

# The Moorland Visitor's Code



Respect



Protect



Enjoy

# The Moorland Visitor's Code

Heather covered moorlands look stunning, especially in August and September when in full purple bloom and people are drawn to their great open landscapes. The 'Right of Access to Open Country' welcomes walkers to 'mountain, moor, registered common land, heath and down' – and with our rights, come responsibilities – naturally.

Britain has 75% of the world's remaining heather, and it is these heather moorlands that provide some of the last safe havens for ground nesting birds such as curlew, lapwing, merlin, golden plover and black grouse. As a result, the law protects most of these moorlands.

Even though it may appear so, moorland is not wild and looks the way it does due to management – it is used to graze sheep and/or cattle and, where there is a predominance of heather, it is likely that the area is managed for red grouse. Moorland management for grouse shooting plays a big part in conserving one of the most important and unique habitats in Europe – for us all to enjoy. For these wildlife and management reasons, at times, some moorland areas will be subject to 'restrictions' such as keeping your dog on a short lead and following paths and tracks. Our moorlands are there for us to enjoy, and by being informed and responsible visitors, we can all play our part in conserving our unique heather heritage and its wildlife for future generations.



**Respect • Protect • Enjoy**



- **Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs.**



- **Keep dogs under close control.**



- **Prevent uncontrolled moorland fires.**

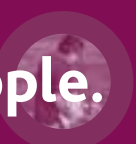


- **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.**

- **Leave gates and property as you find them.**



- **Consider other people.**

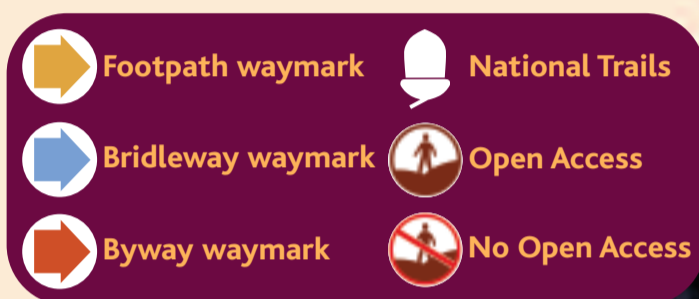


# The Moorland Visitor's Code

## 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 – especially if you are taking a dog (for example, your rights to enter some areas of open land may be restricted while work is carried out, for safety reasons or during breeding or shooting seasons). Follow advice and local signs, and be prepared for the unexpected.

- Refer to up-to-date maps or guidebooks, visit: [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk), or contact local information centres.
- You're responsible for your own safety and for others in your care, so be prepared for changes in weather and other eventualities – consider taking extra clothing, a compass, water, food, a torch and personal medicines. See: [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk) for links to organisations offering specific advice on equipment and safety, or contact visitor information centres and libraries for a list of outdoor recreation groups.
- Check weather forecasts before you leave and don't be afraid to turn back.
- Be aware that heather can be difficult to walk in and to look out for boggy areas, old mines and holes that can be hidden by the heather.
- Part of the appeal of the moors is that you can get away from it all. You may not see anyone for hours and there are many places without clear mobile phone signals – so let someone else know where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Get to know the signs and symbols used in the countryside to waymark paths and indicate open countryside below and at: [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)



## 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. Internationally important birds such as curlew, lapwing, red grouse, merlin, golden plover and black grouse rely on moorland to breed and are vulnerable because they nest and live on the ground.

- 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 in the nesting and lambing season – during March, April, May, June and July – and at all times near farm animals.
- Dogs will be excluded from some areas of heather moorland all year round and other areas at certain times to protect wildlife. Please find out more about these rules from: [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk) and obey local signs.
- From 1 March to 31 July 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. Parent birds can be frightened off their nests long enough to chill the eggs and kill the chicks inside.
- Hatched chicks can be scattered and unable to return to the parent for protection from predators and the cold.
- You do not have to put your dog on a lead on public paths, so 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.
- Everyone knows how unpleasant dog mess is and it can be the source of infections – so always clean up after your dog and get rid of the mess responsibly. Also ensure your dog is wormed regularly if you walk it in the countryside.

## Prevent Uncontrolled Moorland Fires

Smouldering cigarette ends, discarded bottles and dropped matches can all cause uncontrolled fires on moors – particularly during the spring and summer. Serious, deep-seated fires are fatal to important animals and plants and devastating to the landscape.

- Never light fires on moorland – not even gas stoves or barbecues.
- During periods of high fire risk respect all warning signs. Following severe wild fires, our unique moorlands can be left black, scarred, prone to erosion and devoid of wildlife for decades.
- However, carefully planned small-scale heather burning by trained gamekeepers is used to encourage fresh shoots of heather where it has grown old. This light, surface burning ensures food for red grouse and sheep and creates the diversity of habitats that moorland birds rely on. Between 1st October and 15th April controlled burning takes place – so be aware of this. Please report any fires seen on moorland outside these dates to the fire service immediately, and if possible, the nearest dwelling.

## 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.
- If you disturb a bird from the ground in Spring and Summer, please re-trace your steps a few metres and give the area a five metre berth. This will reduce damage to eggs and chicks.

## 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.
- Use gates and stiles wherever possible – climbing over walls, hedges and fences can damage them and increase the risk of farm animals escaping.
- Leave machinery and livestock alone – don't interfere with animals even if you think they're in distress. Try to alert the farmer instead.
- When walking across land that has crops growing on it, follow paths wherever possible.
- Our heritage belongs to all of us – be careful not to disturb ruins and historic sites. The few structures that there are on moors such as 'sheep folds', 'handling pens' and 'grouse butts' are historic and today still serve a crucial purpose.
- If you think a sign is illegal or misleading (for example, a 'Private – No Entry' sign on a public footpath), contact the local authority.

## 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. Moorlands managed for red grouse, farm stock and as water catchment areas, create year-round jobs for shepherds, water bailiffs, gamekeepers and moorland regeneration contractors – all of whom contribute to the conservation of moorland and its thriving wildlife.

- Moorland gamekeepers play a crucial role in the well being of the moors. Rats, foxes, stoats, weasels and crows prey on moorland birds and you may see predator traps or gamekeepers out with a firearm (sometimes at night too) – both are there to protect the birds. Remain alert and please appreciate that gamekeepers are doing their job.
- From 12th August to 10th December every year you may encounter shooting parties and red flags could signify areas that should not be entered, or there may be local signs or estate staff asking you to move to another area. Please respect these requests as they will only be short term.
- Large-scale machinery is rare on moors, but if you encounter it, it's likely that specialist heather re-seeding or 'grip blocking' is being carried out – this is environmentally beneficial. Similarly, spraying to remove harmful bracken swaths may also happen between mid-July and late-September, usually at times where there is little wind.
- Moorland streams are used by livestock and often feed reservoirs for town and city drinking supplies so be careful not to pollute them.
- 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 contact Traveline: **0870 608 2608**).
- Respect the needs of local people – for example, don't block gateways, driveways or other entry points with your vehicle.
- Keep out of the way when farm animals are being gathered or moved and follow directions from the farmer.
- When riding a bike or driving a vehicle, slow down for horses and walkers, or when passing livestock (by law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horse-riders on bridleways).
- Support the rural economy – for example, buy your supplies from local shops.



[www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)

For further copies of this leaflet please ring the Countryside Agency in: Manchester, (0161) 237 1061 or Newcastle, (0191) 269 1600.

# Maps and information

For the most up-to-date information and maps showing where you can go and what you can do on access land, including details of any local restrictions and closures - visit the open access pages in 'Places to Go' on the website: [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)

This website also contains information about access to all countryside and has useful advice and links for various types of recreational users.

The new OS Explorer Maps will be widely available in bookshops and outdoor stores once the new access right has started in each region. You can also order Ordnance Survey Explorer maps by telephoning **0845 200 2712** (+44 1233 211108 outside UK).

Calls are charged at local rate in UK.

Both the website and OS Explorer Maps will also show the location of local 'Access Information Points', and walkers are advised to look out for local signs indicating any closures or restrictions.



The Moorland Visitor's Code, which shares the key messages of the Countryside Code, has been produced by the Moorland Access Advisory Group, with funding from the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Moorland Association.



For further copies of this leaflet please ring the Countryside Agency in: Manchester, (0161) 237 1061 or Newcastle, (0191) 269 1600.