

The Countryside Code

Respect • Protect • Enjoy



The Countryside Code

There are country parks, beaches, woodlands, rivers and forests, as well as thousands of miles of public rights of way and other signposted routes you can explore on foot, on a bicycle or on a horse. You can also walk across some parts of the countryside designated as open land, such as mountain, moor, heath, down and common land.

- **Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs**
- **Leave gates and property as you find them**
- **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home**
- **Keep dogs under close control**
- **Consider other people**

Follow the Countryside Code wherever you go. You will get the best out of the countryside and help to maintain it now and for the future.



Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs

Even when going out locally, it's best to get the latest information about where and when you can go (for example, your rights to go onto some areas of open land may be restricted while work is carried out, for safety reasons or during breeding seasons). Follow advice and local signs, and be prepared for the unexpected.

- Refer to up-to-date maps or guidebooks, visit www.ccw.gov.uk or contact local information centres.
- You're responsible for your own safety and for others in your care, so be prepared for changes in weather and other events. Visit www.ccw.gov.uk for links to organisations offering specific advice on equipment and safety, or contact visitor information centres and libraries for a list of outdoor recreation groups.
- Check weather forecasts before you leave, and don't be afraid to turn back.
- Part of the appeal of the countryside is that you can get away from it all. You may not see anyone for hours and there are many places without clear mobile-phone signals, so let someone else know where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Get to know the signs and symbols used in the countryside to show paths and open countryside.

Some of the symbols you may see in the countryside



Footpath waymark



Bridleway waymark



Byway waymark



National trails



Open access

Leave gates and property as you find them

Please respect the working life of the countryside, as our actions can affect people's livelihoods, our heritage, and the safety and welfare of animals and ourselves.

- In fields where crops are growing, follow the paths wherever possible.
- A farmer will normally leave a gate closed to keep livestock in, but may sometimes leave it open so they can reach food and water. Leave gates as you find them or follow instructions on signs (if walking in a group, make sure the last person knows how to leave the gates).
- Use gates and stiles wherever possible - climbing over walls, hedges and fences can damage them and increase the risk of farm animals escaping.
- Leave machinery and livestock alone - don't interfere with animals even if you think they're in distress. Try to alert the farmer instead.
- Our heritage belongs to all of us - be careful not to disturb ruins and historic sites.
- If you think a sign is illegal or misleading (such as, a 'Private - No Entry' sign on a public footpath), contact the local authority.



Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home

We have a responsibility to protect our countryside now and for future generations, so make sure you don't harm animals, birds, plants or trees.

- Litter and leftover food doesn't just spoil the beauty of the countryside, it can be dangerous to wildlife and farm animals and can spread disease - so take your litter home with you (dropping litter and dumping rubbish are criminal offences).
- Discover the beauty of the natural environment and take special care not to damage, destroy or remove features such as rocks, plants and trees. They provide homes and food for wildlife, and add to everybody's enjoyment of the countryside.
- Wild animals and farm animals can behave unpredictably if you get too close, especially if they're with their young - so give them plenty of space.
- Fires can be as devastating to wildlife and habitats as they are to people and property - so be careful not to drop a match or smouldering cigarette at any time of the year. Sometimes, controlled fires are used to manage vegetation, particularly on heaths and moors between October and early April, so please check that a fire is not supervised before calling **999**.



Keep dogs under close control

The countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, but it's every owner's duty to make sure their dog is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, wildlife or other people.

- By law, you must control your dog so that it does not disturb or scare farm animals or wildlife. You must keep your dog on a short lead on most areas of open country and common land between 1 March and 31 July, and at all times near farm animals.
- You do not have to put your dog on a lead on public paths as long as it is under close control. But as a general rule, keep your dog on a lead if you cannot rely on its obedience. By law, farmers are entitled to destroy a dog that injures or worries their animals.
- If a farm animal chases you and your dog, it is safer to let your dog off the lead - don't risk getting hurt by trying to protect it.
- Take particular care that your dog doesn't scare sheep and lambs or wander where it might disturb birds that nest on the ground and other wildlife - eggs and young will soon die without protection from their parents.



- Everyone knows how unpleasant dog mess is and it can cause infections - so always clean up after your dog and get rid of the mess responsibly. Also make sure your dog is wormed regularly.
- At certain times dogs may not be allowed on some areas of open land or may need to be kept on a lead. Please follow any signs. You can also find out more about these rules from www.ccw.gov.uk or by phoning the CCW Enquiry Line on **0845 130 6229**.

Consider other people

Showing consideration and respect for other people makes the countryside a pleasant environment for everyone - at home, at work and at leisure.

- Busy traffic on small country roads can be unpleasant and dangerous to local people, visitors and wildlife - so slow down and, where possible, leave your vehicle at home, consider sharing lifts and use alternatives such as public transport or cycling (for public transport information, phone Traveline on **0870 608 2608**).
- Respect the needs of local people - for example, don't block gateways, driveways or other entry points with your vehicle.
- When riding a bike or driving a vehicle, slow down for horses, walkers, and livestock and give them plenty of room. (By law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horseriders on bridleways.)
- Keep out of the way when farm animals are being gathered or moved and follow directions from the farmer.
- Support the rural economy - for example, buy your supplies from local shops.



More help and information

For how and where to access the countryside, visit www.ccw.gov.uk, phone CCW's **Enquiry Line on 0845 130 6229** or contact your local visitor centre or library (see www.yell.com for listings).

For problems with getting access to specific areas or rights of way, contact the relevant local authority's Countryside or Rights of Way Department, or National Park Authority for help.

For information on access in England, visit the Countryside Agency website at www.countryside.gov.uk

For more information on access in Scotland and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, visit the Scottish Natural Heritage website at SNH.org.uk

We have also produced a code and guidance on access management for farmers, landowners and land managers. To see this, look on our website.



www.ccw.gov.uk