



**ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY**  
**Making Woodlands More Accessible**

Simon Bell  
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## **Introduction**

This handout considers the different aspects that a manager of typical small recreation and path networks needs to think about if a disabled person were to visit his or her forest. It is laid out as a checklist of issues that follows the different stages from planning through to the actual visit by a person with a disability. It is intended to help you think about the issues someone with a disability needs to consider and have addressed before having a successful visit.

If you have thought about and addressed these points then there will be as few barriers as possible to use by disabled people.

The checklist refers to the more basic elements of an informal recreation development on a small to medium scale. A separate handout deals with larger facilities

Access standards for the outdoors have been developed by the Fieldfare Trust in the "Countryside for All" publication. These are presented as minimum standards but can be difficult in practice to apply. They also tend to assume that all disabled people are the same and that no one can manage with lower standards. The alternative to making sites meet standards is to inform people about the routes and conditions so that they can decide whether they can manage. This does not do away with the need for basic standards to be met as far as possible but it helps managers to achieve a reasonable balance between their legal responsibility, the demand from disabled users, problems presented by the terrain and the cost of meeting standards.

## Before the visit – planning by the potential visitor:

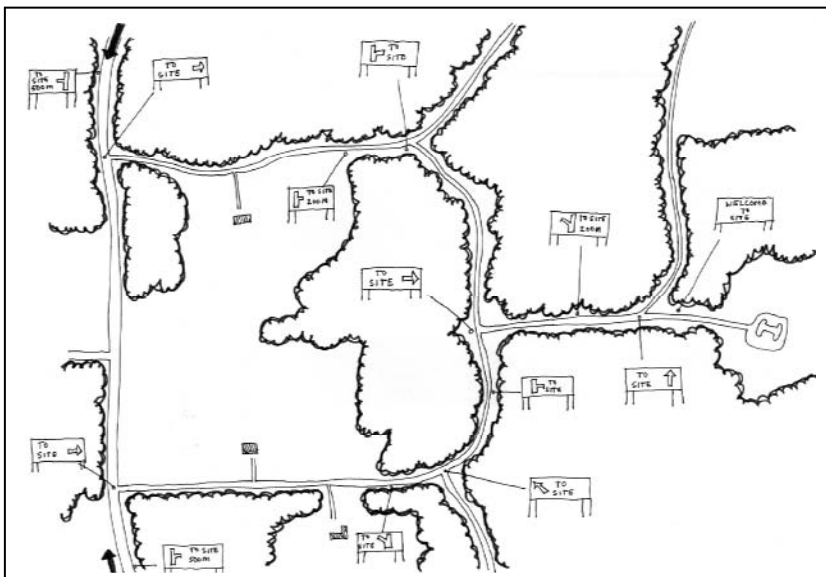
The following points are questions you should consider as this will in many instances be the deciding factor as to whether a person with some form of disability will visit your property.

- Is information available to potential visitors in a suitable format?
- Does the information explain the physical features of the site?
- Does it explain how to find the location?
- Does it provide information on transport?

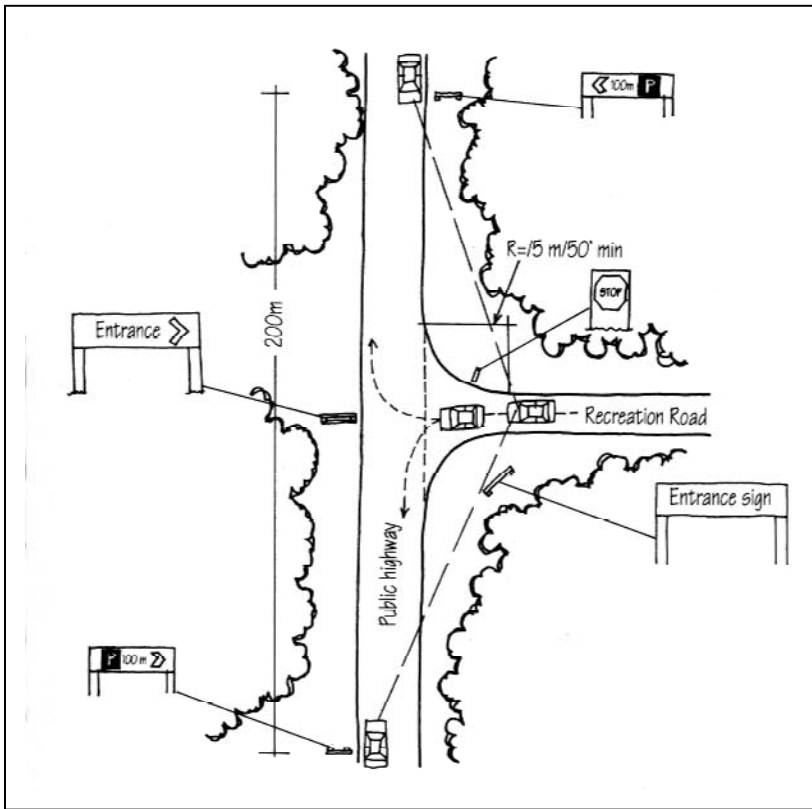
## En route to the site

Visitors have to be able to reach the site in the first place and owing to the form of disability this may present problems; the type of transport, their ability to find the way and their confidence that they can do so are important factors to consider.

- Is the site waymarked so it is easy to find (at least from the point where the visitor has to leave a main road)?
- Is the entrance well signed?
- At the entrance do any signs make it clear of the provisions for disabled access?



*Consider the waymarking system to the site so that people can find it*



*The entrance should be well laid out and signed so that disabled people can see that it has facilities for them*



*Symbols used on signs are good and should denote any disabled facilities*

### **At the point of arrival**

This is the place where the visitor starts their visit and the expectations created by prior information and the landscape setting are fulfilled.

- If car parking is provided are sites set aside for disabled use?

- If any information is provided is it in a format suitable for people with different disabilities to understand?
- Does the information explain the facilities and their suitability?
- Is the sign structure at a height suitable for wheelchair users?
- Is the surfacing around the site suitable for physically disabled people?
- Is information provided on what to do in an emergency?



*Information at the point of arrival should be useable by disabled people – the structure, the method of providing information to different groups etc.*

## Toilet facilities

One of the aspects that makes sites most accessible is toilet facilities. However, these are expensive to construct and maintain and for small sites or ones close to settlements often not considered appropriate.

- What are the options if there are no toilets available?
- Is there alternative provision elsewhere?
- Is information available on this alternative provision?
- If a toilet is provided is it accessible (it needs to meet specific standards)?



*Toilets for disabled use require very specific elements for a range of different users.*

## **Picnicking**

Picnicking is one of the most common activities in any countryside or woodland recreation location. It is generally easy to provide for as long as some basic things are considered.

- If a picnic area is provided, is the surface accessible to some tables?
- Are tables, if provided, modified for a wheelchair?
- Are benches accessible to other physically disabled people (not in a wheelchair)
- If a barbecue is provided is it accessible from a wheelchair (eg height, surfacing)?
- Can litter bins, if provided, be used by disabled people?



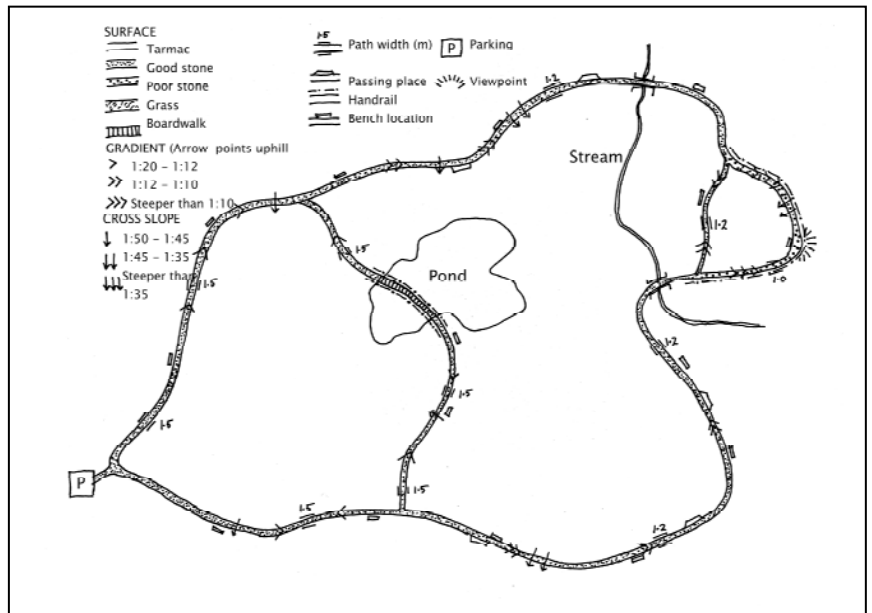
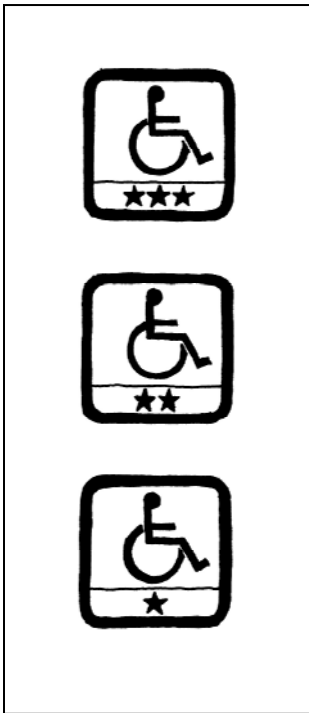
*There are different ways that picnic tables can be useable by disabled people. Access to them is also necessary.*

## **Walks and Trails**

Walks and trails are one of the main reasons people visit an area and they also tend to provide the most challenges in forests in Scotland because of terrain and the need for surfacing in many instances. However, it is not always well known what kind of surfacing is acceptable. More detail is provided on this below.

- Is information about length, surface, gradients and obstacles provided at the start of any trails?
- Are trails waymarked using techniques that are accessible for disabled people (eg. tactile arrows/symbols, contrasting colours, visible from a wheel chair)?
- Has the trail been audited?

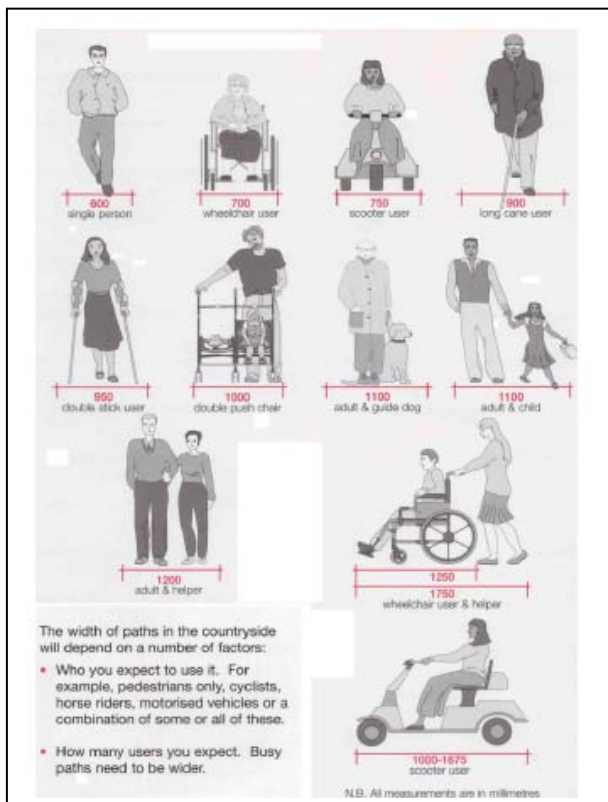




The way that information about paths is given is a very important aspect.

### Mobility impairment

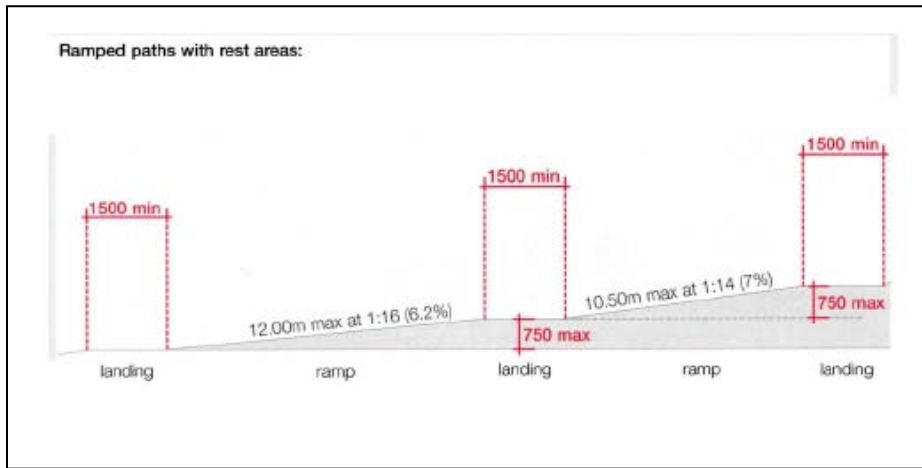
This is in many ways the key form of impairment because most is concerned with the quality of the path itself.



The main dimensions for paths relate to the dimensions of different users and equipment.



- Surfaces – compact, smooth with as few loose stones or bumps as possible.
- Gradient – for wheelchairs no steeper than 1:12.



*Rest areas help to make ramps or slopes more accessible.*

- Cross-slope or gradient – a problem for wheelchairs, keep level or crown the surface for drainage.
- Obstacles – larger stones, tree roots, cross drains etc are hazards.



*A combination of slope and obstacles makes this path difficult to use.*

- Path width – if possible to pass or walk two abreast, otherwise passing places.
- Resting points – benches at suitable intervals, in attractive locations. Seat height is important, backs and arms advisable.

- Handrails – on steeper sections for older people can help, at a height to allow someone in a wheelchair to see over.
- Boardwalks – edges to prevent wheels slipping off and narrow gaps between boards to stop sticks or crutches getting stuck.



*Edges to this boardwalk are good but the gaps between board are too far apart*

- Gates – none if possible, if needed should be wheelchair kissing gates or self closing easily opened gates.



*Gates should be avoided if they cannot be easily opened and self-closing.*

- Signs – at a height suitable for wheelchairs.

## ***Visual impairment***

- Path surfaces – firm and level with no trip hazards.
- Edges should be defined by vegetation or tapping rails for white stick users.
- Handrails useful for partially sighted people on steep sections and steps.
- Steps avoided if possible, edges in a contrasting colour for partially sighted people to see them.
- Surface changes can be used to denote something coming up such as a bench, sign or gate.



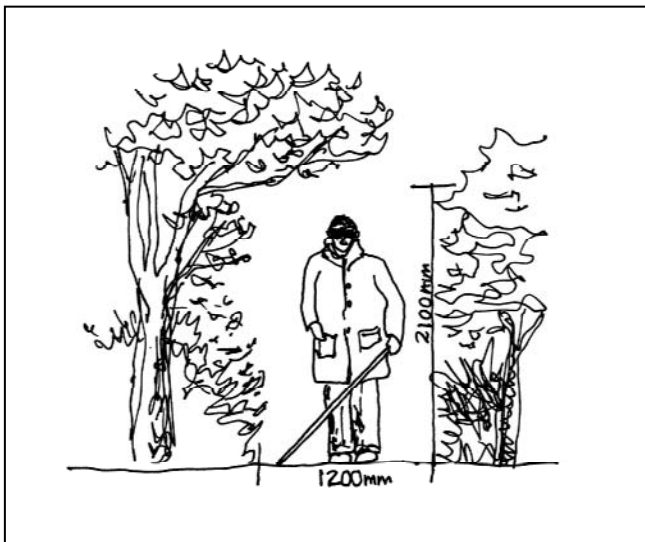
*Surface changes can be used to signal the presence of something to blind and partially sighted people.*

- Paths wide enough to walk two abreast.
  - Path edges should not fall away to one side as this may cause a blind person to lose their footing.
  - Clear walking tunnel – no branches etc interfering with someone who can't see them
  - Information should be in large type (minimum 12pt in leaflets), high contrast between type and background, san-serif font/typeface.
  - Use Braille and/or tactile surfaces for blind people
- Sound posts can be used for information and interpretation





*Path edges that fall away can lead blind people astray*



*The clear walking tunnel is important in forests.*

### ***Mental impairment/learning disability***

- Smooth, level surface if someone's medication causes walking problems.
- Information in simple text or, preferably, symbols.

### ***Hearing impairment***

- Level and smooth surfaces for people with balance problems (Ushers syndrome).
- Signs using symbols and as few words as possible.

- Signs to warn of invisible hazards such as a busy road.
- Information in simple language.