

Freedom to roam – it's here

On September 19 the first areas of open countryside will become accessible under new freedom to roam legislation. In this special section we celebrate the culmination of years of campaigning by the Ramblers' Association.

IT'S TAKEN more than a century of campaigning on behalf of walkers. But finally, we are on the verge of being able to enjoy the freedom to roam in open countryside in England and Wales.

From September 19 we will be able to appreciate some of England's most stunning landscapes in a completely new way. We will gain the right to walk on mountains, moors, heath, down and common land away from mapped paths without being subject to the whim of landowners.

The new right is enshrined in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 but is being introduced gradually region by region as open, uncultivated countryside is mapped across England and Wales. The first regions to be opened up are the Lower North West and South East of England. Access in the other regions of England will be introduced over the coming year (see timetable map on p 19). This spring it will happen in one go for the whole of Wales. Securing greater access to the countryside for walkers was one of the principles on which the

Ramblers' Association was founded and the commencement of new rights under the CROW Act represents a milestone in a long campaign. For some members it represents the achievement of a lifetime of campaigning.

CROW is important because of the greater opportunities that it will bring for all walkers - in some regions there will be vast swathes of countryside opened up. In other areas there will be greater protection for access that is already enjoyed.

The economic benefits from increased visits to the countryside for day trips and holidays could be enormous. A new Countryside Code has been launched to offer guidance to the public on how to enjoy the countryside in a responsible way (see p27).

There is still much work to be done to ensure the public can fully enjoy these benefits. But on the eve of the introduction of the freedom to roam we should take time to acknowledge and celebrate this achievement, which will give enjoyment to generations to come.

SCOTLAND

Scotland, with its own traditions of access, has its own legislation. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 will create a new statutory right of access over most land. The Act comes into effect towards the end of the year. In July, SMPs approved the new Scottish Outdoor Access Code which will provide guidance on responsible behaviour for recreational users and land managers.

The Ramblers - both volunteers and staff - have taken a leading role in the development of the code and the legislation, one of the main achievements of the Scottish Parliament and Executive to date.

A copy of the code can be accessed on the Scottish Natural Heritage website: www.snh.org.uk/strategy/access/sr-afor00.htm and a summary will be available later in the year. For further information contact Ian McCall on ☎ 01577 861222 or IanM@scotland.ramblers.org.uk.

History of the campaign

1884 James Bryce MP introduces first freedom to roam Bill, reintroduced without success every year until 1914.

1932 Six walkers sent to jail for leading a mass trespass on Kinder Scout in the Peak District (right).

1935 Ramblers' Association founded.

1947 Hobhouse Committee recommends legislation for public access to open countryside.

1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act requires local authorities to secure access through agreements, orders or by purchasing the land. Has little effect, except in the Peak District National Park.

1985 Ramblers' *Forbidden Britain* campaign launched to identify areas from which the public are unreasonably barred and to campaign for a right of access.

1997 Government announces legislation introducing a public right to walk on open country.

2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act receives Royal Assent.

2004 New right of access to open country comes into force in the South-East and Lower North West of England on 19 September. Right: The new symbol indicating access land



VIEWPOINT

Chris Smith MP, Ramblers President



"Having access to the wild and most beautiful parts of Britain for everyone who wishes, no matter what their background or income or status, is a very important principle. Without the dedicated work of a lot of people up and down the country over many, many years the freedom to roam would never have happened."

Kate Ashbrook Ramblers' Access Committee chairman



"The Ramblers' campaign for access was revived in the early 1990s. We drafted the legislation and the campaign was won by skill and hard work. Our volunteers were phenomenal, constantly writing to MPs and organising events and gaining publicity. This is a great achievement but it leaves no room for complacency. In some areas we have been disappointed with the access maps, especially with the limited areas of downland that have been included. Coasts and woodland are not yet included in this new access. Now we know what we can achieve, we should aim higher. Scotland, despite its numerous anti-access landowners, has legislation that creates a new statutory right of access over most land. For our part, we have a long way to go to a truly free countryside."



VIEWPOINT

Kevin Gray, Professor of Law at Cambridge University

"The CROW Act 2000 constitutes a quite remarkable advance in the drive towards greater rights of recreational access to open country in England and Wales. In spite of its shortcomings, this legislation places such access on a secure statutory footing in a way which few would have believed possible even a decade ago. This is a quantum step of historic proportions and its significance can scarcely be overstated. For the first time in our history, every citizen will have an entitlement to enter and remain on any defined access land for the purpose of open-air recreation."

Mike Sheehan, Altberg Bootmaking Company, Richmond, North Yorks

"Since the foot and mouth outbreak people have realised the benefits that walkers bring to the local economy. Anything that encourages walkers to visit the countryside must help. The long-term effect of freedom to roam will be to make more people feel they can enjoy our fantastic countryside, knowing they have a right to be there. Everyone with an interest in tourism in the Yorkshire Dales should welcome this."

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