

Walkers with dogs: new approaches to better management



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What's coming up...



- About the Kennel Club
- Assistance dogs
- Dog walkers: access challenges & opportunities
- New projects & approaches
- Opportunities for your LAF?
- Questions!



Assistance dogs in the UK

- 5,000 assistance dogs in the UK
- “Assistance” dog term avoids defining the “team” or “partnership” (dog and human) by a given disability
- Standard logo for assistance dogs
- Five UK charities train registered assistance dogs:
 1. Dogs for the Disabled
 2. Guide Dogs for the Blind
 3. Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
 4. Support Dogs
 5. Canine Partners



A widening role...

- General awareness of “guide dogs for the blind” – hence frequent “guide dogs only” signs
- But, for example, dogs can help the mobility impaired:
 - open and close doors
 - dress and undress
 - fetch a mobile phone
 - collect letters and newspapers
 - reach up to shop-counters and carry a shopping basket
 - help people to walk by providing a stable base and forward motion



But... they are increasingly helping with more “invisible” disabilities:

- alerting a hearing-impaired person to warning sounds, a baby’s cries, and a telephone’s ring
- detecting the early onset of an epileptic seizure
- alerting an owner with diabetes to a dangerously low blood sugar level
- helping people with Alzheimer’s disease find their way home if they become confused or disorientated



Implications for countryside access

- Partnerships may not have any mobility impairment
- Assistance dogs cover many breeds/sizes & a reality in all terrain
- Consider assistance dogs in any proposed physical or legal restrictions: dogs more than just ‘usual accompaniments’
- Openly welcome assistance dog partnerships at events and facilities
- Follow good practice - minimising unnecessary barriers on paths by adopting the least restrictive option



Wider benefits of 'assistance' dogs

- Helping break down social barriers for disabled people
- Increasing overall confidence and visits to town and country
- Reducing suicide rates for people with mental illness
- Improving recovery times from illness
- ... *and people don't need to have a disability to benefit like this!*



Kennel Club approach to public access

- Promoting the significant benefits dog ownership has for promoting healthier lifestyles and a more inclusive society
- Minimising negative impacts caused by the behaviour of dog owners
- Improving mutual understanding and respect of rights & responsibilities between dog owners and land managers
- Balancing legitimate restrictions on dogs with positive messages about less sensitive sites
- Pragmatic, balanced and proportionate solutions within existing legislation



Good things about dogs....

- Promote daily, year-round exercise
- 77% of owners walk their dog(s) for at least 30 mins, 5+ times per week
- Make people feel safer at home and when out
- Provide social interaction and support, especially for older people
- Reduce feelings of isolation and suicide rates
- Encourage owners to take UK-based holidays
- Economic support to local businesses and suppliers



And some bad things about their owners....

With 6 million dogs, irresponsibility by even just a few of those owners at the wrong time or place, is – or can feel like – a big problem!

- Poo!
- Chasing livestock
- Disturbance to wildlife
- Unwanted interactions
- Barking
- Concerns by some ethnic minorities
- Fly parking
- Etc, etc



The realities for us all

- Unique cultural & legal contexts
- Historical lack of engagement, integration or consistency in messages and approaches
- Dog walkers rarely considered in policy & practice as a major access user group
- Perceived issues are real – a small proportion of dog walkers can feel like a “big” problem
- Usually reactive and restrictive management approaches
- Little research into real impacts and more effective approaches



Why new approaches?

- After decades of largely the same approach, we still have problems!
- User and landowner surveys often mention dogs as a key issue
- National Audit Office report 2006 highlights communication deficiencies
- Between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of all countryside visitors have a dog with them
- Dog owners can be a key ‘political’ supporter of access provision – so good to get on your side
- Existing approaches can lead to very emotive and unhelpful conflict
- We need to be more effective!



New approaches are about:

- Addressing underlying causes, values and beliefs, not just symptoms
- Specific behaviours and their impacts
- Using positive messages to manage wanted and unwanted behaviours
- Providing informed choice
- The reality of activity displacement
- Communication that is clear, credible, consistent and timely
- Building-in wider social, economic and environmental benefits
- A strategic approach across different authorities & departments: ROWIPs
- Still fining people when you need to!



Increasing responsible behaviour

Increasing compliance rests on working with underlying attitudes, beliefs & values.

Handlers allowing a dog to exhibit irresponsible behaviour at certain times/places can be due to:

- A totally selfish handler!
- Ignorance/denial of impact
- Inappropriate/inaccessible information
- Priority to welfare/value of dog
- Mistrust of signage
- Unclear/conflicting signage
- Lack of alternative provision
- Lack of dog control ability/awareness
- Lack of mutual empathy/respect
- Peer behaviour



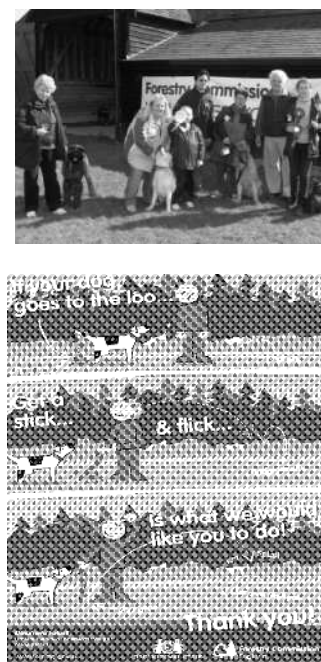
Forestry Commission

- Concordat launched at Crufts, March 2005
- Covers FC's 1 million hectares of land in Wales, Scotland & England. Now dedicated as open access land.
- Around 30% of land is SSSI designated
- Positive engagement of key visitor group
- Balanced approach to rights & responsibilities



Forestry Commission

- Good practice guide: launched at Crufts 2007
- Training for staff and volunteers
- Engaging, targeted publicity and publications
- Dog training in the forest
- “Flick it” off the path approach in some areas
- Visitor centre access improvements and merchandising



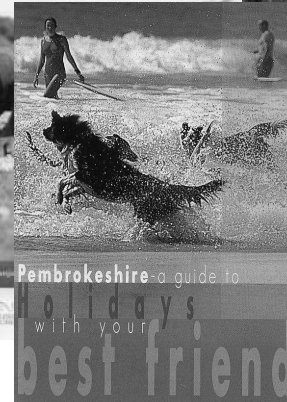
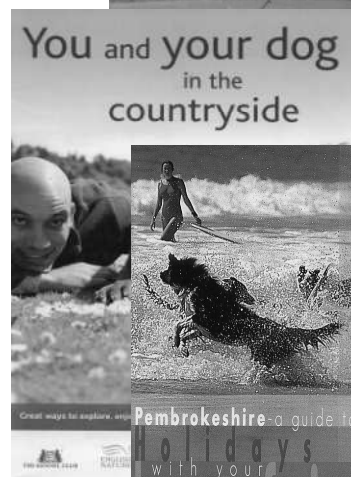
Forestry Commission

- Dog 'pit stops'
- Activity trails
- Dog days
- Canine community notice boards
- Actively managing incompatible activities
- Designated parking
- Developing 'friends of' schemes
- 'Credit card' advice slip



“You and your dog...” booklets

- Balanced, partnership publications between KC, Countryside Agency, English Nature and CCW
- Launched at Crufts and Royal Welsh show 2005
- One million initial print run
- Distribution through countryside outlets, plus vets, pet stores and other canine networks
- Promoted in KC Good Citizen training clubs
- Pembrokeshire's own county leaflet for visitors



Our ongoing work

- Support and advice for local authorities, land managers etc
- Partnership promotion, publicity and endorsement of new initiatives, directly into the canine media
- Moors for the Future projects – podcast, plays and publicity: www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk
- Further research and signage trials: Hampshire County Council 2007
- Launch of KCDOG at Crufts 2006 - developing grass-roots networks
- Workshops and courses for access managers
- Wider advice on development of localised information and guidance



Opportunities for your LAF?

- Encouraging an integrated, balanced, engaging approach: section 94(4) bodies
- Promoting consistent, accurate, timely and appropriate local information
- Considering how best to engage with this significant, year-round group of access users
- Optimising benefits for local businesses: pubs, B&Bs, vets, feed merchants...
- Getting the resources!



Useful links:

- The Kennel Club: www.the-kennel-club.org.uk
- Caesar's web site: www.k9assistance.co.uk
- Assistance Dogs International: www.adionline.org
- Hearing Dogs: www.hearing-dogs.co.uk
- Guide Dogs for the Blind: www.guidedogs.org.uk
- Support Dogs: www.support-dogs.org.uk
- Dogs for the Disabled: www.dogsforthe-disabled.org
- Canine Partners: www.caninepartners.co.uk

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