

# Advice on Where to ride and carriage-drive in England and Wales

**The law and management of public access rights varies widely between the four countries of the United Kingdom. This advice note is written for England and Wales and although elements of the advice may be applicable in Scotland and Northern Ireland this cannot be assumed.**

More advice is available on [www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice](http://www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice). For Scotland and Ireland see [www.bhs.org.uk/bhs-in-your-area](http://www.bhs.org.uk/bhs-in-your-area)

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## Finding places to ride and carriage drive

If you move into a new area or acquire your first horse you will need to find where you can ride or drive safely, ideally away from motor traffic and roads.

You may also decide you want to become involved in improving safe equestrian access in your area, in which case do contact us so we can try to put you in touch with others locally..

There are three main sources of reliable information when looking for equestrian routes:

- The Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way (England and Wales only)
- Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 or 1:50,000 scale maps (England and Wales only)
- Your local BHS Affiliated Equestrian Access Groups

The primary places to ride are public rights of way: bridleways and byways. These are recorded on the Definitive Map and shown on Ordnance Survey Maps. Other places to ride are less easy to find and local Equestrian Access Groups may be able to help.

## The Definitive Map

The Definitive Map and its accompanying Statement are the legal record of the position and status of public rights of way in England and Wales and are kept by highway authorities (county councils or unitary authorities). The map is available at local authority offices and can be viewed for free on request (you may need an appointment). Many authorities also have their map on their website, perhaps also showing minor unsurfaced roads, which can be valuable links for riders and carriage-drivers.

On the map you will be able to view whether a route is a footpath, bridleway, restricted byway or byway, and generally assess the current situation of public rights of way available to you in the area. They vary greatly: some areas have many, others none. You may find that a route you thought was a bridleway is not recorded as such. If that is the case, do investigate further as unrecorded rights could be lost forever (see BHS Advice on Recording a Right of Way and Toolkit 2026).

Changes are made frequently to the definitive map by complex orders (to alter the line of a route, to add or remove routes and change status (from footpath to bridleway, for example) so most local authorities keep a 'working copy', which is one that includes all recent changes that may not yet have been published as an updated or 'consolidated' definitive map so you are better viewing the working copy. Maps on authorities' websites are likely to be the working copy.

## Ordnance Survey Maps

The 1:25,000 scale Ordnance Survey (OS) map (printed as the Explorer map with orange covers) are the best for finding equestrian routes as they show field boundaries, so it is easier to see exactly where a route goes. 1:50,000 scale Landranger maps will show equestrian routes too, but in less detail. Ordnance Survey maps show data from the councils' Definitive Maps and from any confirmed orders making changes to rights of way. Ordnance Survey maps are quickly out of date, so always check with the highway authority to be certain whether a right of way is recorded.

You can view and print sections of maps online on several websites such as Ordnance Survey and Streetmap and digital maps can be bought (or subscribed to) for use with GPS, smartphone or desktop applications.

Paper OS maps can be bought online through many websites, and at bookshops, stationers or outdoor pursuit shops. You can view local ones at many libraries.

You need to know:

- On which kinds of highways shown on OS maps you have a right to ride or drive; and
- Where else you are likely to be able to ride and how to find out about such places/routes.

Look at the key to see which line styles relate to your routes. On 1:25,000 maps, bridleways are long green dashes (footpaths are short ones), restricted byways are long green dashes with alternating half bars and byways open to all traffic are long dashes with crossbars. The same line styles are used on the 1:50,000 but appear pink.

The diamond symbols and a named route on an OS map do not imply a multi-user trail. The rights on any section of such a route are those of the underlying right of way. Often walking routes incorporate bridleways. This does not mean that riders no longer have a right on the bridleway because it is promoted as a walking route, but nor does it mean that footpath sections can be used by riders.

## So you've found the routes – get your facts right...

This applies only to England and Wales as the law and rights are different in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

It is essential that equestrians know the legal basis on which they are using any facility. The normal rules of courtesy and good behaviour should govern our conduct at all times, but where provision has been specially made for equestrians there may be additional rules which have to be obeyed, such as times of access, speed, specific tracks or areas.

There is a right of Open Access on foot ('right to roam') over designated land. Riders and carriage drivers can continue to cross such land, which is marked on recent OS maps, on existing rights of way or other highways

and to exercise any other pre-existing rights and concessions. Such rights are not affected by any Restriction Order that may apply to the Open Access land. Landowners can dedicate their Open Access land for horse-riding as well as walking.

## Where do you have the right to ride or drive?

- On all roads except motorways. There may be a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), permanent or temporary, that suspends your right to use a particular road. Temporary TROs are often used while roads and right of way are repaired.
- On some classes of public rights of way, which are shown on the Definitive Map and Ordnance Survey maps. They are:
  - Bridleways – you can ride or lead a horse, walk or bicycle on a bridleway. Cyclists must, however, give way to riders and walkers. Motor vehicles driven by the public are not allowed on bridleways, nor are horse-drawn carriages, but may be allowed with the landowner's permission.
  - Restricted byways – are open to all non-mechanically propelled traffic, that is, on foot, horse, cycle and with a horse-drawn carriage, but not with a motor vehicle (unless with permission).
  - Byways open to all traffic – open to all users including motor vehicles.

Footpaths are for walkers only; there is no right to ride or drive on a footpath, but occasionally a footpath may have unrecorded higher rights, in which case you can exercise the higher rights if you know about them, or you may ride on a footpath with the permission from the landowner.

On older maps you may see Roads Used as Public Paths instead of byways. RUPPs were mainly old roads used as if they were public paths (that is, footpaths or bridleways). The meaning of the terms was very confused for years following the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and subsequent legislation required their reclassification for greater clarity in the rights. Some were reclassified as bridleway, or even footpath. They remained a problem until the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which automatically reclassified any remaining RUPP as a Restricted Byway.

Byways (restricted and open to all traffic), bridleways and footpaths are collectively called public rights of way or minor highways; the term highway covers any public right of way from an A road to a footpath. Footpaths and bridleways may collectively be called public paths.

Farmers and adjacent house owners may have private rights of access with vehicles along any minor highway, such as the access road to a farm which is also a bridleway.

People in wheelchairs, manual or electric, are allowed to use all rights of way.

## Minor Roads

Not all roads were surfaced with 'tarmac' or asphalt in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and some of these remain as stone, earth or grass tracks and are generally categorised by highway authorities as unclassified unsurfaced minor roads. They are sometimes called 'white roads' from the way they appeared on OS maps. Unclassified means they are not an A, B or C road. Highway authorities and users familiar with them may call them UCRs (Unclassified/ Unsealed/ Unsurfaced County Roads.)

Unclassified roads may be shown on OS maps published since the 1990s with green dots (1:25,000 Explorer) or dark pink dots (1:50,000 Landranger) as Other Routes with Public Access (ORPAs). In many cases you can ride, and drive a carriage, on a route shown as an ORPA. They vary from unsurfaced routes across fields to stony tracks or fully surfaced lanes. In urban areas, they might be only footpaths or cycle paths. On some you may meet motorised vehicles. Highway authorities are often uncertain of the status of unclassified roads and may only be able to declare them "at least a highway on foot". Such routes need investigation to ensure that the right to ride or drive will be protected and to clarify for all users.

You may also use:

## Commons

Some, but not all, commons have statutory provision for people to take air and exercise on horseback, depending on the Acts of Parliament governing the particular common. On some commons there may be a Scheme of Management which includes provision for ridden horses. If there are bylaws (which should be noted and obeyed) they will be displayed on the common, otherwise seek information locally about what is allowed. The right of access for recreation is additional to the use of any rights of way or vehicular roads across the common.

## Designated Horse Rides in Public Open Spaces

These are designated under bylaws made under an Act of Parliament for the site and are most common in large urban areas or country parks. Often, such rides have been specially constructed for the purpose and are exclusive to riders (and drivers if carriage driving is permitted). Many were created to provide healthy exercise for people. Less commonly, access may be over a designated area rather than a route. Public Open Spaces are most commonly associated with urban local authorities in and around London; well known examples are some of the Royal Parks, Epping Forest, and the Metropolitan Commons.

Horse Rides are not shown on Explorer maps and many of the Public Open Spaces may be too small to seem significant but still provide good lengths of riding or extra facilities such as manèges. These will be shown on maps at entrances or on information issued by the council. Use is usually subject to bylaws which should be studied before you use the facilities. The bylaws are posted at entrances but the relevant ones should be contained in any published information.

## Concessionary or Permissive Routes and Access

These are where the landowner has given permission for use. The landowners vary from private owners to a variety of public and semi-public bodies.

Permission can be withdrawn, which has happened where a facility has been abused or where land use has changed. Use is open to all who know about the route or, in some cases, area. In most cases the use is free, but sometimes a charge is made. In some places, a permit may be required.

Some permissive routes are long term and shown on Ordnance Survey maps. Others may be provided through government funded agri-environment schemes, in which case you may only find about them locally or through Natural England or Natural Resources Wales.

Under the terms of hard-won concordats with the Society and BHS Cymru, the Forestry Commission provides free equestrian access on its roads and tracks if it has no need to regulate access and if it owns the land. On land it leases, or where the Commission considers it necessary to regulate use, it requires equestrians to pay "a reasonable fee" for a permit, unless they are only using public rights of way.

Not all Forestry Commission woods are open to riders and you will need to check locally whether a permit is required. A permit is valid throughout Great Britain.

## Other bodies also operate permit systems

The BHS supports permit schemes ONLY where there is absolutely no definitive or *de facto* right to ride and where they provide a useful addition to public rights for equestrians, both ridden and driven. The Society recognises that there are circumstances where a permit scheme may be an acceptable management tool which facilitates designated horse rides and drives.

## Country Parks

Country parks and land owned or administered by public authorities often have concessionary horse routes provided as additional facilities for local residents and visitors. The tracks may not be exclusively for equestrians or specially constructed. There may be a code of conduct or bylaws with which you should familiarise yourself, or restrictions on hours of use.

## Cycle Routes

Many local authority owned cycle routes, particularly those on old railways, may be used by riders although this is often not advertised, simply because riders have been forgotten in the promotion of cycling and walking. Care must be taken not to damage the surface provided for cycles or to impede other users.

Many traffic free cycle routes are shown on OS maps with orange dots or you can find out about them from your local authority. Check which ones, or which sections, are open to riders. Where a promoted cycle route runs on a bridleway, riders and walkers have priority over cyclists.

## Beaches and estuaries

Many beaches are open to riders but this may be subject to local rules or bylaws limiting the hours or seasons when riding is allowed. See [www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice](http://www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice) for more information on Riding on Beaches and Estuaries and a list of UK beaches which welcome horses (it also lists BHS approved establishments that offer riding on beaches). You are recommended to check with the local authority for more information or in case the rules have changed.

## Permits and Toll Rides

Permits are primarily a management tool for permitted access, often used to control numbers or ensure good behaviour, and some are issued without charge.

Toll Rides are a subscription only for riders who pay into a money-raising scheme in return for a permit to ride on certain land or routes. The permits are usually annual ones, although some schemes provide visitors'

permits. Toll rides can be the only option where there are few bridleways or where stabling is cut off from rights of way by busy roads.

Additional advice on toll rides may be obtained from the BHS Access and Rights of Way department.

So long as provision of new public links is not prejudiced, the BHS believes that toll rides can provide a useful supplement to public rights of way locally where definitive or permissive routes do not exist.

You can ride freely on bridleways and byways through areas which may be covered by permits or tolls for use of other routes but you are advised to ensure that you keep to the public rights of way if you do not have a permit.

## If you encounter a problem

If you encounter a problem, it should be reported to help other riders and drivers so that off-road routes are kept open and easy to use. If the problem is on a bridleway, byway or road, contact the rights of way department of the highway authority (the county council or unitary authority). Many authorities have problem-reporting facilities on their websites and this can be the quickest way to make a report.

If the problem is on a site covered by bylaws, contact the organisation shown on notice boards.

Where you have obtained a permit or paid a 'toll', contact that office.

## Join a BHS Affiliated Equestrian Access Group

The BHS has Equestrian Access Groups spread throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Riders Access Groups in Scotland, all of whom work to defend, extend and promote equestrian access in their areas. They are likely to have good knowledge of routes in the area they cover. You can find out if there is a group near you on [www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk) or by contacting [access@bhs.org.uk](mailto:access@bhs.org.uk) if you are interested in forming a group.

## BHS Policy Statement on Use of Byways

The British Horse Society defends the appropriate use of highways by those who are legally entitled to use them; it deplores irresponsible and damaging use by any category of user, and supports the use of Traffic Regulation Orders, especially temporary ones, to restrict use where appropriate to allow tracks time to recover or be repaired.

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