

Detailed guidance about equestrian access on different types of land use

Cereal crops and stubble fields

Description: Cereal crops are either sown in the autumn (e.g. winter barley, oilseed rape) or in the spring (e.g. spring barley). A field that has been recently sown should show signs of cultivation, i.e. the surface will look smooth and have an appearance similar to a freshly raked vegetable patch. It does not take long for small green shoots to appear. Cereal crops are ready to harvest from late July onwards with crops sown the previous autumn ready first.

Taking access responsibly across cereal fields and stubble: Fields that have crops sown or growing in them are excluded from access rights, although you can go around the margin of such fields provided you can do so without causing undue damage to the crop or ground. The ground conditions will normally need to be dry for this to be possible.

Once a crop has been harvested and the field is in stubble, you should be able to enjoy access on horseback or driving a horse-drawn vehicle. Take care if the field is very wet not to cause excessive poaching. If you are using a stubble field immediately after the crop has been harvested, avoid riding out through rows of cut straw since this can churn straw into the ground or spread it and make it harder to bale.

Fruit and vegetable crops

Description: Vegetable crops are usually planted in the spring. Harvesting varies depending on the crop. A planted field will be easy to recognise since vegetables are planted as seedlings rather than as seeds. Vegetable fields usually have a wide uncultivated margin. This margin is needed to accommodate the large crates that are used to transport both the seedlings to the field and take the harvested crop away. Some vegetable crops, such as turnips, are grown under fleece.

Taking access responsibly through fruit and vegetable fields: Fields that have crops sown or growing in them are excluded from access rights. You can go around the margin of such fields however and because these margins are wider than those round cereal crop fields, they are often a more feasible option for equestrian access use.

Vegetable crops are mainly sold directly to supermarkets for direct human consumption. Supermarkets have strict quality controls in place with contaminated batches rejected and the grower penalised for supplying such batches. There are therefore some things to be particularly careful of when taking access in these fields. Most importantly, do not ride or drive your horse too close to the crop, and if it dungs, clear it up. The Code says that access users should not take a dog into fields of vegetable or fruit unless they are on a clear path, such as a core path or right of way. If you have a dog with you, only go into vegetable or fruit fields that have such a path and only if you are confident your dog will stay on the path. Do not let it run through or foul in the vegetable crop. Avoid dropping any litter.

Grass being grown for hay, silage and turf

Description: Grass which is not being grazed by livestock from early spring onwards may be intended for hay or silage. For grass to form a hay or silage crop, it needs to be left to grow and thicken. Such fields will often receive a dressing of nitrogenous fertiliser in the spring. Silage is usually cut from June onwards, with two cuts from a field not uncommon, i.e. the field is cut and then allowed to re-grow and thicken again before a second cut is taken later in the summer. Hay is most commonly cut in July and sometimes in August, but it can be cut as early as June. Hay is left to dry in the field for several days before it is baled.

Although less common, grass can also be grown for turf for horticultural use, which is particularly susceptible to damage by equestrian access. Land managers will often put signage up where a field is being grown for turf. If not, grass intended for turf is usually on flat land, and can be distinguished by its very short, tight sward, possibly with signs of previous turf cutting in narrow strips.

Taking access responsibly in grass being grown for hay or silage: Rights of access apply to grass being grown for hay or silage only where there is no risk of damage. Usually this is defined as being at a late stage of growth, but because of the potential impacts of hoofs or wheels, most land managers would quite understandably prefer if riders and carriage drivers kept out of hay and silage fields from the time the grass is shut off from livestock (April or May onwards) until the bales have been lifted or silage taken off the field.

Where grass is grown for turf, keep to paths or tracks where they exist or go along the field margins.

Grass fields with livestock

Description: Cattle and sheep are the main farmed livestock reared out of doors, but you may also come across fields of pigs, poultry, horses and other types of livestock. Each species has its own characteristic behaviour and will interact with horses differently depending on those characteristics, the time of year and the nature of the environment. For example, cattle often run away from a perceived danger, but may stampede, and occasionally charge horses, particularly suckler cows protecting their calves. Groups of young cattle are notoriously curious and playful, so don't ride into a field of young stock unless you are confident you can control your horse. Most animals have young in the spring and early summer when the grass is most nutritious. Lambing out of doors will normally take place between late March and early May. Calving can be spread out over a longer period. Bulls will be turned out with cows from late summer to mid-autumn with calves due 9-10 months later. Llamas and alpacas are increasingly common and often a surprise to horses, particularly if they spit!

Taking access responsibly in grass fields with livestock: You can take access in fields with livestock provided you can do so responsibly. You will need to make a decision about this for yourself depending on the circumstances you encounter. You need to take into account how your horse will react to the livestock concerned and how they will react to your horse. If there are other alternatives available however, it may be best to avoid fields with livestock altogether.

If you do enter a field with livestock, you should be sure that you are not going to cause the animals undue stress or concern. It will usually be best to stay at a walk. Always leave gates as you find them. Be particularly sensitive to animals with young and avoid fields with particularly young animals, e.g. lambing fields. You might know that you do not present a danger to young animals, but their mother doesn't.

Domestic livestock are most threatened by dogs. If you have a dog with you, you should only take it into a livestock field if you can keep it under proper control. Never take a dog into fields or areas where animals are mothering their young.

Horses are unlikely to react positively to another horse entering their field. It is common sense to avoid fields with horses running loose in them. Avoid fields where bulls are kept. **Take particular care not to come between a cow and her calf, especially along narrow enclosed strips.**

If there is a route you would like to ride but you are not sure about the temperament of the livestock you will encounter, think about speaking to the farmer before you go about how the animals are likely to react.

Open and hill ground

Description: Domestic livestock can be grazed on unenclosed and hill ground. Most commonly you will find sheep, and cattle grazing such ground, particularly in summer, but you may also encounter other horses, occasionally including stallions. Shooting and stalking may take place at certain times of year in these areas too. Grouse moors are managed by periodic burning of heather (muirburn) to encourage new growth. The grouse shooting season is from 12th August to 10th December each year.

Deer stalking takes place in Scotland to keep deer numbers in balance with the upland environment and for economic benefits. The red deer stag season is from 1st July to 20th October, but most stag stalking takes place from September to the end of the season. The red deer hind season runs from 21st October to 15th February.

Taking access responsibly on open and hill ground: Access rights apply to open and hill ground. Be aware of the livestock and wildlife in these areas and make sure you do not cause them undue stress or concern. As above, cows and sheep will be protective of their young and young cattle may try to follow you. Stallions are not usually a problem provided you do not come between them and their mares. Giving all animals (particularly cows and sheep with young and stallions) a wide berth and adjusting your pace to suit the situation, is usually all that is required to avoid any difficulty.

Leave any gates you encounter as you find them and if you do have a dog with you, ensure you have it under proper control. Do not let it chase livestock or wildlife. Be aware of the ground nesting bird breeding season which runs from April to July and do not let your dog disturb nests. If you are riding in a red deer stalking area, you should take reasonable steps to find out when and where stalking is occurring and take notice of any reasonable requests to avoid particular areas.

Woodlands and Forestry

Description: Many woodlands and forests in Scotland are managed on a commercial basis. Trees tend to be harvested on an approximately 30 year cycle. Many large areas of forestry are managed by the Forestry Commission, however, there are large and small areas of forestry and woodland that are owned and managed privately, sometimes by commercial forestry companies on behalf of private owners.

Woodlands are also places where pheasants and other game birds are reared. A proportion of the previous year's birds are left to breed and they will nest on the ground from April to July. This stock is often supplemented by young birds which have been hand-reared. These birds will be released during the summer. Game bird shooting takes place in the autumn and winter.

Seasons vary from species to species, but all game bird shooting seasons are ended by 1st February.

Deer control also takes place in forestry and woodlands, usually at dawn and dusk. Deer tend to eat young saplings and so numbers need to be controlled to allow woodlands to regenerate. Other species, such as foxes, are also at times controlled in woodlands.

Taking access responsibly in woodland and forestry: Access rights apply to woodlands and forestry. Be aware of the land management activities that go on in woodlands and forestry and be prepared to adjust your route and/or pace to enable these activities to go ahead unhindered. Land managers should put up signage to alert you to any activities that would not otherwise be obvious to you. If you have a dog with you, ensure it does not chase or attack game birds and be particularly careful over the breeding period not to disturb ground nests.

Because deer control in woodlands tends to occur at dawn and dusk, it will not normally clash with equestrian activity. Deer control can also occur at other times of the day however, and if you do encounter such activity, take notice of any reasonable requests to avoid certain areas. Similarly, take notice of any reasonable advice about other shooting or species control activities in woodlands.

Policies

Description: Policies are areas of parkland, grassland or woodland which are found around some large houses.

Taking access responsibly in policy plantings: It will sometimes be possible to exercise access rights in “policies”. However, by their very nature policies are reasonably close to the houses they are attached to and you will therefore need to be careful that you are not unreasonably intruding on the occupants’ privacy if you do use these areas. Depending on the nature of the policies you are using for access, some of the other advice in this guidance may be relevant.

Conservation sites

Description: Some organisations, for example Scottish Natural Heritage, the RSPB, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, etc, own or manage land primarily for conservation reasons. The focus in these areas is to create the right conditions in which a particularly rare and/or sensitive species or habitat can thrive. It is becoming increasingly common for farmers and other land managers to also manage areas of land for conservation reasons. This might be because Scottish Natural Heritage requires the land manager to manage a protected area, such as a Special Area of Conservation or a Site of Special Scientific Interest in a particular way, or it might be because there are agricultural benefits to encouraging certain species. For example, planting wildflower strips along field margins to attract bees will help with crop pollination and creating beetle banks to provide cover for insects that eat aphids, will reduce the need for insecticides.

Taking access responsibly in conservation areas: You can exercise rights of access on horseback in areas which are managed for conservation benefits provided you can do so responsibly. You should be careful not to cause damage however or to alarm sensitive species. Take notice of any reasonable requests. For example, you may be asked to stay on a path so that you do not damage particular flora, or so that you do not disturb ground nesting birds during the breeding season. If a site is being managed primarily for the benefit of birds, think carefully about whether it is appropriate to take a dog with you. If you do so, you will need to be confident that you can keep it under proper control. Wildflower margins and beetle banks are not likely to be adversely affected by reasonable levels of use, but do not over use these areas.