

## FOOTPATHS & THE RIGHTS OF WAY ACT

Rights of way are minor highways that exist for the benefit of the community at large. Historically they were an integral part of the country's transport system but have long since evolved into a recreational web which enables people to explore the countryside on foot, on horseback or on wheels. At the same time, some parts of the rights of way network, in both rural and urban areas, provide a convenient means of travelling from one place to another, particularly for short journeys.

### PATH SURFACE

If a path (both footpaths and bridleways) runs around the edge of a field, law states that its surface must not be ploughed or disturbed. If a path runs across a field then the farmer is allowed to plough or disturb the surface whilst cultivating the land providing he *'could not conveniently prevent'* the damage and providing restoration work is carried out within 24 hours (unless it is the first disturbance for that particular crop where 14 days are allowed). The restoration work should restore the path to its correct width (see below), appear both obvious and apparent once the crops have grown and be in a *'reasonably convenient'* condition for both walkers and riders.

### PATH WIDTHS

By law, paths must be the following widths at a minimum:

	<i>Around the edge</i>	<i>Across the middle</i>
FOOTPATH	1.5 metres	1 metre
BRIDLEWAY	3 metres	2 metres

### IF YOU MEET A PROBLEM ...

If while on your travels you find that a path appears to be non-existent or there is an obstacle (human or otherwise!) in the way and you believe the law has not been complied with you should deal with it as best you can at the time, record the relevant information and report it to the rights of way officer in the relevant highway authority (run by the local council for that area). They have both the powers and duty to see that the law is enforced.

The authority will need to know:

- the date when you found the problem;
- exactly where it was, giving 6-figure grid reference if possible;
- what the problem was.

If the authority accepts that there is a problem, it can, after giving notice to the farmer, go in and put the matter right. Should the farmer still not wish to comply it then has the power to take the farmer to court. The rights of way officer will also find it useful to hear of other problems you encounter on paths; you will need to give the same details each time.