

Advisory Signage for Outdoor Access

Good practice principles



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An example of signage that this guidance seeks to address

INTRODUCTION

This summary guidance has been issued now to convey important information on approaches to advisory signage which support the principles of access rights and responsibilities. This comes in advance of new detailed guidance which will cover all aspects of signage for influencing responsible behaviour and giving directions (see Next Steps, section 5). In-depth guidance specifically aimed at land managers has already been issued for use in their day-to-day operations. Please refer to 'Signs guidance for farmers and other land managers – Using advisory signs to inform the public about your day-to-day land management operations', available from the www.outdooraccess-scotland.com website.

Section 2 provides an up-to-date context for signage in relation to the new access arrangements, and explains why some changes are required from previous practice. Sections 3 and 4 are set out as a series of key principles. The former covers general signage principles which aim to encourage the selective use of helpful, easy-to-understand signs. The latter looks in more detail at the signage principles for managing shared use on paths.

It is strongly recommended that you read this guidance before installing new signs or reviewing existing signs. This guidance will be of interest to both access managers, especially access authorities, and land managers – including farmers, estate managers, crofters, foresters and deer managers.

ACCESS RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES - A NEW CONTEXT

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 ('the Act') has fundamentally altered the legal basis for outdoor access in Scotland. The public now have access rights to most land and water, subject to behaving responsibly. Land managers also have a duty under the Act to use and manage land responsibly in relation to access rights. To reflect and support these new arrangements, important but subtle changes are required in how access managers communicate with users. The introduction of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code ('the Code') sets out guidance which has been approved by the

Scottish Parliament. The Code should therefore be a key reference point when preparing new signs.

The new approaches promoted by this guidance may challenge access managers to think afresh about what information people need to make informed choices, and how best to communicate this through signs and other means. The quality of communication between access managers and users will be a key factor in the successful management of outdoor access and realising the benefits of the new access arrangements in Scotland.



This local sign is now non-compliant but with minor edits the wording would be relevant in the new access context

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

This section covers general principles which aim to encourage good practice in advisory signage by access and land managers and to provide information which is Act and Code compliant. It covers:

- ▶ **Taking the right approach – will a sign be effective?**
- ▶ **Promoting understanding of the Code**
- ▶ **Signing selectively**
- ▶ **Making messages positive and informative**
- ▶ **Good practice in using signs**
- ▶ **Signage where access rights do not apply**
- ▶ **Avoiding 'No Access' type signs**
- ▶ **Reminder signs**

1. **Taking the right approach – will a sign be effective?**

Signage is only one way of communicating with users. There may be more creative and effective approaches, e.g. through maps, leaflets, websites and user group networks which, in some cases, may remove the need for signage.

Use the Code to create signs, check your wording is correct and that you are not inadvertently deterring people from exercising their access rights by using language or symbols inappropriately. **Please check with Scottish Natural Heritage that any use of the Code logo is correct.**

2. **Promoting understanding of the Code**

Help people to make informed decisions - the Code stresses that people should be responsible for their actions, to respect the interests of others and to care for the environment. Signs should contain information that helps the public to follow these principles, rather than telling them what to do.



3. Signing selectively

- Only use signs where and when needed. Avoid putting up too many signs as this will dilute your message, confuse people and spoil the attraction of the countryside.

- Signs are not required for every land management operation. Use them to ensure the public are not put at risk and to allow you to work safely and effectively.
- Standard health and safety signage should continue to be used where this is appropriate.



This area uses too many signs, diluting the message, confusing people and the signs used are not very sympathetic with the landscape

4. Making messages positive and informative

People want to feel welcome in the outdoors and respond best to helpful information. Signs that the public will value best include all of the following:

- ▶ the activity or hazard that visitors need to be aware of
- ▶ the area affected and for how long
- ▶ the action you are requesting people to take and the reason for it
- ▶ your contact details
- ▶ a simple 'thank you'

5. Good practice in using signs

- Signage should apply only to the minimum area and duration required to safeguard people's safety.
- Signs can be either:
 - ▶ in-advance – to warn people of a hazard before they come to it or to promote an alternative route
 - ▶ at-site – to warn people when they reach the hazard
 - ▶ used in combination (both in advance and at-site)

Example – Natural hazard

Unstable ground, steep drops



- At site access – 'unstable ground, steep drops, 400m ahead' with hazard symbol
- At hazard – 'unstable ground, steep drops' with hazard symbol

- Where people are crossing land rather than using paths and tracks, any necessary signs should be located at regular access points.

- Signs need to be carefully placed so that they are readily accessible, easily read and free of surrounding vegetation.

- Ensure that your signs comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which makes it illegal to discriminate against disabled people on the grounds of their disability. Note also that the Disability Equality Duty (since December 2006) requires all public bodies to ensure that people with disabilities are treated equally. Good practice in the design and lay-out of signs should be followed to ensure that messages will be short and easy to understand, and be helpful to a wide range of abilities.

- Remember to take down signs as soon as the activity is complete or the hazard is no longer present.



- At all times use the word 'path' and not 'footpath'.

6. Signage where access rights do not apply

In many cases you will not need signs for these situations, e.g. building curtilages and areas of privacy around houses, as they will be reasonably obvious, e.g. lawns, flower beds and sheds. However, you may wish to help people to avoid your property through helpful waymarking or signage, in combination with path provision, to assist people to get to places they want to reach. If so, ensure you follow the good practice principles outlined above.

7. Avoiding 'No Access' type signs

You should not be using signs saying 'Private – Keep Out' or 'No Entry' on land or inland water where access rights apply. These commands are too wide ranging and do not comply with the Act and the



Code. If your intention is to prohibit motor vehicles, then you should use a more specific wording saying 'No motor vehicles unless authorised.'

8. Reminder signs

Signs with messages like 'Please leave gates as you find them' and 'Take your litter home' have long been a common sight in the countryside. These reminder signs help to support the Code's three key principles and still have a useful role. You should therefore continue to use them selectively where they are still helpful as prompts for the public to behave responsibly, but be mindful of the danger of proliferating signage and diluting your message (see point 3, above).



PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING SHARED USE THROUGH SIGNAGE

The Paths for All Partnership and Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned a study examining the role of graphic symbols in access management following the introduction of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The prime purpose of the study was to investigate the most commonly recognised access symbols for use on paths, such as those depicting a walker, cyclist, horse-rider and wheelchair user - often used to indicate suitability for a purpose or to discourage a particular use. These were also assessed within the context of wider methods of communication such as text-based signs, orientation panels, health and safety signs, maps, leaflets and websites.

The key principles emerging from the study cover the following areas:

- ▶ **The effect of access rights and responsibilities**
- ▶ **The use of symbols**
- ▶ **Approaches to path promotion**

The key principles are listed below:

1. The effect of access rights and responsibilities

- Pre-Act, access managers could decide where different users could and could not go, often supported by agreement with land managers.
- Post-Act, it is largely the user who should decide what responsible use is at any one time.
- Post-Act, the role of the access manager is to provide useful information to help users make informed decisions.

2. The use of symbols

- Existing symbols systems, which were previously acceptable, can no longer offer ready solutions for management of shared use which are Act and Code compliant. Each approach investigated had flaws as well as strengths.
- The use of symbols to promote a specific mode of use is contrary to the spirit of the Act, as this may infer that a path may not be used by other user groups.
- The use of a single symbol is too simplistic to represent the full range of

abilities, aspirations and needs present within a user group, e.g. from novice cyclists to extreme mountain bikers.

Example of potential for ambiguous messages when using symbols



- This could indicate that the route is suitable for cycling
- It infers that the route may not be suitable for other users
- It infers that other routes may not be suitable for cycling
- This indicates a recommended waymarked route

- In the majority of cases, the use of symbols to prohibit specific modes of access will not be Act compliant as the manager cannot readily determine what will be responsible use.

- Specifically, the use of the statutory prohibition signs (red circle with red diagonal slash) is not Act compliant and cannot be used.

- Advising users on hazards or obstructions can be done using text signs (either text-only or reinforced by the recognised hazard symbol).

3. Approaches to path promotion

- Signs and symbols for influencing responsible behaviour should only be used as part of broad marketing approaches to paths promotion involving maps, leaflets, websites, user group information networks and other means. Signs should be the end point of a promotion process not the beginning.

Note that there is no move towards 'uniformity' of signposting and waymarker designs, and that individual house styles and local distinctiveness are still encouraged, based on these good practice principles.

PREPARING NEW SIGNAGE GUIDANCE – NEXT STEPS

The intention is to prepare new signage guidance and the following outline contents is a start point for further scoping and drafting:

- ▶ Introduction and context
- ▶ Key principles
- ▶ Sign planning
- ▶ Design and materials
- ▶ Location and installation
- ▶ Waymarking and directional signs
- ▶ Information and warning signs
- ▶ Information sheets
 - Standard designs
 - Text and wording
 - Symbols
 - Installation
 - Maintenance

The new guidance should act as a key reference point for all signage guidance and provide both principles and technical detail as required. To avoid duplication with other publications, e.g. 'Signs guidance for farmers and other land managers' and 'Managing visitor safety in the countryside', only key guidance points will be reiterated for completeness and emphasis.

The existing Paths for All Partnership 'Signposting Guidance' will be revised - some text needs updated and some removed. In the meantime, please do not make further use of the section on 'Symbols to denote use' (pp9-10), as this is not consistent with the principles set out in Section 4.



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