

Equestrian Access and The British Horse Society

The
British
Horse
Society



All about Access in England and Wales

The British Horse Society is committed to helping you have access to great off-road riding and carriage driving. In this leaflet there are some handy tips to help you discover new riding routes and understand the key issues that may affect your local access as well as what to do if you experience a problem with access in your area. You can also find out what the BHS does for equestrian access year-round and how you can help to achieve more.

What The British Horse Society does for Access

- Protects existing rights of way in danger of being lost
- Helps to keep routes open and free of obstructions
- Provides local advice and assistance through a network of 230 Access and Bridleways volunteers
- Encourages use of the equestrian off-road network by promoting routes
- Responds to consultations to ensure that equestrian access is considered
- Engages with other user groups to include equestrians in access opportunities
- Supports individuals wanting to make a difference to access in their area

Visit bhs.org.uk/access-and-bridleways to learn more about BHS Access work.



Where to ride and carriage drive in your local area

How to find a route

There are four main sources of reliable information to use when searching for riding and carriage driving routes:

1 The Definitive Map

The Definitive Map forms the legal record of public rights of way in England and Wales. The Map is kept by highway authorities (county councils or unitary authorities) and can be viewed at their office or on council websites if available. The Map shows footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways. Riding is permitted on all except footpaths, which may be ridden with the permission of the landowner.

2 Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 or 1:50,000 scale maps (UK wide)

The information from the Definitive Map is shown on Ordnance Survey maps. It is easiest to follow equestrian routes on the 1:25,000 scale Explorer maps (orange covers) because they show field boundaries. View the most recent OS mapping online with OS OpenMap or www.streetmap.co.uk. Hard copies of OS maps can be bought from many websites, bookshops, stationers or outdoor shops, or they can be viewed for free at most local libraries. Remember that any map may not be completely up-to-date as more recent changes to the Definitive Map may not yet be included.

3 Your local BHS Affiliated Equestrian Access Group (UK wide)

The BHS currently has more than 100 affiliated Equestrian Access Groups spread across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, all of whom work to defend, extend and promote equestrian access in their areas. They are likely to have a good knowledge of routes in their area. Find out if there is one near you by visiting bhs.org.uk or contact access@bhs.org.uk if you are interested in forming a group.

4 Local Authority websites

Some local authorities publish riding routes and their promoted routes are shown using diamonds on Ordnance Survey maps. Promoted routes are usually more than a day's ride, so they are great for a holiday. Riding each day to a new destination is a very different experience from returning to your yard after each ride. Promoted routes are ideal for a first adventure as there are often B&Bs for both you and your horse along the way – for a list of BHS approved Horses Welcome B&Bs, visit www.bhs.org.uk/welfare-and-care/find-a-livery-yard/results?cat=Bed+and+Breakfast+Establishments.

Where you can ride

ce you've found the route you want to take, check that you do have the right to ride or drive there. Here's a list of the types of routes that you can use (England and Wales only):

- On all roads except motorways. Very minor roads may not obviously be public, and may be shown as ORPAs by the Ordnance Survey (Other Routes with Public



Access). If they have footpaths or bridleways leaving them, then they may be public. If you are not sure, contact your Highway Authority to check.

- On public rights of way shown on the Definitive Map and OS maps, except footpaths. They are:
 - Bridleways – you can ride or lead a horse, walk or cycle on a bridleway. Cyclists must give way to walkers and horse riders on bridleways.
 - Restricted Byways – the same rights as a bridleway except horse-drawn carriages are also permitted. Motor vehicles are not permitted.
 - Byways open to all traffic (BOAT) – open to all users including motor vehicles.
- Designated horse rides in public open spaces.
- Some commons and cycle routes.
- Concessionary or permissive routes.
- Beaches and estuaries (subject to bylaws and conservation restrictions).
- Agri-Environment Schemes ('Countryside Stewardship').
- Permits and Toll Rides.

For further details on the above please look at the 'Finding places to ride and carriage drive' leaflet available to download at [bhs.org.uk](https://www.bhs.org.uk).

What to do if routes are blocked, closed or no longer there

Occasionally when you ride out you may find the route you want to use is blocked, perhaps so badly that it is unclear where it goes. There may be many reasons, some

simple, some complex, and it may be temporary or permanent – but the answer is always the same. Report it to the Highway Authority asking for it to be opened. This includes everything from a locked gate to a stretch of deep mud. However, before you report it double check that you are actually in the right place and haven't made an error of course!

For more information on action you can take in the event of a blocked route, read 'Blocked and difficult to use bridleways and byways' advisory leaflet available at bhs.org.uk.



Recording routes on the Definitive Map

As previously mentioned, the Definitive Map provides the legal position for all rights of way in England and Wales. However, there may be certain routes that you currently ride that either aren't recorded on the Map or are shown only as footpaths, or new routes that you think would make an ideal bridleway. Any routes not recorded on the Definitive Map are not safe from closure, and it may not be possible to open them if they become blocked or in need of repair. There are ways to get such routes recognised and we have outlined the recommended methods below:

Definitive Map Modification Order

A Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) is used to record rights which have been shown to exist for a long period. They are not new rights, but are rights that have not previously been recorded. See the next section, "Protecting your routes", for more details on recording unrecorded routes. Consider whether any alternative methods of recording rights, such as those below, will achieve the same result as they are generally simpler than a DMMO.

Express Dedication at Common Law

This is the simplest way of recording completely new rights and unrecorded rights. A landowner completes a simple dedication agreement.

Creation Agreement HA80s26

A local authority may make an agreement with a landowner for the dedication of a bridleway or restricted byway.

Public Path Creation Order HA80s26

A local authority can make an order to create a bridleway or upgrade a footpath if it can

be demonstrated that there is enough need for it.

Further information on how to record routes on the Definitive Map can be given by your local Access and Bridleways Officer – visit bhs.org.uk/access-and-bridleways.

Protecting your routes

The BHS and its 230 dedicated Access and Bridleways Officers are committed to protecting and preserving the equestrian off-road network, but it is facing a tough deadline. In 2000, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act was introduced. The crux of the Act is that many historic routes in England and Wales not formally recorded as a bridleway or byway on the Definitive Map by 2026 are at risk of being extinguished.



There are a number of reasons why routes may not be accurately recorded on the Definitive Map; they could have been omitted when the record was first compiled, or the existence of the routes may have arisen since the map was put together. It's also important to note that just because you currently ride on a route, you can't assume it's recorded and protected from closure. That's a frightening thought as there are some areas with very few recorded routes and riders cannot afford to lose the routes they currently enjoy.

The BHS and its team of Access volunteers have been working tirelessly to save the routes you ride, but it's not enough. Your help is needed. To help you to protect your routes from the 2026 deadline, the BHS has created a mapping toolkit. Using this toolkit, you'll be able to check whether the routes that you currently enjoy riding are safe from closure, and you may even be able to save a route that you can't currently ride but would love to. Getting all the historic routes accurately recorded on the Definitive Map is the only way to ensure that they are safeguarded for future generations.

To get started on ensuring your routes are protected from 2026, download the toolkit at bhs.org.uk/2026.

Need some advice?

If you have a problem with equestrian access in your area or you just need some advice, contact your local Access and Bridleways volunteer. BHS volunteers will be able to provide you with help and assistance on a range of access matters. Find your local volunteer at bhs.org.uk/bhs-in-your-area. Alternatively, call the Access team on 02476 840515 or email access@bhs.org.uk.

Get Involved

What you can do for Access

- Become a member of the BHS – all profits go towards BHS charity initiatives such as local and national access work
- Become a volunteer to help improve your local access
- Help the BHS in the race to record unrecorded routes before 2026. Visit bhs.org.uk/2026
- Join your local equestrian access group to help protect access in your area
- Donate to our Access Fighting Fund or hold a fundraising event, such as a pleasure ride
- Preserve a route for future generations by leaving the BHS a legacy

Visit bhs.org.uk/access-and-bridleways to learn more about what you can do

About The British Horse Society

The British Horse Society (BHS) is dedicated to improving the lives of horses, their safety, and educating everyone from enthusiasts to riders and professionals to help them get the most out of their relationship with horses.

Offering world-class qualifications and an approvals system awarding quality instruction and care, a strong voice in access, safety and welfare issues, as well as support and guidance in all areas has allowed the BHS to become the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK.

You can become a member of the BHS and join a thriving and dedicated community that supports horses, horse lovers and professionals through local events, campaigning and education. With over 80,000 members enjoying personal benefits already, the BHS welcomes more people to support and join in order to continue working for a secure and brighter future for all horses.

Please join or donate today at bhs.org.uk

More information on all of the content in this leaflet can be found at bhs.org.uk. You can also download any of our advisory leaflets free of charge from our website on all of the topics below:

- Responsible Riding and Carriage Driving
- Finding Places to Ride and Carriage Drive
- Hacking
- Hill and Upland Riding
- Opening Gates
- Dung
- Riding on Beaches
- Riding through Livestock and Horses
- Level Crossings
- Dealing with Confrontation
- Stallions on Bridleways
- Permissive Routes
- Blocked and Difficult to Use Bridleways and Byways
- Electric Fencing
- 2026 Toolkit (saving old routes from being lost)
- Recording a Right of Way
- Researching a Route for a Definitive Map Modification Order Application
- Diverting a Right of Way
- Surfaces
- Mounting Blocks
- Bridges, Gradients and Steps
- Width, Area and Height
- Gates
- Vehicle Barriers
- Gate Installation
- Road Crossings
- Cattle Grids
- Shared Use
- Lobbying
- Town and Country Planning
- Solar Farms
- Wind Turbine Advice for Riders and Carriage Drivers
- Wind Turbine Guidance for Planners and Developers
- Wind Turbine Experiences Survey 2012 Results

Access Department

The British Horse Society
Abbey Park, Stareton,
Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ

Call: 02476 840515 Fax: 02476 840501
www.bhs.org.uk Email: enquiries@bhs.org.uk

This advice note applies to England and Wales. For information on Scotland, contact Helene Mauchlen, National Manager for Scotland, Woodburn, Crieff, Perthshire PH7 3RG
Telephone: 02476 840727 Email: helene.mauchlen@bhs.org.uk

For information on Northern Ireland please contact Susan Spratt, National Manager for Ireland, Hawks Hill Cottage, 26 Portaferry Road, Greyabbey, Newtownards, Co. Down BT22 2RU
Tel: 02476 840736 Mob: 07808 141079 Email: susan.spratt@bhs.org.uk

The British Horse Society is a Registered Charity Nos. 210504 and SC038516

If this advice note is a printed copy, please check for the latest version on www.bhs.org.uk/access-and-bridleways.
2016/7

The
British
Horse
Society