

CASE STUDIES DEMONSTRATING POSITIVE EQUESTRIAN ACCESS PROVISION

Good Practice Case Studies:

1. Positively influencing equestrian access users on the Leys Estate, Banchory

Leys Estate comprises approx 3,000 hectares to the east side of Banchory in Aberdeenshire. Most of the estate's landholding is let to farming tenants and other rural businesses. Ailsa McIntosh tenants a small livery yard from the Estate. As with most livery businesses, the land Ailsa rents, while being adequate to keep the horses, is not extensive enough to meet her clients' riding needs. Neighbouring farmers were reluctant to encourage horse riding on their land fearing open gates, churned up ground or inappropriate use of crop and livestock fields. This tended to force the riders onto busy rural roads. Good riding routes will often be a key attraction when horse owners are deciding where to keep their horses, so the situation was not ideal from a business or safety point of view.

Thys Simpson, Countryside Ranger with Leys Estate, started to work with Ailsa in June 2003 to see if anything could be done to improve the situation. The Estate was prepared to make some investment to ensure that a good tenant's business succeeded and they were therefore retained, whilst trying to minimise impact on other estate activities at the same time.

The first steps involved:-

- Identifying potentially suitable initial routes starting and ending at the livery.
- Agreeing some simple and sensible "rules" which the riders would be asked to abide by.
- Agreeing that the riders would help with some of the route maintenance tasks.

The "rules" which riders are asked to follow:-

- Wear reflectors to aid visibility
- Make a point of acknowledging the farmer/estate worker when you see him/her.
- Spread the pressure across the routes available.

The Estate were prepared to do some initial route creation work which involved cutting back some low branches and vegetation where needed, clearing windfall, pegging out the route until it became established by use, draining some particularly wet patches of ground and removing some trees from the edge of a woodland strip to allow the track to dry up and more light to come in. The Estate also agreed that they would fit "trombone" handles to the gates which the riders would encounter on the routes. Fitting the trombone handles meant that the riders could open and close the gates without needing to dismount from their horses, adding an additional level of attraction to the routes.

The routes are now well established through regular use, they work well without conflict occurring and are largely self-maintaining. The Estate carries out a route walk every six months and does some maintenance work approximately once a year; this would extend to removing a fallen tree and so on. As initially agreed, the riders themselves help with smaller maintenance tasks such as litter picking and removing stones and fallen branches. An additional route was added in 2006 and another tenant offering livery joined the Estate in 2008. In October 2009 a route linking the second tenant to the first was completed.

2. Riders Help Themselves - Frandy Gate.

Glen Devon and the Ochils to the south of Auchterarder is an area of superb natural beauty with a long history of access corridors across and through the hills. This area of upland grassland is criss crossed by historic drove roads and coffin routes and would be easily accessible to large communities of horse riders both in Strathearn and the Central Belt.

While local riders have for years wanted to follow an historic route over the Ochils and back through the glen there have always been a number of barriers which have made this impossible.

Riders access groups (RAGs), affiliated to the British Horse Society, operate all over Scotland. They have three aims: to facilitate and promote equestrian access in their localities to all riders; to uphold the values of the BHS by education on safe riding and the proper use of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (the Code) and to fulfil a social need by encouraging people to hack out.

Strathrag (Strathearn Riders Access Group), local to Glen Devon, decided to negotiate with local land owners in order to make the historic Glen Devon circular route rideable. The aim was to take a group of riders around this 15 mile circuit as part of Crieff and Strathearn drovers Tryst – a walking and multi-access festival held in Strathearn every October.

The planned route was across the Ochils from Cloan and Coulshill, following the Boreland Glen under the Greenknowes wind farm to Glendevon. From here there is a lovely track along Glensherup on the south of the river Devon which could join up with the beautiful ancient drove road in Glen Eagles, and at the north end of the Glen a quiet Duchally road would return riders to the start.

The main barrier to riding this route occurred where the Glensherup track met the Glen Eagles drove road and there was no access through a march fence at Frandy Farm. The land had been deer fenced for forestry and was managed by Scottish Woodlands. Without this part of the circuit, riders would be forced onto the busy A823 as it twists and turns through the village of Glen Devon, a very dangerous stretch of road to ride on with poor visibility. So Strathrag decided to take the matter in hand and set about trying to arrange for the barrier to be removed. A Strathrag representative contacted Frandy Farm, Gleneagles Estate (who own the land) and Scottish Woodlands and explained that this one deer fence prevented the riders enjoying an historic and beautiful route. After quite a bit of negotiation and some seeking of sponsorship, a new horse-friendly gate was erected on Frandy Farm, the gate being put in place with the help of Scottish Woodlands. The installation of the gate was paid for by Wind Prospect Ltd, a company planning a new wind farm on the Back Hill behind Frandy, and the actual gate was donated by Tornado Wire in Auchterarder. Scottish Woodlands and Gleneagles Estate were most accommodating and in the 2009 Crieff and Strathearn Drovers Tryst, Strathrag members and guests enjoyed the most beautiful 15 mile ride.

This is an example of a community group of horse riders working in partnership with land owners and managers. Strathrag holds guided rides in Strathearn all year round and as a result the group holds some funds. If sponsorship for the Frandy gate had not been forthcoming, Strathrag were in a position to purchase the gate themselves. Work on the Glen Devon circuit continues. There is a broken hill pipe on the track down from Greenknowes at Boreland farm and the farmer James Patterson is making sure the pipe is repaired to make access for all users across the drove road easier.

3. Providing multi-use access at Balliefurth Farm, Grantown on Spey

Addressing access issues common to many livestock farms by use of simple but effective signs and creation of alternative path avoiding steading

Balliefurth is a 250ha family run commercial beef and sheep farm near Grantown on Spey in Morayshire. Although several miles from the nearest village in a very rural location, Balliefurth has a surprisingly high level of public access. Since the disused railway line which bisects the farm was developed as part of the Speyside Way, walkers following this long distance route have passed through the farm throughout the year. Inclusion in a local walks leaflet also encourages local walkers and visitors staying in the area to walk through the farm on a regular, if not daily, basis.

Although relatively few horses are kept locally, numerous riders are keen to use the Speyside Way as part of longer rides, and the surface of the disused railway was ideally suited to sustainable multi-use access. An increasing number of cyclists were also keen to use the route but were unable to do so because of kissing gates, chain-link stiles and locked gates. After the introduction of the Land Reform Act, it was decided to replace these restrictions on access with self-closing bridlegates which allow cyclists and horse-riders to enjoy the Speyside Way alongside walkers. The self-closing mechanism means that the farmer and his family no longer have to worry about gates being left open or stock straying into arable crops or onto neighbour's farms, which was previously a major concern.

The disused railway has always served as the main route for moving livestock within the farm, which potentially conflicted with increased public use of the route. Alistair McLennan has got around this very constructively by use of temporary signs which he made on his computer. When cattle or sheep are being moved along the disused railway, a simple but very effective notice is hooked over the gate either end asking people to wait for a few minutes until they are given the all clear to continue. The sign is removed as soon as stock are off the path, which takes minimal time for the farmer, but is much appreciated by members of the public using the disused railway, who are more than happy to wait when they know what is happening.

Privacy, safety and other issues associated with public use of the main farm track through the steading have been addressed by creation of alternative paths, which people have been happy to use once they were clearly signed so they know where to go. Kissing gates either end of narrow, informal woodland paths restrict access to pedestrian only because the gradient and surface would not support responsible equestrian or cycle access. Clear waymarking of alternative routes which cyclists and horse-riders can use avoids any issue.



4. Positive equestrian access provision where there are concerns about stock straying

The Old Roman road between Dolphinton and West Linton is a firm, grassy track - ideal for responsible access on horseback – but following past problems with gates being left open and stock straying, the march gates were sometimes padlocked, which meant that riders never knew whether they would be able to get along the track. The locked gates also presented problems for walkers other than those able to climb the gates. Installation of new bridlegates adjacent to the main gates, or “two-in-one” gates in the line of the track where there is insufficient space or the ground is too soft for a separate bridlegates, means that farmers can now lock the main gate without restricting legitimate public access. Stockproof handles on the gates and self-closing hinges provide reassurance that gates will never be inadvertently left open. The new gates have also resolved issues with occasional illegal vehicular use and poaching, and are very popular with the farmers as they can squeeze through on a quad without having to unlock the main gate!

A newly installed bridlegate means that the main gate can still be locked to restrict vehicular access but without restricting legitimate responsible multi-use access. Self-closing hinges ensure that the bridle gate closes automatically behind riders to avoid any risk of stock straying. A stockproof catch has proved the answer to the farmer’s initial concerns that cattle might inadvertently open the easy-latch.



A Centrewire 2-in-1 gate at the march boundary alleviates any worry about stock straying onto the road or adjacent golf course, whilst still allowing multi-use access. The other half of the gate is usually locked to restrict illegal vehicular access, but the gate can be opened full width when required for farm access.

5. Positive equestrian access provision where stock are handled on a track

Ingraston Farm has for many years used part of the old Roman Road between Dolphinton and West Linton for occasional sheep handling. From the farm's point of view, the stony track provides a firm base, and it is the logical place in which to gather sheep off the hill, but sheep might be penned across the track for several hours. Walkers got around this by climbing the adjacent fence, but there was no alternative for those following the track on horseback, which was frustrating for riders, and interrupted the farmer's work while he explained what was happening. Increasing use of the track, including by several recently developed livery yards, meant that this was becoming more of a problem all-round. The solution was to install a separate bridlegate in the fence 200m uphill off the track which walkers, cyclists and horse-riders can use when stock are penned across the track, but the majority of the time, everyone still follows the main track which is much better able to support heavy recreational as well as farm use. Replacement of the main gates on the track, which were previously very difficult to open or close, with new self-closing gates with easy-latch fastenings has helped the farmer as much as the public who enjoy this route.

6. Positive equestrian access provision where illegal vehicular access is an issue

Motorcycles and 4WD vehicles were an ongoing problem in the forestry around Wilsontown near Forth in South Lanarkshire, but padlocking the main gates to prevent illegal vehicular use also stopped local horse-riders who, along with many walkers, had enjoyed access to the woodland for many years. Following discussion between local riders and the landowners, "horse stiles" were constructed at key entry points which restrict motorcycle use but still allow horse access. Adjacent kissing gates provide unrestricted access for walkers. Some local riders complained that at first their horses were reluctant to go over the sleeper-stiles, but with a little patience and gentle persuasion, this type of access facility is easily negotiated by horses and riders of all ages and abilities.



Horse stiles successfully maintaining equestrian access but preventing illegal motorcycle use at Wilsontown, South Lanarkshire.

7. Positive equestrian access provision in conjunction with shooting

In common with many other woodlands, forestry at Harehope, near Peebles in the Scottish Borders, is commercially managed. The owners and factors were concerned that allowing equestrian access through the wood, which was entirely legitimate under the Land Reform Act but previously restricted by locked gates, would conflict with the let shoot, and potentially pose more of a safety risk than already existed with low level pedestrian access. Adopting a positive approach and a very simple solution has enabled riders to enjoy use of the track through the wood without impinging on organised shoots for the past five years. There are only three points of access to the wood. When shooting is taking place, a red square is hung on a post at each of these key access points, which together with a simple explanatory sign alerts walkers, cyclists and riders to the potential risk. Putting signs at the entrance allows people to use an alternative route, and the effort made by the owners/shoot managers is reflected in the respect members of the public show whilst shooting is in progress.

Simple signs at each of the key entrance points to the wood alert members of the public when shooting is taking place.



New self-closing bridle gates prevent livestock entering the wood and allow the main gate to be locked to prevent illegal vehicular access.