

INTEGRATING ACCESS CASE STUDIES

MEIGLE FARM

Problems with dogs have been overcome at the same time as increasing and improving public access opportunities on the farm through creation of an alternative path avoiding the hay field and creation of longer distance waymarked circular routes.

Key facts	325ha owner occupied mixed farm producing beef and sheep from grass leys, permanent grass and rough grazing with small acreage under barley
Location	Clovenfords, by Galashiels, Scottish Borders
Access issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Dog fouling along the path and in the hay crop grown in the first field along the old coach road- Gates left open allowing stock to stray- Concern about safety risks and liability of dog walkers mixing with suckler cows and calves
Background	The 'Green Road' or 'Velvet Path' which runs through Meigle Farm has a long history of public use, originally as a coach road and more recently as a link for walkers between Clovenfords and the small hamlet of Caddonfoot several miles to the south. For many years this caused no problems for the farm but as the village of Clovenfords expanded with various housing developments, the number of people coming home from work and letting their dogs loose immediately through the gate of the first field they came to began to create real problems. When asked to clear up after their dogs, owners deposited tied nappy sacks along the edge of the field or hung them from adjacent trees like Christmas decorations.
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To overcome problems of dog fouling in hay field➤ To provide public access without interfering with farming
Who wants access?	Local walkers, those from Clovenfords looking mainly for short walk to exercise dogs or children, those from Galashiels looking for longer circular walk. Visiting walkers looking for circular walk through attractive countryside
Where?	Old coach road from Clovenfords to Caddonfoot Circular route/link to Galashiels
Sensitive areas/sites	Fields immediately adjacent to housing
Action Taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ New path created – in 2003 owners David and Joan Mundell started to develop a path through a strip of woodland parallel to the first section of the Green Road to provide an alternative to people going through the hay field. Despite good intentions, their attempts to cut a path through the undergrowth were overtaken by pressure of farm work. Through the local authority access officer, the Criminal Services Team then became involved, clearing scrub, building steps and finishing off the path. The only cost to the Mundells was farm labour and machinery involved in the initial felling and path clearance.➤ Track to mast was identified as a valuable link creating a shorter circular route. This track is managed by the farm and claimed under LMC access option.

- **Circular route created** – in discussion with the Mundells, as part of a local paths project the local authority access officer identified a new circular route around the farm and through to Galashiels on the neighbouring farm (also farmed by the Mundells). The local authority ranger service were responsible for waymarking and replacement gates at no cost to the farm.

Benefits

- ✓ “People have totally unrestricted access on the farm but as a rule choose to stick to the designated paths, which helps them because they know they’re welcome and don’t get lost on the hill. Whereas before we never knew which gates might be left open, we now know which gates people use and can keep more of an eye on those. But actually if someone does leave a gate open, then the next walker closes it so we don’t have a problem any more. “
- ✓ “People who’ve always lived in the village know where to go but those new to the area appreciate the waymarked paths and creation of these paths allows us to continue to farm properly without worrying about public access.”

Keys to success

- ❖ Encouraging people to use routes with a long history of public use
- ❖ Routing new waymarked paths around edge of fields or following clear features which help guide people
- ❖ Unenclosed paths and sufficiently large fields that if walkers meet cattle they can give them a wide berth

Lessons learned

- “It works much better for everyone waymarking paths for those who want to follow them without stopping anyone going where they want.”
- Involving the local community and access officer can help address access problems and develop worthwhile new opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside at little or no cost to the farm

Ongoing issues

When problems have arisen with fouling of the new woodland path as a result of the high number of dog walkers, the farmer has asked the local community council to help urge people to clear up after their dogs and act more responsibly.