

The law and management of public access rights vary widely between the four countries of the United Kingdom. Practical elements of the following advice apply in all of them but the law in Scotland and Northern Ireland may differ from in England and Wales.

Riders and drivers of horses are referred to generically as equestrians.

More advice is available on [www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice](http://www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice).

**IMPORTANT** This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. Where it is being relied upon, The Society strongly recommends seeking its advice specific to the site.

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## Four principles

1. Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work.
2. Act with courtesy, care and consideration for others and for the land.
3. Be prepared and know what to do in an incident.
4. Comply with the Countryside Code.

## Enjoyment and respect

- Leave only hoofprints and guard against fire.

- Leave dogs at home. Dogs may accompany a human on the track or path of a right of way only, so close to their humans. This means on a short lead or at heel. On a lead is not safe from horseback, and being reliably at heel requires an exceptionally well-trained dog. Dogs must be on a lead on a road. You may think your dog would never harm, but the person or animal they are disturbing does not know and that includes wildlife, for which your dog is a natural threat, as well as other people's dogs or horses which may not be friendly. Dogs in a carriage should be secured on a lead as in a car.
- Observe bylaws displayed at the entrance to a site.

## Care for the land and its use

- Ride or drive slowly past all livestock.
- Keep to the public bridleway or byway, or on a permitted route for horses, including through cultivated land, unless on land with open access on horseback. If in doubt, check BHS Advice on 'Places to ride and drive' on [www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice](http://www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice) and use a map app to stay on the correct route.
- Leave gates as you find them. If open, this may be so animals have access to water. If a gate is difficult to open or close, persevere until it is secure on grazing land, but [report it](#) to the county council as an obstruction (gates should be easy to use).<sup>1</sup>
- Walk if faster paces may damage the ground and, if possible, avoid routes on sloping pasture in sodden conditions where damage could be severe.
- Do not jump fences, hedges or walls — you might cause damage which could be a criminal offence, and risk livestock escaping.
- On commons or coasts which have open access on horseback, avoid areas with heritage or conservation value which may be fragile, especially in breeding season when your passage may disturb vulnerable birds which are ground-nesting or feeding at the shoreline.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice](http://www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice) 'What to do about blocked and difficult to use bridleways and byways'

## Courtesy to other users

- Wear hi-viz aids, even off-road, to help other users to see you and have more time to react.
  - Hi-viz on your horse and carriage as well as you can help locate them more quickly in an incident.
  - Wearing both yellow and orange or pink can increase visibility depending on terrain.
- Slow down well before you reach others and pass at walk; they may be anxious or uncertain how to act safely.
- Give dog walkers time to recall their dog and have it under control. Stop well back if necessary; their dog may be afraid of horses or could react adversely.
- Acknowledge courtesy shown by other users.
- Adopt the 'Be Nice, Say Hi' and 'Share the Trail' ethos. Each encounter with another user is a chance to build cooperation — a smile and a friendly comment can work wonders.
- Politely encourage cyclists to call out when approaching horses. Many cyclists are unsure what to do around horses and may think it best to pass as quickly and quietly as possible.
- If you ride or drive on roads, take the BHS 'Ride Safe' or British Driving Society 'Drive Safe' training respectively. Be able to stop in the distance that you can see ahead.

## Be prepared

An incident can occur even on your shortest local ride or drive so always be prepared. Consider what you would need to deal with an emergency.

- Wear a helmet and gloves, and appropriate clothing. Wear boots that are suitable for riding or driving and in which you can walk if necessary.
- A helmet camera can provide valuable footage to assist in the event of an incident, on or off-road.
- Have a headcollar and rope in case you need to tie your horse or lead.

- Carry a fully charged mobile phone with your 'In Case of Emergency' (ICE) contact immediately accessible without security.
- Carry a hoofpick, penknife or multi-tool and baler twine (for emergency repairs to tack, a fence or gate) and first aid kit.<sup>2</sup> These can fit into a compact pack on the saddle dees or in a carriage.
- Consider a tracking app to share your location with someone and/or apps such as What3Words to provide a location to emergency services or a friend.
- On longer routes or in unfamiliar terrain, consider where your horse may be able to drink in hot weather, and ensure you have water and emergency food for yourself.
- Have liability insurance, included with membership of British Horse Society, British Driving Society and British Carriagedriving.
- If you do have an incident, record it on [BHS.org.uk/horse-i](https://www.bhs.org.uk/horse-i), and with the police if appropriate. Records on Horse-i help BHS work with highway authorities, armed forces, emergency services and others to improve safety.
- Carriage drivers should also:
  - Carry an active, competent groom or passenger who is alert to hazards and able to assist as needed.
  - Check the carriage carefully for defects before every use and carry commonly needed spares for harness and vehicle.

## The Countryside Code

All equestrians are strongly recommended to know and comply with the Countryside Code:

- England [gov.UK](https://www.gov.uk)
- Wales [naturalresources.wales/days-out/the-countryside-codes/the-countryside-code](https://naturalresources.wales/days-out/the-countryside-codes/the-countryside-code)
- Scotland [outdooraccess-scotland.scot/](https://outdooraccess-scotland.scot/)

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<sup>2</sup> Basic First Aid Kit: sterile swabs, scissors, 10cm wide elasticated or cohesive bandage, saline, disinfectant or antiseptic solution

- Northern Ireland [nidirect.gov.uk/articles/countryside-code](http://nidirect.gov.uk/articles/countryside-code)
- Ireland [leavenotraceireland.org](http://leavenotraceireland.org)

For more information for equestrians in each country, see respective pages of [www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk).

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