

Countryside access and the new right

Helping everyone to respect, protect and enjoy the countryside



The major new right of access was completed across England on October 31 2005. This is a historic date for all users of the countryside as this new right gives people the opportunity to walk freely across mapped 'access land', without sticking to paths.

In England, the public now have 'open access' to around 940,000 hectares (3,629 square miles). This represents 7% of the country.

The new right covers most recreational activities carried out on foot, including walking, sightseeing, bird-watching, climbing and running, but there are some common sense restrictions in place which limit where people can walk or take a dog. [See 'Just for dog owners'](#)

The new right of open access does not include camping, cycling, horse riding or driving a vehicle (except mobility scooters and buggies), but where these activities already take place they are unaffected. Access land open under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) is for walkers but does not prevent people carrying out other activities with the landowner's consent or where permitted by law.

Knowing where to go

Land to which the new right of access applies is land that has been mapped under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) as mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land.

Landowners may dedicate other areas of land for permanent open access; for example, the Forestry Commission plan to dedicate over 180,000 hectares (700 square miles). However, even within these mapped or dedicated areas, certain places are excluded. Some areas are out of bounds such as gardens, parks and arable land. [See 'Excepted land'](#)

Some restrictions on going onto access land may be in place at times.

[See 'Closures and Restrictions'](#)

Access land is shown on the website www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk and on new OS Explorer Maps. [See 'Maps and Information'](#)

Closures and restrictions

Farmers and landowners have the discretion to suspend or restrict the new access right for up to 28 days each year, for any reason. They may also apply for additional restrictions or closures, where necessary for land management, safety or fire prevention reasons. Whenever possible, restrictions and closures will be shown on www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk and will be reinforced by local signs.

Visitors are advised to check on the website that an access area is open before setting out for a walk.



Maps and information

For the most up-to-date information and maps showing where you can go on access land, including details of any local restrictions and closures, visit the 'Places to Go' section on the website www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

This website also contains information about access to all countryside and has useful advice and links for various types of recreational user.

The new OS Explorer Maps which carry the access symbol are now available in bookshops and outdoor stores. All types of access land are shown on these maps with a light yellow tint surrounded by a light orange border (see example above).

You can also order OS Explorer Maps by phoning 0845 200 2712 (+ 44 1233 211108 outside the UK). Calls are charged at local rate in the UK.

OS Explorer Maps will also show the location of any local 'Access Information Points', and walkers are advised to look out for local signs indicating any closures or restrictions.



In addition, the new access symbol may be displayed to help guide you at some entry and exit points.

Responsible access

Freedom to walk on access land comes with responsibilities, which are outlined in the Countryside Code:

- **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**

Visitors to access land are primarily responsible for their own safety, and for taking care of any children or dogs who accompany them. They must not light (or cause) a fire, feed any animals, leave litter or do any damage.

Printed copies of the Countryside Code and the Moorland Visitors' Code are available from most Tourist Information and Visitor Centres, and selected outdoor shops.

Copies of the Countryside Code leaflet are also available by phoning 0870 120 1273. For further information about the Code visit www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

Just for dog owners

The new right requires you to keep your dog on a lead of no more than 2m long between 1st March and 31st July (the main breeding period for ground-nesting birds) or at any time of year when you are near livestock. Leads are specified as even the best trained dog may occasionally become unresponsive.

Specific local restrictions may also be in place, such as excluding dogs from grouse moors. Please check the open access maps and restrictions information on the website www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk and look out for local signs.

Dog restrictions and exclusions do not affect the right of a person reliant on a guide or hearing dog to enjoy the new right of access but these dogs must also be kept under close control.

None of this affects existing rights for dog walkers, but do remember that a dog attacking or threatening livestock may lawfully be shot.

What the right doesn't include

There is no new entitlement to ride a horse, a bicycle or use any other mechanical transport; to camp, hang-glide or paraglide, use a metal detector, take part in organised games or commercial activities, swim, use boats or windsurfers in nontidal rivers or lakes; or remove anything from the area – including stones, fallen wood or plants. However, existing rights such as riding a horse on a public bridleway are not affected.

See 'Responsible access'



What about Wales and Scotland?

Countryside Council for Wales is responsible for access mapping and implementing the CROW Act in Wales. The new right was introduced in May 2005. See www.ccw.gov.uk

In Scotland, Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 came into force in February 2005. This established a statutory right of responsible access over most areas of land and inland water.

See www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Excepted land

This is land on which the right of access is NOT available at any time, even if it appears on maps of access land. It is generally obvious on the ground and includes:

- Buildings and the land attached to them (eg. courtyards)
- Land within 20 metres of a house, or a building containing livestock
- Parks and gardens
- Land beneath structures – such as electricity substations, wind turbines or telephone masts (though this does not prevent use of access land around them)
- Quarries and other active mineral workings

- Railways and tramways
- Golf courses and race courses
- Aerodromes
- Land being developed in one of the ways above
- Arable land – ploughed for the growing of crops within the past year
- Temporary livestock pens
- Racehorse training gallops – between dawn and midday on any day and at any other time when it is in use for that purpose
- Land under Military Byelaws (eg. Ministry of Defence training areas)

Where 'excepted land' is served by public rights of way (eg. footpaths or bridleways) or other legal access rights, access by those means is still allowed.

Frequently asked questions

Do I have to enter access land at a particular place?

Not usually, unless local restrictions require it. But you must not damage any walls, fences or hedges on your way in or out.

What about cycling?

There are no new rights to cycle, but you can check out the National Cycle Network by phoning Sustrans on 0117 929 0888, or view cycle maps of the area you are visiting at www.sustrans.org.uk

Is rock-climbing allowed?

Yes, provided there are no local restrictions such as for nature conservation. Climbing is at your own risk and you must not cause any damage.

Will I be able to walk at night on access land?

Yes, unless local restrictions rule this out. Obviously, you should take extra care not to trip or fall and take suitable protective clothing with you. Remember, as in daytime, you may not go within 20m of a house, or a building containing livestock.

What about existing rights of way that cross access land?

Public rights of way are not affected by the new right of access or by local access restrictions. As always you should follow the Countryside Code.

See 'Responsible access'

What about woodland and the coast?

The new right of access doesn't apply unless they come within areas of mountain, moor, heath, down or common, or are voluntarily dedicated for access. See 'Knowing where to go'

What happens if I break the rules?

If you break the rules you lose the new right of access to that land for 72 hours and become a trespasser. Serious or repeated cases could result in a landowner seeking a court injunction to keep you from the land.

For printed copies of this leaflet, contact Countryside Agency Publications, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7EP
Tel: 0870 120 6466.

