

Are you new to walking or exploring the countryside?

Here a few things you might find useful.

First and foremost - getting out into the countryside is good for your health and well being. So is walking. Walking in the countryside is a double winner.

If you're new to this, there are a few things you should know.

- Most of our countryside (even in National Parks) is privately owned, and there is no general right of public access
- Apart from Open Access areas, getting into the countryside is usually by our network of public rights of way - as their name suggests, you have a right to use these (see overleaf)
- These routes - footpaths, bridleways and byways - are explained overleaf
- The routes will lead you through urban areas, alongside rivers and streams, across moors - and also through farmyards and across fields, some of which may hold livestock
- In all of these cases, you have a responsibility to respect the needs of the landowner, just as they should respect your right to be there
- The main things we would ask you to keep in mind are
 - **if you're arriving by car, try to park in an official parking area** - you may have to pay (the money is needed to maintain local facilities), but you can be sure you don't block other traffic, or access by farmers to their land
 - **know where you're going** - a good map is essential to show the paths, but many of those on smartphones won't show sufficient detail
 - **a mobile can be useful** - but don't rely on its map, or that you can always get a signal
 - for all but the shortest walk, **take water and food with you** - in case you get lost or your planned route is blocked
 - especially on longer walks, **tell someone where you are going** and when you expect to return
 - **wear suitable clothes** - short excursions in well used areas that have been maintained with visitors in mind are one thing; but if you're going further, paths can be very muddy, weather can change suddenly (especially if you're climbing to any height), and you can get lost in unfamiliar places: make sure you have strong footwear, warm clothing and a good waterproof
 - always **leave gates as you find them** - open or shut
 - but do not leave anything else - please **bring back everything you took with you**: farm and wild animals may be hurt by your unwanted items - even food
 - if you have one, **keep your dog under close control** - do not allow it to chase farm or wild animals, nor to bother other people (and **collect your dog poo** for disposal in a bin)
 - if you're out on a road in the evening, **wear light clothes** so you can be seen

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Signage

Places where you have a right to walk should be signposted, though some signs may be missing. The different levels of usage are colour coded on signs.

	Footpath: open to walkers only
	Bridleway: open to walkers, horse-riders and cyclists
	Restricted Byway: open to walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and horse-drawn vehicles
	Byway Open to All Traffic: open to walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, horse-drawn vehicles and motor vehicles
	Open Access land: areas available to people to explore without having to stay on paths

Rights of way are shown on some, but not all, maps; the most widely used are the Explorer maps of the Ordnance Survey (OS). Such maps try to be accurate, but occasionally, mistakes can happen, and paths can be added to, diverted on or deleted from the network. Also note that a landowner may have private rights at a higher level than the public rights - for example, a farmer may drive a tractor on a track which is a public footpath.

Maintenance

Responsibility for the condition of public rights of way largely rests with the Highway Authority for the area concerned (though may be the National Park Authority in their area). If you are unlucky and experience a problem on your walk, this will be the place to report it - if they don't know about it, they can't deal with it, so most have well developed on line reporting systems. If you're in a Walkers are Welcome town or village, you could report it to them, or (anywhere in England and Wales) you can report to The Ramblers' *Pathwatch* scheme (<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/advice/pathwatch-report-path-features-and-problems.aspx>): all reports are forwarded to the relevant authority, but this will take longer.

For further advice look at

- The Countryside Code
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code>
- Ordnance Survey
<https://shop.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/maps/paper-maps/explorer-maps/>
- The Defra video
<https://www.facebook.com/DefraGovUK/videos/453509999194995>