

Countryside Code

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,

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 conditions before you leave, and don't be afraid to turn back.

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 know where you're going and when you expect to return.

Get to know the signs and symbols used in the countryside. Download and print out the Finding Your Way Advice Sheet to take with you. It shows all the up to date signs and symbols.

Leave gates and property as you find them

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, stiles or gaps in field boundaries when provided - 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.

Protect plants and animals and take your litter home

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.

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.

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 to protect it, other animals and 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.

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.

Keep out of the way when farm animals are being gathered or moved and follow directions from the farmer.

When riding a bike or driving a vehicle, slow down for horses, walkers and livestock and give them plenty of room. By law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horse-riders on bridleways.