

Advice on Deer gates on equestrian routes



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.

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.

Bridleways or byways may pass through boundaries which need to be deer-proof and therefore the gate must be the same height as the fence (generally 1.8m).

The minimum width between posts for a bridleway is 1.5m. On a byway, the BHS is unlikely to accept a gate less than 1.8m other than in exceptional circumstances and even 1.8m will depend on the location and whether a Traffic Regulation Order is in operation. Please consult the BHS if in doubt.

A 1.5 or 1.6m gate at 1.8m high will be heavy so it is crucial that its posts are strong enough and are properly embedded to be able to support the weight of the gate so that it swings freely for its lifetime. Some manufacturers will provide a metal gate of this size on an H-frame, with the lower part of the H sunk in the ground for extra stability; however, it is still important that the buried frame is secure and the crossbar of the H is fully buried and will not be exposed by erosion, when it would become a trip hazard. Wooden gates will need substantial hanging posts which are well-secured, as for long field gates. The Paths for All Outdoor Access Design Guide (Scotland) includes a specification for a deer gate.

Gates wider than 1.8m are unlikely to be convenient to open at this height because of their weight. Where access is required for four wheeled motor vehicles and there is not space to make the vehicular access separate from the bridleway, then a double gate (two gates hung to meet in the middle of the track) may be necessary. The gate intended for bridleway users should be 1.525m between

posts; the other gate must be fixed to the ground so that it does not move when the bridle gate is unlatched. If this is a byway, then both gates must be able to be opened and wedged open for a horsedrawn vehicle.

Where self-closing gates are essential, the closing speed should be at least eight seconds, taking into account prevailing wind conditions.

The latch mechanism must be operable from either side of the gate, on foot, from a mobility device, or mounted on a horse. To be operable from a horse, a lever must be extended to reach the top of the gate or no less than 1.2m from the ground.

Latching mechanisms which require a rider to dismount are undesirable as a rider has less control while dismounting or mounting and, if mobility impaired, may have difficulty without assistance. Having to dismount, even for an agile rider, is an inconvenience and can be a risky movement in an open environment.

Extended lever mechanisms for spring or gravity latches mean that latches can be installed which can be conveniently operated from either side of the gate, on foot and on horseback.

The lever for a spring latch should ideally extend above the top of the gate but on a deer gate may be accepted at a minimum height of 1.2 m so long as it can be operated easily without risk of being caught or trapped by the rails of the gate, bearing in mind that a rider may be reaching down to it (a person on foot or in a wheelchair /mobility device would usually be level with the latch). Standard gate latch kits can be used if the latch point can be above mid-height of the gate.

Gravity latches may be operated when mounted by welding an extension rod to the top of the latch or by attaching a length of chain or rope from the gravity latch to the top of the gate or post. The rider lifts the latch by pulling the chain upwards (so it must have enough slack to be picked up when wearing gloves).

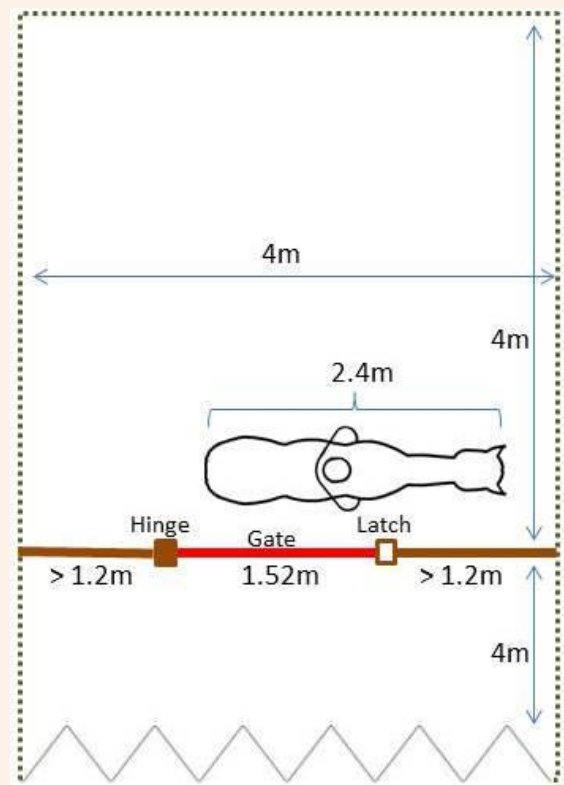
Gravity latches are not ideal because they require one hand to lift the latch and the other to move the gate, which leaves a rider no hand for the horse. The striker should form a D or U shape to reduce risk of a gouging injury from a straight horizontal rod sticking out from the gate.

Space required around the gate is the same as for a standard height gate (figure 1):

- 1.2m in line with the gate at the latch end (taking account of hedge growth)
- 4m manoeuvring space either side of the gate

This is because the recommended method for opening a gate is to approach from the hinges and reach the latch when parallel with the gate, which requires space for the length of horse in front of the rider (nearly half the horse) beyond the latch so the latch is at the horse's shoulder and the rider is not over-reaching.

Having released the latch, the rider then reverses the horse to pull or push the gate open and pass through the gateway. Space is required on both sides of the gate to manoeuvre into this position.



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