

Safety for all in the Countryside

For years the encouragement of health and wellbeing has been encouraged and ironically it has been a world health hazard in the form of a pandemic which has seen this objective begin to blossom, especially in the form of more walking in the fresh air.

This must have been having huge benefits for many people to break the boredom of lockdown and at least see other people, even if a wave or shouting at each other across a space during a howling north-easterly gale.

In addition there has been a big rise in the ownerships of dogs – including rehoming of rescue animals – all to the good for dogs and their new human companions.

As with all changes, there have been accompanying drawbacks – most of them unfortunate, some, sadly very bad for the image of the visiting public – such as destructive and damaging wild camping along beaches and in for instance National Parks, incidences generated by few but which cause not only unpleasant results but expense for the Local Authorities who are not only cash-strapped in the normal way of things but having to cope with the outfall of Covid 19.

There is a new Countryside Code (available on the DEFRA web site; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code>) – which is a document encouraging walking and recreation in the countryside, advising on the wildlife regulations and general behaviour.

The new Code is good as a general document but there are some details which deserve emphasis:

1. Remember, even when on Public Rights of Way you are in many cases walking on private property – and in the case of farmland is part of a business (which is providing the food you eat).
2. Litter is becoming an increasing problem. The countryside is not a dustbin and it costs money to clear up after the ‘droppers’ – may put the price of food up if it gets worse.
3. Dog walking – a great occupation as long as done responsibly.
 - Dogs should always be on a lead or under close control at all times – the latter means close by, not tearing all over a field away from the Public Right of Way (PRow). They can disturb – and harm – livestock and ground nesting birds.
 - Always carry and use dog poo bags – and take them away with you. Would you like a dog to defecate on your lawn? It comes to the same thing.
 - Dog faeces cause infections and diseases in grazing animals – sheep, horses, cattle. In the case of the latter *Neospora* can cause miscarriage, debility and failure to ever recover – there is no cure.

- There have been very distressing reports of dogs, out of appropriate control, attacking, maiming and killing livestock. Please ensure that dogs are properly trained before letting them off the lead, especially if rescue animals about which their detailed history is not known.

The information above has been drawn from national reports and the unfortunate incidences probably reflect the behaviour of a small but irresponsible proportion of those who visit the countryside.

Most landowners/managers/farmers welcome visitors who arrive as long as they stay on the PRow, keep their dogs under control and respect that they are on private property.

It is excellent that people are looking after their health and wellbeing - just remember that the property through which you are walking is managed by people who also have lives to lead - and need to take care of their health and wellbeing too.

Some key points from the Countryside Code are:-

1. Respect the area through which you are walking
2. Do not damage wildlife/plants or livestock
3. Keep dogs under proper control
4. If a gate is shut when you go through it, shut it after yourselves.
5. Do not drop litter.

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