

The countryside code explained

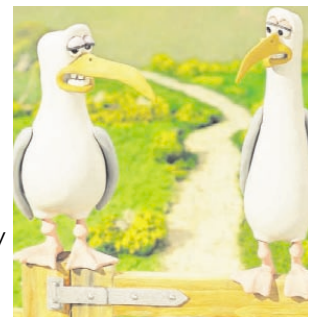
Some important new changes in Government legislation last year affect how you can use the countryside. New areas of countryside are now accessible to the general public, bringing new responsibilities as well as new rights.

A new Countryside Code was launched last year by the Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales to promote responsible access, with messages for both visitors and land managers. The updated Code is intended to reflect the changes that have happened over the past 20 years and the introduction of the new public right of access to open country (mountain, moor, heath and down) and registered common land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The new right of access covers such activities as walking, running, climbing, sightseeing, picnicking and birdwatching on some of the finest countryside in England and Wales. It came into effect in the South East and lower North West of England on 19 September 2004 and will roll out into the rest of England on a regional basis by the end of 2005. It will be available in Wales this May. Although it gives more freedom to walkers and ramblers, the CROW Act will ensure that the interests of landowners and occupiers are safeguarded.

You can find out where the new access rights apply and where restrictions or exclusions are in force by visiting www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk. The site also provides details of national trails, national parks and links to many related organisations. You can view and download some animations, from the makers of the Creature Comforts series of films, which you can use to support Award Participants' expedition training.

You may wish to copy and use the page opposite as part of your expedition training, to ensure participants are fully informed of their responsibilities. The card below could be copied and laminated for participants to keep as an aide-memoire. These pages are also available in the Library zone of www.theaward.org (in the Award Journal section).



● Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs

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 land may be restricted while work is carried out, for safety reasons or during breeding seasons. Follow advice and local signs, and be prepared for the unexpected.

● Leave gates and property as you find them

Please respect the working life of the countryside, as our actions can affect people's livelihoods, our heritage, and the safety and welfare of animals and ourselves.

● Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home

We have a responsibility to protect our countryside now and for future generations, so make sure you don't harm animals, birds, plants, or trees.

● Keep dogs under close control

The countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, but it's every owner's duty to make sure their dog is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, wildlife or other people.

● Consider other people

Showing consideration and respect for other people makes the countryside a pleasant environment for everyone – at home, at work and at leisure.

History, evolution and content of the new Countryside Code

1930s: The Commons and Open Spaces Society produced a Country Code and the Council for the Protection of Rural England produced a Code of Courtesy.

1940s: The Ramblers Association produced a Ramblers Code. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act led to the production of the first national Country Code, which was based on a consultation with 17 interested organisations. This Country Code, published in 1951, was produced by the National Parks Commission and it later was integrated into the Highway Code.

1950s: Norman Thelwell designed a series of cartoons to help promote the new Country Code and through the 50s and 60s this Code became well established with both visitors to the countryside and landowners and it was translated into

Welsh. Generations of Scouts, Guides and Brownies acquired their Country Code badge; the Central Office of Information publicised the code on television; British Railways advertised it on trains; Butlins promoted it in holiday camps; and factories publicised it in their canteens. Demand for the Country Code booklet consistently outstripped supply.

1960s-1980s: The first long distance footpath, the Pennine Way, was designated in 1965, and an increasingly mobile population with increased interest in leisure, established the need for a code to encourage responsible use of the countryside. This came in 1979 when the Country Code was reviewed by the Countryside Commission (previously the National Parks Commission) and which led to the next Code and a list of eleven key messages, published in 1981.



THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

Leave gates and property as you find them

Please respect the working life of the countryside, as our actions can affect people's livelihoods, our heritage, and the safety and welfare of animals and ourselves.

- A farmer will normally leave a gate closed to keep livestock in, but may sometimes leave it open so they can reach food and water. Leave gates as you find them or follow instructions on signs; if walking in a group, make sure the last person knows how to leave the gates.
- In fields where crops are growing follow the paths wherever possible.
- Use gates and stiles wherever possible - climbing over walls, hedges and fences can damage them and increase the risk of farm animals escaping.
- Our heritage belongs to all of us - be careful not to disturb ruins and historic sites.
- Leave machinery and livestock alone - don't interfere with animals even if you think they're in distress. Try to alert the farmer instead.



Consider other people

Showing consideration and respect for other people makes the countryside a pleasant environment for everyone - at home, at work and at leisure.

- 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 0870 608 2608.
- Respect the needs of local people - for example, don't block gateways, driveways or other entry points with your vehicle.
- By law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horse riders on bridleways.
- Keep out of the way when farm animals are being gathered or moved and follow directions from the farmer.
- Support the rural economy - for example, buy your supplies from local shops.

Protect plants and animals - and take your litter home

We have a responsibility to protect our countryside now and for future generations, so make sure you don't harm animals, birds, plants or trees.

- Litter and leftover food doesn't just spoil the beauty of the countryside, it can be dangerous to wildlife and farm animals and can spread disease - so take your litter home with you. Dropping litter and dumping rubbish are criminal offences.
- Discover the beauty of the natural environment and take 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.
- Wild animals and farm animals can behave unpredictably if you get too close, especially if they're with their young - so give them plenty of space.
- Fires can be as devastating to wildlife and habitats as they are to people and property - so be careful not to drop a match or smouldering cigarette at any time of the year. Sometimes, controlled fires are used to manage vegetation, particularly on heaths and moors between October and early April, so please check that a fire is not supervised before calling 999.

BE safe - plan ahead and follow any signs

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 land may be restricted while work is carried out, for safety reasons or during breeding seasons. Follow advice and local signs, and be prepared for the unexpected.

- Refer to up-to-date maps or guidebooks. Check out Places to go for more information.
- You're responsible for your own safety and for others in your care, so be prepared for changes in weather and other events.
- Check weather forecasts before you leave, and don't be afraid to turn back. Who can help has information on this.
- 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.
- Get to know the signs and symbols used in the countryside to show paths and open countryside.

Some of the symbols you may see in the countryside



Footpath waymark



Bridleway waymark



Byway waymark



National Trails



Open Access

Keep dogs under close control

The countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, but it's every owner's duty to make sure their dog is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, wildlife or other people.

- By law, you must control your dog so that it does not disturb or scare farm animals or wildlife. You must keep your dog on a short lead on most areas of open country and common land between 1 March and 31 July, and at all times near farm animals.
- You do not have to put your dog on a lead on public paths as long as it is under close control. But as a general rule, keep your dog on a lead if you cannot rely on its obedience. By law, farmers are entitled to destroy a dog that injures or worries their animals.
- If a farm animal chases you and your dog, it is safer to let your dog off the lead - don't risk getting hurt by trying to protect it.
- Take particular care that your dog doesn't scare sheep and lambs or wander where it might disturb birds that nest on the ground and other wildlife - eggs and young will soon die without protection from their parents.
- 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. Also make sure your dog is wormed regularly.
- You can also find out more by phoning the Open Access Helpline on 0845 100 3298.

