

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.

- You're responsible for your own safety. You may not see anyone for hours and there are many places without clear mobile-phone signals so as an added precaution, let someone know where you're going and when you're likely to be back.
- Follow advice and signs. Download and print out our [Finding Your Way Advice Sheet](#) to take with you. It shows all the up to date signs and symbols.
- Check [weather conditions](#) before you leave, and don't be afraid to turn back.
- If you're looking for ideas, explore the [Things To Do](#) section.

According to [RoSPA](#) , almost half a million people a year are injured whilst pursuing leisure activities.

Leave Gates and Property as You Find Them

Please respect the working life of the countryside, as our actions can affect people's livelihoods, our heritage, and the safety and welfare of animals and ourselves.

- 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 and stiles wherever possible - 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.

You're never more than 80 kilometres [50 miles] from a National Trail. National Trails carry the acorn symbol, and are long distance routes for walking, cycling and horse riding. Find out more about your nearest one [here](#).

Protect Plants and Animals and Take Your Litter Home

We have a responsibility to protect our countryside now and for future generations, so make sure you don't harm animals, birds, plants or trees.

- 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.

According to [Defra](#) , litter causes a third of all outdoor fires and dumped food and leftover takeaways has helped the UK rat population reach around 60 million.

In 2005, an analysis of the whole of the British flora was carried out – the first time this has been attempted. According to a major conservation charity, one in five of our wildflowers is threatened with extinction. Find out which are most at risk [here](#) .

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.

- By law, you must control your dog so that it does not disturb or scare farm animals or wildlife. You must keep your dog on a short lead on most areas of open country and common land between 1 March and 31 July, and at all times near farm animals.
- You do not have to put your dog on a lead on public paths as long as it is under close control. But as a general rule, keep your dog on a lead if you cannot rely on its obedience. By law, farmers are entitled to destroy a dog that injures or worries their animals.
- If a farm animal chases you and your dog, it is safer to let your dog off the lead – don't risk getting hurt by trying to protect it.
- 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.
- You can also find out more by phoning the Open Access Helpline on 0845 100 3298.

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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.

Whether you're walking on your own or with a large group, you'll have an impact on the local environment. Follow these brief rules to make it more pleasant for visitors and locals alike.

- 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, consider sharing lifts and use alternatives such as public transport or cycling. For public transport information, phone Traveline on 0870 608 2608.
- Respect the needs of local people - for example, don't block gateways, driveways or other entry points with your vehicle.
- By law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horse riders on bridleways.
- Keep out of the way when farm animals are being gathered or moved and follow directions from the farmer.
- Support the rural economy - for example, buy your supplies from local shops.