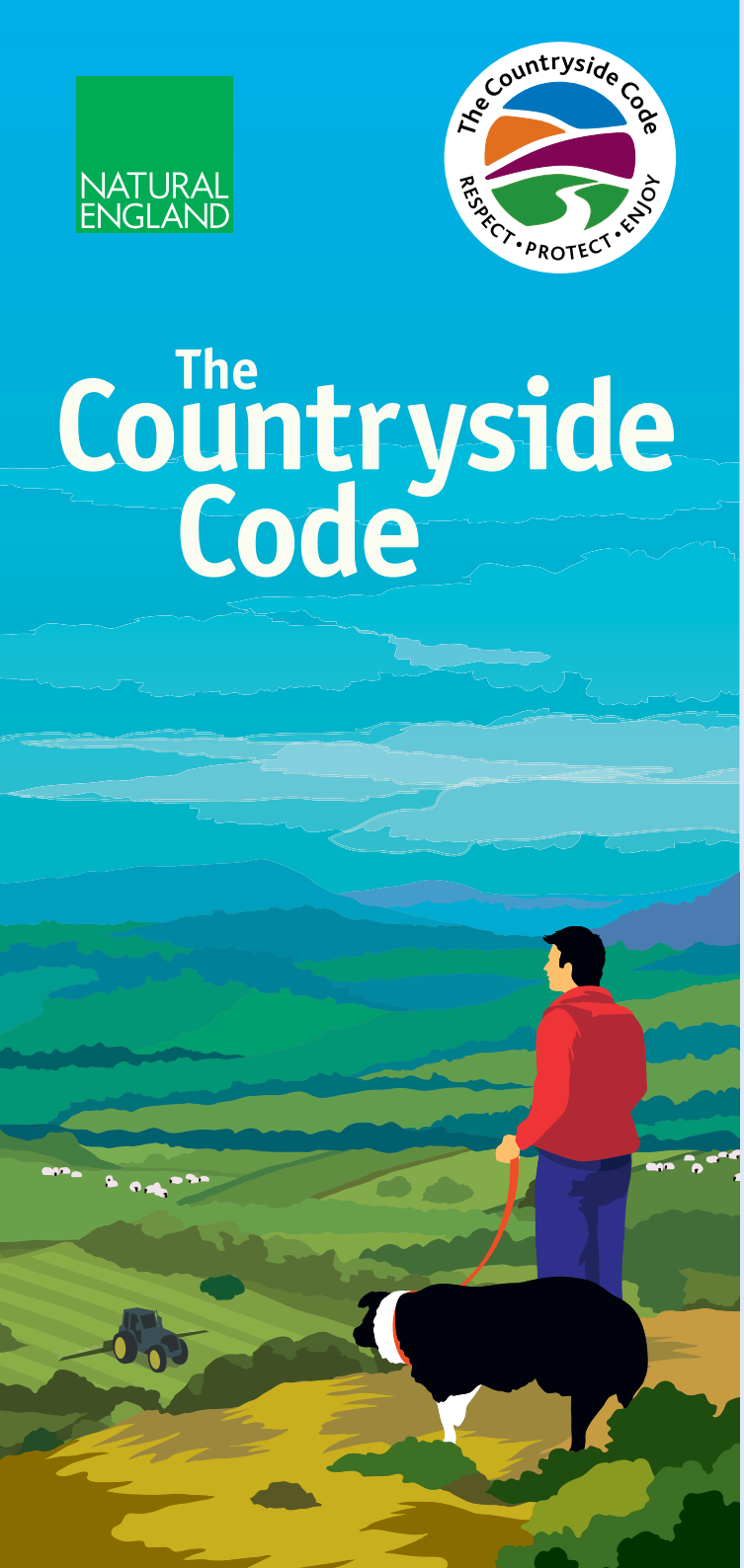
NATURAL ENGLAND

The Countryside Code



Respect other people

Please respect the local community and other people using the outdoors. Remember your actions can affect people's lives and livelihoods.

Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors

- Respect the needs of local people and visitors alike – for example, don't block gateways, driveways or other paths with your vehicle.
- When riding a bike or driving a vehicle, slow down or stop for horses, walkers and farm animals and give them plenty of room. By law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horse-riders on bridleways.
- Co-operate with people at work in the countryside. For example, keep out of the way when farm animals are being gathered or moved and follow directions from the farmer.
- 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 0871 200 22 33 or visit **www.traveline.info**.

Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available

- A farmer will normally close gates to keep farm animals in, but may sometimes leave them open so the animals can reach food and water. Leave gates as you find them or follow instructions on signs. When in a group, make sure the last person knows how to leave the gates.
- Follow paths unless wider access is available, such as on open country or registered common land (known as 'Open Access land').
- If you think a sign is illegal or misleading such as a 'Private - No Entry' sign on a public path, contact the local authority.
- Leave machinery and farm animals alone – don't interfere with animals even if you think they're in distress. Try to alert the farmer instead.
- Use gates, stiles or gaps in field boundaries if you can – climbing over walls, hedges and fences can damage them and increase the risk of farm animals escaping.
- Our heritage matters to all of us – be careful not to disturb ruins and historic sites.

Protect the natural environment

We all have a responsibility to protect the countryside now and for future generations, so make sure you don't harm animals, birds, plants or trees and try to leave no trace of your visit. When out with your dog make sure it is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, horses, wildlife or other people.

Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home

- Protecting the natural environment means taking 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.
- Litter and leftover food doesn't just spoil the beauty of the countryside, it can be dangerous to wildlife and farm animals – so take your litter home with you. Dropping litter and dumping rubbish are criminal offences.
- Fires can be as devastating to wildlife and habitats as they are to people and property – so be careful with naked flames and cigarettes at any time of the year. Sometimes, controlled fires are used to manage vegetation, particularly on heaths and moors between 1st October and 15th April, but if a fire appears to be unattended then report it by calling 999.

Keep dogs under effective control

- When you take your dog into the outdoors, always ensure it does not disturb wildlife, farm animals, horses or other people by keeping it under **effective control**. This means that you:
  - keep your dog on a lead, or
  - keep it in sight at all times, be aware of what it's doing and be confident it will return to you promptly on command
  - ensure it does not stray off the path or area where you have a right of access
- Special dog rules may apply in particular situations, so always look out for local signs – for example:
  - Dogs may be banned from certain areas that people use, or there may be restrictions, byelaws or control orders limiting where they can go.
  - The access rights that normally apply to open country and registered common land (known as 'Open Access' land) require dogs to be kept on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July, to help protect ground nesting birds, and all year round near farm animals.
  - At the coast, there may also be some local restrictions to require dogs to be kept on a short lead during the bird breeding season, and to prevent disturbance to flocks of resting and feeding birds during other times of year.
- It's always good practice (and a legal requirement on 'Open Access' land) to keep your dog on a lead around farm animals and horses, for your own safety and for the welfare of the animals. A farmer may shoot a dog which is attacking or chasing farm animals without being liable to compensate the dog's owner.
- However, if cattle or horses chase you and your dog, it is safer to let your dog off the lead – don't risk getting hurt by trying to protect it. Your dog will be much safer if you let it run away from a farm animal in these circumstances and so will you.
- 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 –' bag it and bin it'. Make sure your dog is wormed regularly to protect it, other animals and people.

Enjoy the outdoors

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 Access land and coastal land may be restricted in particular places at particular times. Find out as much as you can about where you are going, plan ahead and follow advice and local signs.

Plan ahead and be prepared

- You'll get more from your visit if you refer to up-to-date maps or guidebooks and websites before you go. Visit www.gov.uk/natural-england or contact local information centres or libraries for a list of outdoor recreation groups offering advice on specialist activities.
- You're responsible for your own safety and for others in your care – especially children - so be prepared for natural hazards, changes in weather and other events. Wild animals, farm animals and horses can behave unpredictably if you get too close, especially if they're with their young - so give them plenty of space.
- Check weather forecasts before you leave Conditions can change rapidly especially on mountains and along the coast, so don't be afraid to turn back. When visiting the coast check for tide times at www.ukho.gov.uk/easytide, don't risk getting cut off by rising tides and take care on slippery rocks and sea-weed.
- 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.

Follow advice and local signs

England has about 190,000 km (118,000 miles) of public rights of way, providing many opportunities to enjoy the natural environment. Get to know the signs and symbols used in the countryside to show paths and open countryside.

Some of the symbols you may see

Footpath – open to walkers only, waymarked with a yellow arrow.

Bridleway – open to walkers, horse-riders and cyclists, waymarked with a blue arrow.

Restricted byway – open to walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and horse-drawn vehicles, way-marked with a plum coloured arrow.

Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) – open to walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, horse-drawn vehicles and motor vehicles, waymarked with a red arrow.

National Trail Acorn – identifies 15 long distance routes in England and Wales and the England Coast Path. All are open for walking and some trails are also suitable for cyclists, horse-riders and people with limited mobility. Check the National Trail website at www.nationaltrail.co.uk for information including maps, trip planning tools and trail diversions.

Open Access land – 865,000 hectares of mountain, moorland, heathland, down land and registered common land (mapped under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) is available to people to walk, run, explore, climb and watch wildlife, without having to stay on paths. Similar rights are being extended in stages on coastal land in England (identified under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009). Check the Open Access web pages at www.openaccess.naturalengland.org.uk/wps/portal/oasys/maps/MapSearch for maps, information and any current restrictions in place.

A 'negative' access symbol – may be used to mark the end of area-wide access although other access rights may exist, for example public rights of way.

Countryside Code – *advice for land managers*

Know your rights, responsibilities and liabilities

People visiting the countryside provide important income for the local economy. Most like to follow a visible route, prefer using proper access points like gates, and generally want to do the right thing - but they need your help.

- The Ordnance Survey's 1:25,000 maps show public rights of way and access land. These maps are not 'definitive'. If in doubt you can check the legal status of rights of way with your local authority. You can find out which areas of Open Access land are mapped under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 on the Open Access web pages at **www.openaccess.naturalengland.org.uk/wps/portal/oasys/maps/MapSearch**.
- For guidance on your rights, responsibilities and liabilities, contact your local authority or National Park authority. The Country Land and Business Association, **www.cla.org.uk**, 020 7235 0511 and the National Farmers' Union, **www.nfuonline.com**, on 024 7685 8500 can also offer advice.
- For specific queries about Open Access land, check the Open Access pages on GOV.UK at **www.gov.uk/guidance/open-access-land-management-rights-and-responsibilities** or contact the Open Access Contact Centre, on 0300 0602091.

By law, you must keep rights of way clear and not obstruct people's entry onto access land - it's a criminal offence to discourage rights of public access with misleading signs.

- Trespassing is often unintentional - for advice on tackling trespass contact your local authority (**www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council**).

Make it easy for visitors to act responsibly

Most people who visit the countryside are keen to act responsibly and problems are normally due to a lack of understanding. There are a number of ways you can help them to realise their responsibilities:

- Keeping paths clear and waymarks and signs in good order and up to date will help people stick to the right routes and access points. Contact your local authority or National Park Authority to find out what help is available.
- Where there is public access through a boundary feature, such as a fence or hedge, create a gap if you can – or use an accessible gate or, if absolutely necessary, a stile. When installing completely new gates and stiles, make sure you have the permission of the local authority.
- Encourage people to respect your wishes by giving clear, polite guidance where it's needed. For example, telling visitors about your land management work helps them to avoid getting in your way.
- Rubbish attracts other rubbish – by getting rid of items such as farm waste properly, you'll discourage the illegal dumping of rubbish and encourage others to get rid of their rubbish responsibly.

Identify possible threats to visitors' safety

People come to the countryside to enjoy themselves. They have the first line of responsibility to keep themselves and their children safe while there, but you need to ensure that your activities do not knowingly put them at risk.

- Consider possible man-made and natural hazards on your land and draw any 'hidden' risks to the public's attention.
- Try to avoid using electric fencing or barbed wire where people may accidentally touch it, particularly alongside narrow paths and bridleways.
- If electric fencing is used, ensure warning signs are visible.
- Use and store any chemicals or poisonous substances responsibly on your land. They may kill wildlife or cause harm to people or pets. Any pest control you undertake must be planned with this risk in mind.
- Animals likely to attack visitors should not be allowed to roam freely where the public has access – you may be liable for any resulting harm.
- Your duty of care under the Occupiers' Liability Acts of 1957 and 1984 depends on the type of access right people have – so it's important to know what rights, if any, apply to your land. By voluntarily dedicating land for permanent public access you may be able to reduce this liability.

Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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www.gov.uk/natural-england

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