

Access to the Outdoors – guidance on hosting / leading activities for schools visits to Farms and Estates

Introduction

Scottish Access Rights were introduced, via Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, in early 2005. The legislation established a statutory right of access to the outdoors in Scotland. The right is a conditional one and therefore exists provided the person exercising that right behaves in a way which is considered responsible. It also established a reciprocal obligation placed on land managers which requires them to behave in a responsible manner in terms of enabling outdoor access rights to be exercised. It was acknowledged when this piece of legislation was introduced that an education and awareness-raising campaign would be required to ensure both access-takers and land managers understood the balance between rights and responsibilities.

The official responsibility for publicising the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which provides guidance on access rights and responsibilities, lies with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the 34 access authorities in Scotland (32 local authorities, plus the 2 national park authorities). Much has already been achieved in this respect, and in promoting what is meant by responsible access, but it is also recognized as an ongoing task which has no defined end point, and which a great many organizations and individuals need to provide support with to be truly successful.

One such way that landowners can help is to include information on Scottish Access Rights and Responsibilities into school farm or estate visits. The information below is designed to provide ideas for how this might be achieved, and to give an easy reference point for the variety of materials that are available to assist.

Two potential approaches are to:-

- a) run a 30 minute session which specifically covers the topic at a given point in the programme, or
- b) break the information up into bite-size chunks (5 mins each) which are delivered at a series of points on the tour.

The first approach has the advantage that a reasonable length of time is devoted to the topic and it is perhaps memorable for having had an allocated slot in the day. However, the second approach means that you can talk about specific issues as they arise during your tour, i.e. talk about the access issues associated with rivers by the riverbank, ground-nesting birds in woodland, and so on. This type of approach has the advantage that it is delivered in context and for that reason is relevant and memorable when the young people find themselves in that situation again. The approach you take will be best suited to your style of delivery and to the layout of the tour.

It is similarly difficult in this document to provide specific or prescriptive advice on how you should deliver information on access rights and responsibilities. Each day needs to be tailored to suit your tour, we therefore provide a selection of possible materials and approaches to enable you to “pick and mix” as appropriate.

Resources

- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) can supply copies of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (the Code), shorter summary leaflets and other materials, such as “crack the code” dials, for you to hand out on the day. The following link will take you to a full list of SNH’s “Enjoying the Outdoors” publications.

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/?q=&cat=EO>

Contact SNH Publications Department on 01738 444 177 to place an order. Most of SNH’s publications are free of charge.

- One of the publications you will find in SNH’s catalogue is an Activity Guide. There is a version for 8 – 12 year olds and one for 12 – 14 year olds. Printed copies of these packs can be ordered, although there are limited stocks left. The other alternative is download them from the online catalogue where you can print them out and if necessary laminate them. The packs have ideas and resources in them that you may find helpful to illustrate your discussion. You can also order separate elements from the packs without requesting the full packs, including photo cards, story cards and posters. This guidance document makes some suggestions as to when these resources might be helpful to a discussion with visiting school groups.
- You can download copies of SNH’s land management signs at www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/responsible-access/land-managers/guidance-and-templates.
- SNH’s dog walking posters and other resources are available to download at:-
 - www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/help-and-information/marketing-and-resources/dog-campaign-resources,
- SNH have also produced a poster about dog faeces and diseases in livestock which highlights the importance of picking up dog poo on grazing land. It is available at:
 - www.snh.gov.uk/docs/C299764.pdf
- SNH’s camping posters are available to download at:-
 - Camping - www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/help-and-information/marketing-and-resources/camping-resources

Things to Cover

When deciding what to cover in your discussions about Outdoor Access, you will inevitably want to include the things that are issues or potential issues on your property. We have suggested below some topic areas and how they might be covered. It will be important to start with an Introduction to Scottish Access Rights and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and you might also want to make sure you include something on signage. After that, the discussion can be tailored to suit the length of time you have and the issues that are pertinent to you.

An introduction to Scottish Access Rights & the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (the Code)

It is important to start off by explaining what is meant by Outdoor Access and this needs to be done in a way that children can relate to.

Suggested conversation/questions

- **We're going to talk about Scottish Outdoor Access Right**

Q. Does anyone know what I mean when I say Outdoor Access?

Answers could include, going for a walk, cycle, run, horse-ride, canoe trip, camping, picnicking, wildlife watching, coming out to the farm/estate today. Anything that takes them in to the countryside for fun, relaxation or to learn about the countryside. Access rights don't extend to motor vehicles though, so if they have a scramble or quad bike, they need to ask the farmer's permission before using it on his land.

- **Tell the group that in Scotland everyone has a Right (so permission isn't required) to go to the countryside and to parks and other open spaces in towns and cities to do the things mention above, but that right comes with some responsibilities.**
- **The idea of responsibilities in the countryside might not be obvious to the group, so to explain the idea you could ask the children to give examples of personal responsibilities they have at home, such as keeping their bedroom tidy, walking the dog, laying the table.**
Explain that we also have personal responsibilities in the outdoors and see if they can think of what these might include. Answers could include, leaving gates as you find them, not dropping litter, not trampling crops, if you have a dog with you not letting it chase animals or birds and using a bag to pick up your dog's poo and putting it in a bin.

You could suggest that it would be a great idea if someone would write all these ideas down and put them in a Code that everyone could read. Then introduce the **Scottish Outdoor Access Code**.

Explain that the Code has been written to help visitors to the countryside understand how to behave in a way that won't cause problems for the people that live and work there. The 3 main principles in the Code are:

- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment
- Take responsibility for your own actions

This exercise comes from the SNH Activity Pack 8 – 12 years old. It can be extended into a bigger exercise if required – see the Activity Pack for details. The Story Cards which come with the Activity Pack, or can be ordered/downloaded separately, are also good for running a longer exercise or discussion about responsible behaviour. They come as pairs, one picture demonstrating responsible behaviour and the other demonstrating irresponsible behaviour. Posters are also available which groups of children can use to find people behaving responsibly and irresponsibly in different situations. The posters can be used to provoke group discussion.

Signs and Posters

- **Tell the group that to help visitors to the outdoors understand their responsibilities, farmers and other people who work on the land will sometimes use signs or posters.**
You might want to hold up an example of some signage, such as SNH's blue land management information signs and give a brief explanation of what is being requested and why.
- You could also place other signs around the farm or estate and ask the group to let you know when they spot one. They can tell you what it says and what action it is asking them to take. This gives a further opportunity to talk about why the action is being requested.

Q When might someone who works on the land, like a farmer or forester, need to ask you to avoid a particular area or activity?

Answers could include: during lambing time or when there are young livestock in the field, during land management operations such as crop spraying, when birds or other wildlife are breeding, when field margins are being managed for wildlife, to warn of farm traffic, when trees are being cut down, when shooting is taking place.

Photo card C from SNH's Photo Card Pack might be helpful when discussing Signage

Farmyards

- **The Code says if we are out in the countryside we should avoid going through farmyards and close to buildings, or if we do need to go through a farmyard we should take notice of any advice, such as a sign asking us to proceed with caution.**

Q Why do you think that is?

Answers could include: tractors reversing, livestock being moved, farmworkers busy doing their job and might not see you, you could get hurt or you could cause someone else to get hurt, they are someone's place of work.

Forests and Woodlands

- **Forests and woodlands are good places to go to enjoy the outdoors. You can see lots of plants, birds and sometimes wild animals in woodlands. They can be good places to walk, cycle and horseride and sometimes people go to them to picnic or wildcamp. However, if you are going to enjoy woods responsibly then you need to remember about the other things that go on in woodlands too. Woods afterall, are part of the landowner's business and things like timber harvesting and gamebird shooting bring in income.**

Q Can you think of some things that a gamekeeper or estate worker might be doing in a forest or woodland area?

Answers could include: rearing gamebirds such as pheasants and partridges, cutting down trees to sell as timber or logs. Sometimes you might also come across livestock such as cattle, sheep, pigs or horses grazing in woodland.

Q. Can you think of the things you need to remember if you are out in woodland?

Answers could include: don't climb on timberstacks in case they topple, don't break branches off trees, and if you have a dog with you, don't let it chase birds, livestock or wildlife. This is really important between April & July when birds are nesting. Never light an open fire during prolonged periods of dry weather or in areas such as forests, woods, farmland, or on peaty ground or near to buildings or in cultural heritage sites where damage can be easily caused.

You could expand on the groundnesting birds issue by adding that if a mother is scared off the nest her eggs are left vulnerable to predators such as foxes, and she also might not return at all which means the eggs will go cold and the chicks won't hatch.

Q. Do you know where birds like pheasants and partridges nest?

Answer: On the ground. Their chicks are therefore more vulnerable to being attacked by dogs.

Q. If you come across a sign saying that there are forestry works going on further up the path you are on, what should you do?

Answer: It is best to follow the advice on the sign, which will normally ask you to take an alternative route through the woods. If trees are being felled or branches cut down, the foresters will be using noisy machinery so they might not hear or see you, and you don't want to get in the way of a falling tree.

It might help if you have a picture of a groundnesting bird to show the group – Picture P in SNH's photo card pack would be suitable. Photo cards C & E might also be helpful when discussing forests and woodlands. If you want to cover wild camping, photo cards O & Q could be helpful as could SNH's camping posters and leaflets.

Access on and near rivers

- You could start off by explaining that Access Rights apply to inland water as well as to land, so people can do things like canoe and swim in rivers and lochs. People often picnic or wild camp by rivers and lochs and this too can be done under Access Rights. Access rights don't extend to fishing though, so the owner's permission is required and/or a permit to fish needs to be bought.

Q. Can you think of things you should remember to do if you have picnics or camp by the river?

Answers could include: Take litter home. If you are camping, preferably use a portable stove, but if you need to light a fire for cooking or to keep warm, make sure you know how to do it properly so that you can keep control of it, and that you also know how to put it out properly. If you are away from a public toilet and you need to go, make sure you dig a hole well away from the water and bury what you do.

Q. Why?

Answers: Litter - wild and farm animals can get hurt on broken bottles or become ill if they eat plastic wrapping and so on. Canoeists or fishermen coming out of the river might get hurt on broken glass and it also makes the place less attractive for other picnickers. Fires – fires can get out of control or damage the ground. Remember never light an open fire during very dry weather, since it can very easily spread in these conditions. Sanitation – you could pollute water supplies which might be a danger to human and animal health and it isn't very responsible to leave a mess for other people to find.

Q. What are the things you should think about if you go swimming or kayaking in rivers and lochs?

Answers could include: Make sure you stay safe. Look out for fishermen. If you are swimming, avoid pools which are being fished. If you are kayaking, stop a little upstream and try to get the fisherman's attention before you attempt to pass. Ask him or her to indicate the route they would like you to follow.

Picture B from SNH's photo card pack might help illustrate the range of activities that can occur on water. If you want to cover wild camping, photo cards O & Q could be helpful as could SNH's camping posters and leaflets.

Livestock Fields

Q. Do you think it is okay to go through grass fields when sheep and other animals are in them?

Answer: It can often be okay to go through grass fields with livestock in them provided you avoid frightening the animals. It is important to be extra careful however when there are young animals like lambs and calves in the field because their mothers might be worried by your presence and act aggressively towards you. This is because they are trying to protect their young. If there is alternative way you can go that avoids fields with young animals in, then it is probably better to follow it.

Q. Which farm animals do you think could be dangerous, when and why?

Answer: Cows – they are big animals and they can sometimes be aggressive, usually this is when they have calves with them. Sometimes young bullocks (explain this is groups of young male cattle) can also be inquisitive and follow you when you go into their field. Horses, pigs and farmed deer might also react aggressively towards people, particularly if they have young animals with them.

Q. How do you think sheep will react to people crossing their field?

Answer: Sheep are quite timid animals and they will usually run away if you get too close to them.

Q. Does having a dog with you affect your access rights? Why?

Answer: Walking your dog is something that you can do using your access rights, but only if you keep your dog under proper control so you need to take extra care.

Reasons why include:

- Animals react more aggressively towards dogs – this is because they feel threatened by dogs, even very small or friendly dogs. Never let your dog frighten, chase or attack livestock and do not take your dog into fields where there are lambs, calves or other young animals.
- If you go into a field of farm animals, keep your dog on a short lead or under close control (walking to heel) and keep as far away as possible from the animals.
- If cattle behave aggressively and come towards you, keep calm, let your dog go (he will find his own way out of the field quicker than you) and take the shortest, safest route out of the field.

As well as keeping your dog under proper control you should also ensure that if your dog goes to the toilet in livestock fields, you always bag the poo and bin it in the nearest available litter or dog poo bin. Dog poo can cause diseases in farm animals.

Q. Do you know why you should not feed farm animals?

Answer: Sometimes this can spread diseases.

Picture 1 from SNH's photo card pack might help with this discussion.
SNH's poster advising of the dangers of dog faeces to grazing livestock could also be useful.

Gates

Q. If you go through a gate, how should you leave it?

Answer: You should leave it as you find it.

Q. Do you know why that is?

Answer: If a gate is closed when you come to it, you should close it behind you as it might be keeping animals in a certain field and out of fields that they shouldn't get into, like crop fields. If a gate is open when you come to it, you should leave it open since it might have been left that way to let animals get to a water trough or to an area of dry or shaded ground).

Q. What do you think we should do if the gate is padlocked or if you can't find a gate?

Answer: If there is no other option, then you can climb over a gate, but you should do so at the hinged end of the gate next to the post, because it is stronger there. You can also climb over a fence, hedge or wall, but do so carefully and avoid causing any damage.

Fields with Crops

Q. Do you think it is okay to walk through a field where a crop is growing?

Answer: You shouldn't go over the crop itself, since you will damage it. You can go around the edge of cropped fields, but try to stay in the margins of the fields if you can rather than being on the crop.

Q. What would you do if you saw a sign that the farmer had put up asking you not to enter the field because he had treated the crop with fertilizer or a spray?

Answer: Sometimes chemical sprays and other treatments used on crops can be harmful to humans for a short period of time after they have been applied. You should avoid these fields for the length of time the farmer advises.

Q. What do you think you would do if you saw that the farmer was harvesting a crop in a field that you wanted to go into?

Answer: It would be better to avoid the field until the work was finished, since you don't want to get in the farmer's way when he is busy, and the machinery he is using might be dangerous if you get too close. However, if you do have to go into the field, then take extra care for your safety and keep as far away from the machinery as possible.

Picture D from SNH's photo card pack might help illustrate this discussion

Open Hill Ground and Moorland

- Scotland's hills and moorland are places where some animals (usually sheep) and birds (often grouse) are reared by farmers and gamekeepers. It is quite common to see herds of wild deer on hill ground and you might spot some other wild animals and birds too. You won't usually find any crops being grown this high up since the soil is usually not of good enough quality to grow crops and the temperature is quite a bit cooler than on lower ground.

Q. If you go walking or mountain biking in the hills and you want to behave responsibly, what sort of things do you think you should think about?

Answers could include: try to avoid disturbing the animals and birds that live there and keeping your dog (if you have one with you) from chasing animals and birds. Take notice of any signs at the foot of the hill and follow their advice. Avoid soft or boggy ground as you might damage the surface and cause erosion to start.

- Each Autumn shooting and stalking parties go out onto hills and moorland to shoot grouse and deer. They do this because the meat from these animals is quite valuable so it brings in money to the Estate, and also because the numbers of animals and birds has to be kept inline with the amount of natural food that is available for them to eat.

Q. If you come across a sign that tells you deer stalking is taking place what should you do?

Answer: The sign should tell you where the stalkers and their clients will be. You can then plan an alternative route that avoids the stalking party. Sometimes the sign will suggest an alternative route for you.

Q. Do you know why hill walkers are less likely to disturb deer stalking on a Sunday?

Answer: Because stalking doesn't normally take place on Sundays.

Picture F from SNH's photo card pack might help illustrate this discussion

Wildflowers

Q. Who and what benefits from wildflowers?

Answer: Insects, birds and wild animals eat them and they also help to scatter the seeds so that new flowers will grow. Sometimes you will find strips of wildflowers growing along the edge of cropped fields. Farmers often plant these wildflower strips to encourage bees and other insects to live in these areas. Bees are needed to pollinate crops and some insects such as ladybirds also protect the farmer's crop because they eat other insects known as aphids which eat crops.

Q. Instead of picking wildflowers to take home, what could you do?

Answer: Take a photo of them.

Picture R from SNH's photo card pack might help illustrate this discussion

Houses and Gardens

Q. The Code says if you are out in the countryside you should avoid going too close to houses and you shouldn't go into gardens. Why do you think that is?

Answer: These are private areas and you should "respect the interests of other people", which includes respecting their privacy.