

Advice on Shared and single use paths in Scotland

Horse riders, walkers and cyclists all enjoy equal rights of access in Scotland, so shared use is the norm north of the border. The presumption is also in favour of shared use for any new paths being developed, unless physical circumstances dictate otherwise, for example where there is no alternative other than a long flight of steep steps.

In the main, cyclists, walkers and horse riders get along fine using the same routes. All users of shared use paths have responsibilities for the safety of others they are sharing the path with. The key is good communication, understanding and respect of each other's interests and needs. However, in occasional circumstances single use or braided use paths may be preferable. BHS Scotland has produced this information sheet to provide guidance for riders, carriage drivers and access managers on how to make shared use work from all perspectives, and when and where single or braided use paths may be considered appropriate.

Helpful tips for horse riders and carriage drivers on responsible shared use

- Accustom your horse to walkers, cyclists, buggies, wheelchairs and buggies.
- Always pass other people slowly and politely
- Avoid causing any unnecessary damage.
- Restrict your speed according to ground conditions and visibility.
- Keep to one side of the path (usually the left, as we are in Britain!)
- Move to one side, or if necessary off the path, to allow others to safely pass.
- Acknowledge courtesy shown by other people.
- Remember that some people are frightened of horses.
- Try to move your horse off paths before it dungs. Otherwise, if it is safe to do so, dismount and kick the dung off the path.
- Find safer alternatives to promoted downhill or other bespoke mountain bike routes such as the Seven Stanes MTB routes.

If you meet a cyclist

- If possible, move to the side of the track to allow cyclists past without dismounting.
- If cyclists are hanging back, let them know when it's safe to pass by waving them through.
- If you meet cyclists on a corner, try to stand on the inside to allow the cyclist the easier, wider outside track.

Width, height and gradient of shared use paths

- Acceptable width depends on level and type of use(s) and ground conditions. Narrow paths concentrate wear and tear, restrict scope for users to pass comfortably and safely, and suffer greater problems with encroaching vegetation. Aim for 2-3 m, accepting that narrower sections are inevitable and acceptable.
- Minimum height of a mounted rider is 2.6 m. Overhanging branches should be cleared to a height of at least 3 m to allow safe passage, preferably to 3.7 m.
- For general purposes BHS quote a gradient of 1:12 as the ideal maximum for ridden use.
- Steps are not normally viable on shared use routes because they are difficult for cyclists and less mobile people. However, horses can cope with steps, particularly if there is sufficient room to allow all four feet to stand together between riders (minimum riser height 150 mm, length of steps 2.9 m).

Paths for All Partnership provide useful guidance on construction and design of shared use paths, downloadable from www.pathsforall.org.uk

Gates and infrastructure

As with most other aspects of off-road recreational access, the position in Scotland regarding gates and infrastructure differs to that in England and Wales. In Scotland farmers, crofters, landowners, access authorities and managers are legally obliged to respect the Land Reform (Scotland) Act and the Equality Act, but otherwise are not legally bound to meet minimum specifications unless work is publicly funded, for example through Scottish Rural Development Programme. Priority in deciding whether a gap or a gate, and which type of gate, is most appropriate must take account of land use and management, as well as the needs of walkers, cyclists and horse riders of all ages and abilities.

In keeping with best practice, BHS Scotland recommends the first choice where stock or access control is not essential should always be a minimum 1.5 m wide gap. Where a gate is necessary, either a 1.5 m self-closing bridlegate fitted with an easy-latch, or a 2-in-1 gate with integral self-closing 1.5m self-closing bridlegate (such as a Centrewire York gate <https://centrewire.com/products/york-2-in-1/>) is recommended. 2-in-1 gates incorporating a pedestrian only section (such as Centrewire Bristol gates <https://centrewire.com/products/bristol-2-in-1/>) can be misinterpreted as implying horse riders do not share equal legal access rights and if the main gate is locked for any reason, are impassable with a horse. The fixed bar at the base of this latter design also potentially presents a trip hazard for walkers, and therefore a potential liability.

Detailed guidance on gates and all other infrastructure for shared use paths can be found in the Outdoor Access Design Guide <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/pfa/creating-paths/outdoor-access-design-guide.html>.

Sustrans Technical Information Sheet no. 28 provides guidance to anyone using Sustrans design documents when developing the National Cycle Network, much of which is equally relevant to other routes.

Signage

As shared use is the norm in Scotland, the general guidance is that there is no need to sign each and every route as being suitable for walkers, cyclists and riders. It would be tantamount to signing every single road as being suitable for the many different types of vehicle which roads are designed to accommodate.

Signage can, however, play an important role in reinforcing suitability for shared use, or misleadingly suggesting otherwise. For example, signs on the Deeside Way include symbols for each different type of use which usefully reminds cyclists and walkers that they may also meet horse riders.



In a slightly different context, signs erected by Blair Atholl Estates are a good example of positive endorsement of shared use while reinforcing the fact that access rights do not include motorised vehicles.



In contrast, the examples shown below include important messages encouraging responsible shared use, but in referring only to pedestrians and cyclists are often misinterpreted as meaning that horse riders do not have a legal right of access along the canal towpath.



Examples of other signs encouraging everyone to respect other users



Surfacing

- From an equestrian perspective, short, firm well-drained turf, grassed over roads and tracks are the ideal. Provided level of use is relatively low, drainage is adequate and substrate/surface layers are sufficient to bear weight of horse and rider, beaten earth may be sufficient. Tussocky molinia and marshy areas which may be acceptable for walkers can be a liability for horses, and for disabled users.
- Forest roads and other tracks constructed or uncompacted, sharp or angular hard stone will soon lame horses and are very tiring to ride, walk or cycle on.
- Wherever possible surfaced riding routes should be finished with compacted 40 mm to dust crushed stone blinded with fine whin dust to fill voids, bind and smooth the surface.
- For cantering or fast going, path surface needs to be either resilient or soft enough to allow hoofs to sink in to a maximum of 3 cm. Softer ground risks sprains and tendon damage at speed.
- On disused railways and other such paths and tracks, well-drained grass alongside a bound surfaced cycle path can work well in providing alternative access for horse riders and dogs

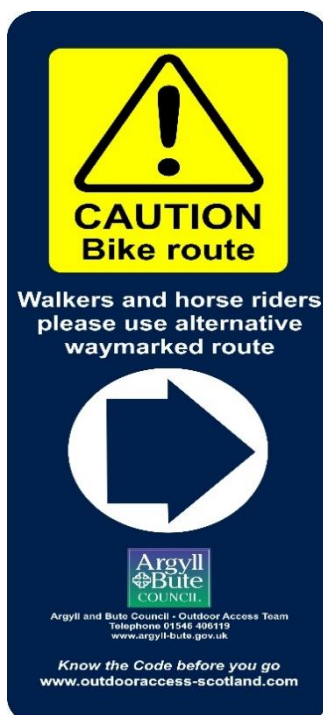
(see picture below), but will not be popular if boggy, litter strewn or too narrow. Ideally the surfaced strip should be on one side, with a grass strip of equal width parallel.



BHS Scotland's equestrian access factsheets provide summary guidance on surfacing from an equestrian perspective. Paths for all Partnership produce useful technical information on the comparative merits of different types of surfacing.

Where might single or segregated use paths be considered justifiable?

- Specialist downhill mountain bike routes. Any such routes should be clearly signed and



- alternative routes clearly identified and appropriately waymarked.
- Exceptionally narrow or steep paths with insufficient passing space or steep steps which are unsuitable for horses, cyclists or wheelchair users.
- Paths where there is a genuine safety risk, such as the case study below.

Case study: segregated use path at Linburn, West Lothian

Linburn Estate is the home for the Scottish War Blinded <https://www.royalblind.org/scottish-war-blinded/linburn-centre>. The estate also offers valuable safe off-road hacking for the many ridden horses around Humble Holdings. Linburn's residents like the horses, but many of the routes on which they depend for outdoor access have been ruined by equine activity. For a blind person level surfacing and the quality of paths is critical. A hoof print or pile of horse dung can present an unseen trip hazard.

Following complaints from the Linburn Centre, BHS visited Linburn and were appalled to find that irresponsible heavy use of paths around the estate by local horse riders had caused significant damage to the paths where the blind and partially sighted walk their guide dogs. Evidence suggested that even in wet weather riders had been cantering on a relatively newly laid stone chip path created specifically for Linburn's residents. Riders had even been using the mono-block path which joins the centre with the sensory garden, and accessing the special smooth paths and board walks that join the operational buildings used by blind people, allowing their horses to dung and not removing the dung. One of the Linburn residents suggested that riders had been less than courteous to the residents.

A meeting was set up involving BHS Scotland, the Linburn Centre, West Lothian Council Countryside Ranger Services and local rider representatives. The meeting included a site visit to various parts of the estate to identify an agreed equestrian route that will allow local riders to access other circular rides that they cherish and give access to the beautiful woodland tracks on the north east of the estate, avoiding the paths most popular with Linburn residents and their guide dogs. It was agreed that suitable signage would be erected pointing out that most of the residents are blind or partially sighted, identifying which paths riders should avoid and which paths could be used. BHS will produce draft wording for all signs, which will be agreed with the working group before output and erection.

Consultation has revealed that as many as 30 local riders may have an interest in using Linburn Estate. At the meeting the horse riders most regularly using Linburn Estate were also identified and encouraged to continue to work positively with the Linburn Centre, including involvement with path clearance and signage.

Working with local riders, once the route is ready a familiarisation event will be held on foot to walk round the tracks and discuss the special privileged nature of access to this estate. The aim of the event will be to raise awareness of the principles of responsible access and how these translate on the ground at Linburn.



If you need further advice on equestrian access in Scotland, contact your local BHS access representative (see www.bhsscotland.org.uk for contact details) or Helene Mauchlen, national manager for BHS Scotland Tel. 01764 656334 or email Helene.Mauchlen@bhs.org.uk.

For guidance on equestrian access in England and Wales, contact Access and Rights of Way Department, The British Horse Society, Abbey Park, Stareton Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ. Telephone 02476 840581. Email access@bhs.org.uk.

IMPORTANT This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. The Society recommends seeking advice specific to a site where it is being relied upon.