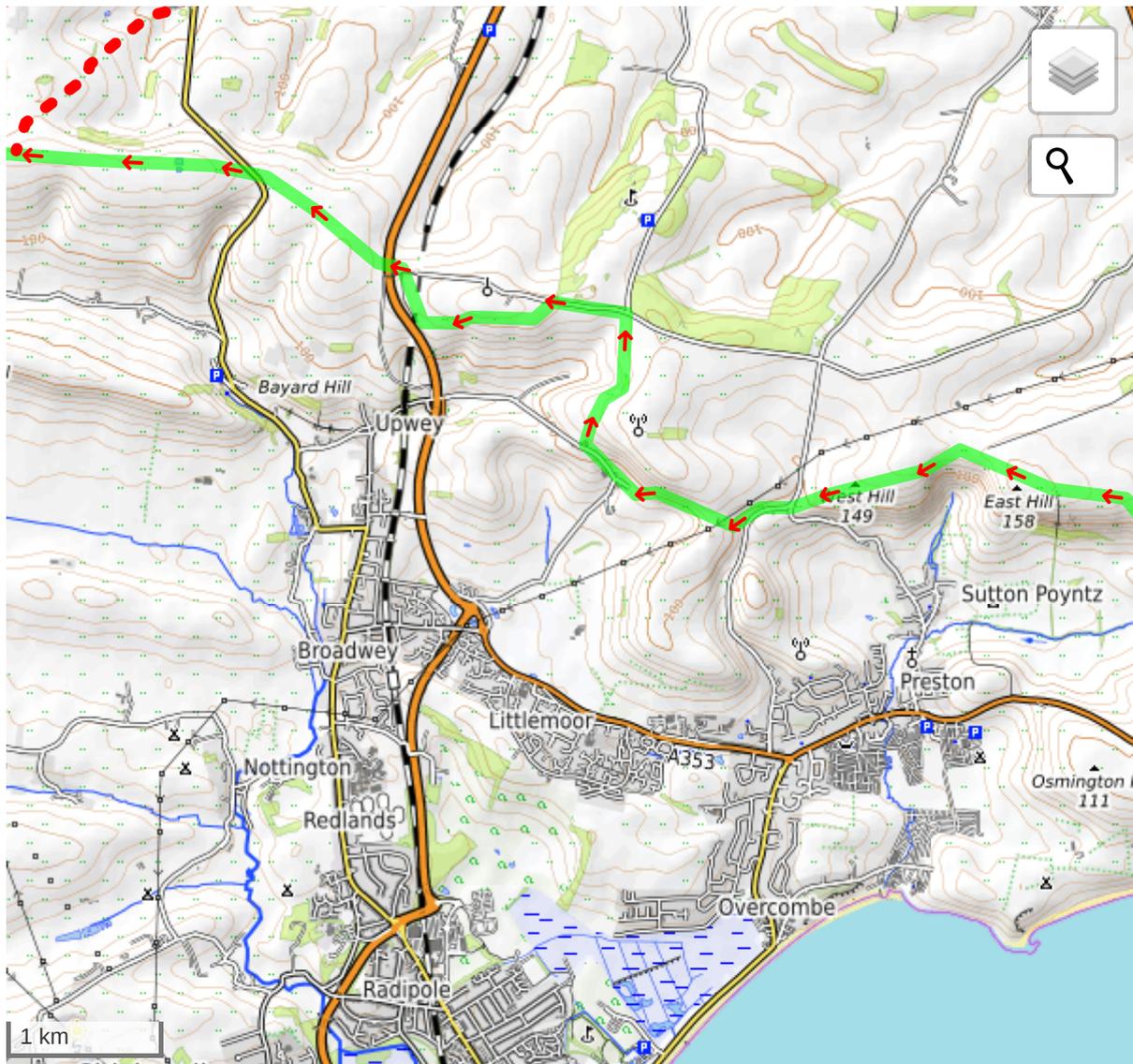
Walk Directions

OpenStreetMap (not OS) mapping is used in the PDF for licence reasons.

Map 1

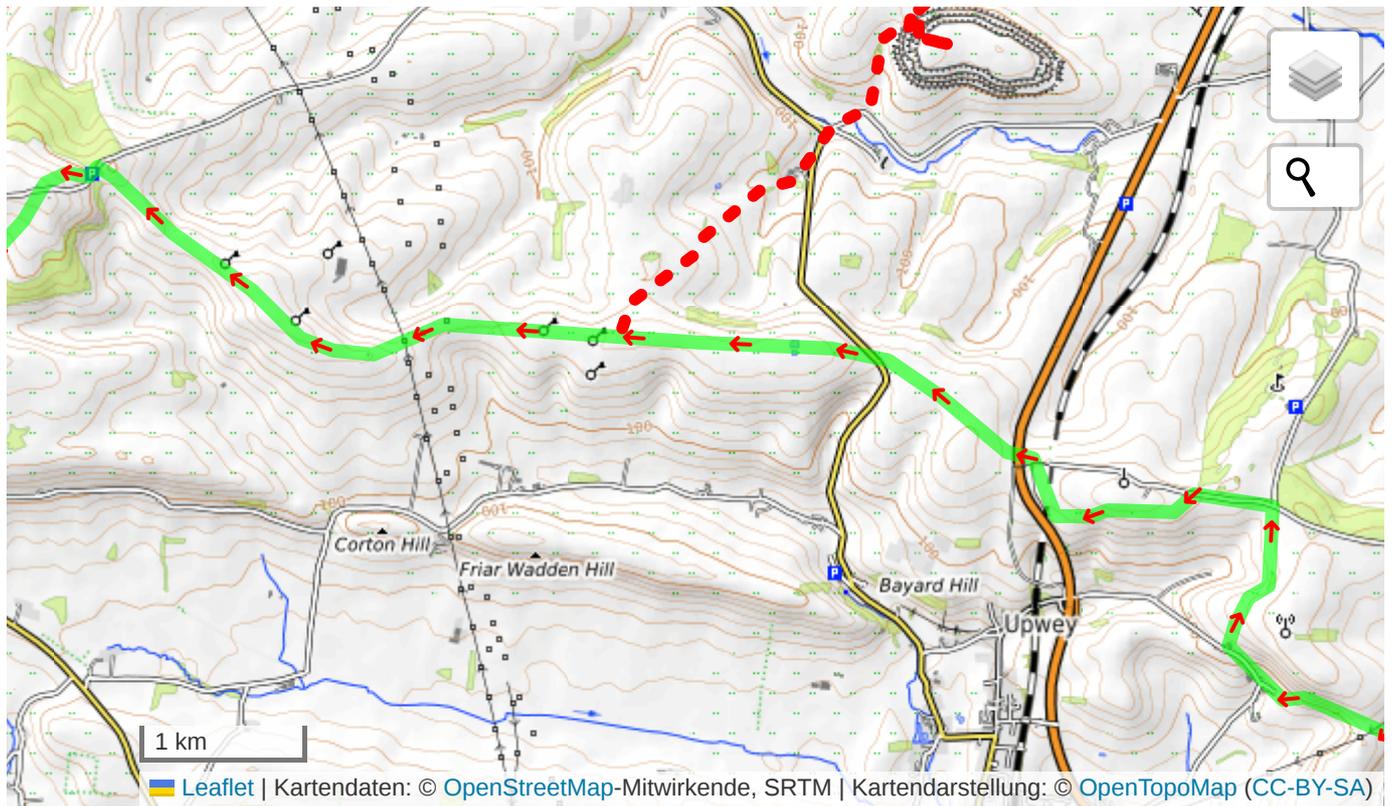


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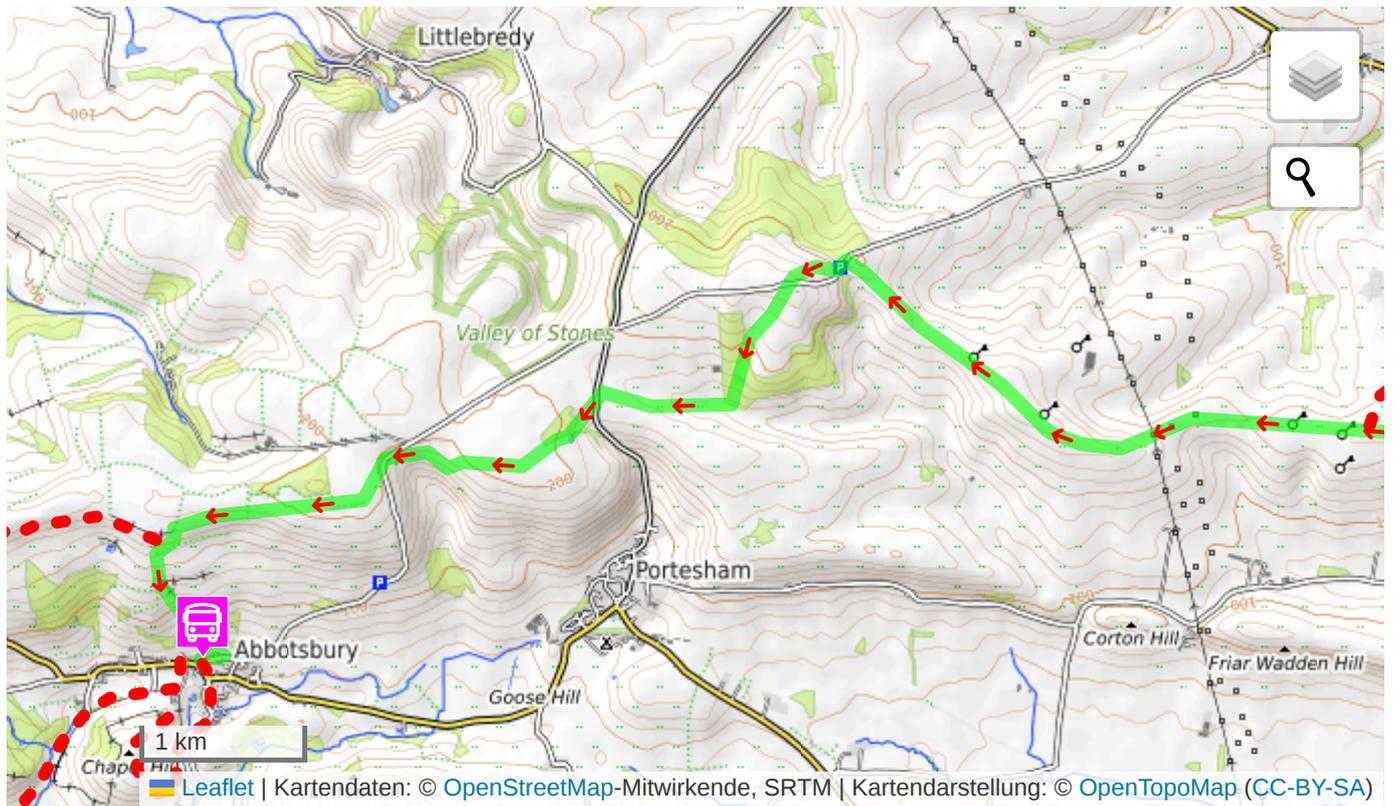


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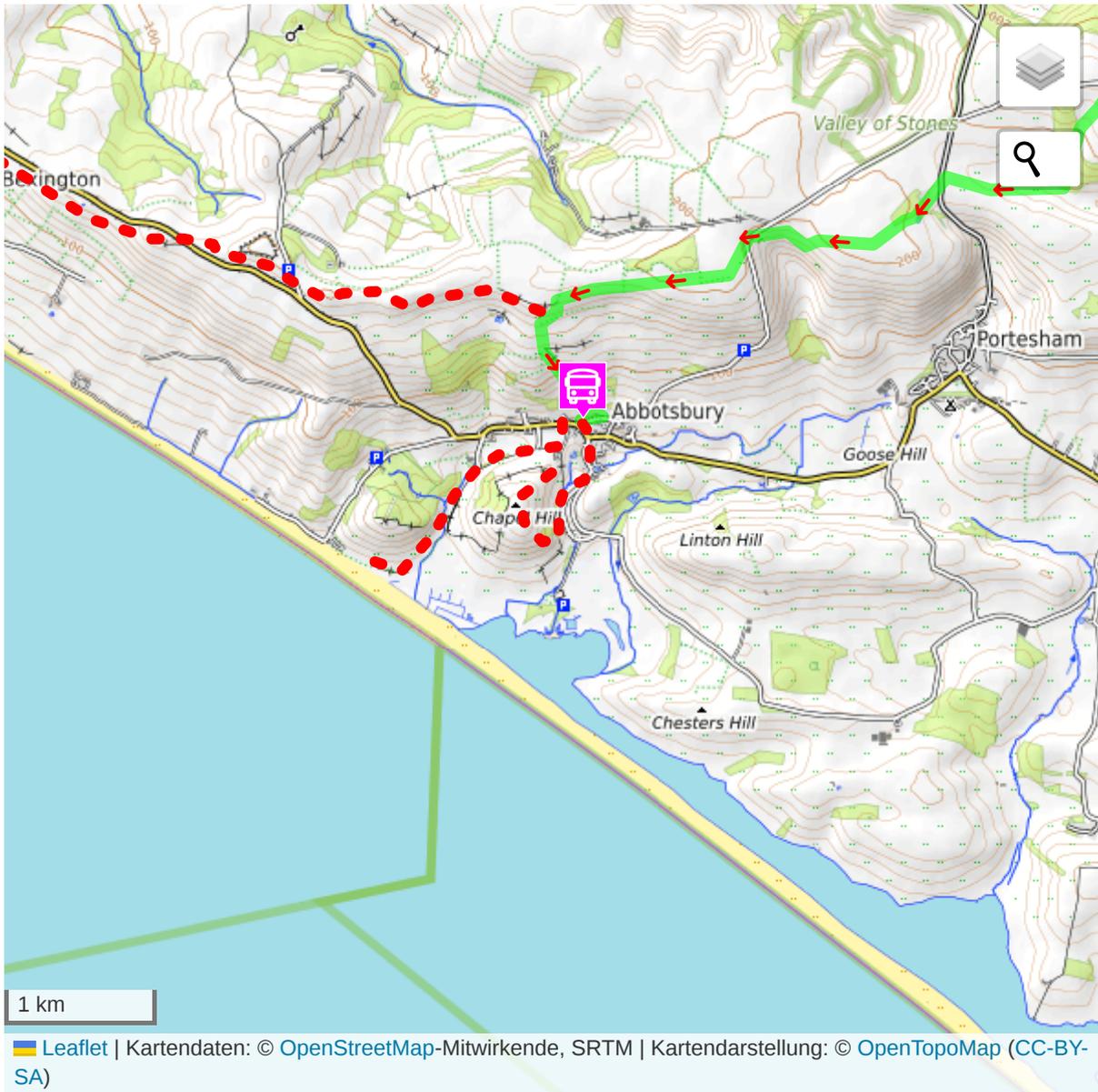
Map 3



Map 4



Map 5



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