



A brief guide to the history, evolution and content of the new Countryside Code - launched July 2004

1930s

The Commons and Open Spaces Society produced a Country Code and the Council for the Protection of Rural England produced a Code of Courtesy.

1940s

The Ramblers Association produced a Ramblers Code.

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act led to the production of the first national Country Code, which was based on a consultation with 17 interested organisations. This Country Code, published in 1951, was produced by the National Parks Commission and later in the 1950s it was integrated into the Highway Code.

1950s

Norman Thelwell designed a series of cartoons to help promote the new Country Code and through the 50s and 60s this Code became well established with both visitors to the countryside and landowners as it was translated into Welsh. Generations of boy scouts, guides and brownies acquired their Country Code badge; the Central Office of Information publicised the code on television; British Railways advertised it on trains; Butlins promoted it in holiday camps; and factories publicised it in their canteens. Demand for the Country Code booklet consistently outstripped supply.



A coloured wall sheet depicting the Code was published, and won enthusiastic support from education authorities as well as the National Union of Teachers which said it was “of value in securing greater understanding between town and country”. Smaller display cards carrying the Code were circulated around hotels, cafés and public houses.

The National Parks Commission reported in September 1951:

“We regard the Country Code as a core around which will grow a body of information about the countryside. As knowledge spreads, there should be much less of the damage often done by sheer thoughtlessness in well-intentioned people. By all these means we hope there will be a deepening respect and friendliness between countryman and townsman.”

1960s-1980s

The first long distance footpath, the Pennine Way, was designated in 1965, and an increasingly mobile population with increased interest in leisure, established the need for a code to encourage responsible use of the countryside. This came in 1979 when the Country Code was reviewed by the Countryside Commission (previously the National Parks Commission) and which led to the next Code and a list of eleven key messages, published in 1981.



The 1981 Code

1. Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
2. Guard against all risk of fire
3. Fasten all gates
4. Keep your dogs under close control
5. Keep to public paths across farmland
6. Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
7. Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
8. Take your litter home
9. Help to keep all water clean
10. Protect wildlife, plants and trees
11. Take special care on country roads
12. Make no unnecessary noise

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)

As part of the implementation of the Countryside Rights of Way Act (2000), the Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales developed a new Countryside Code. This Code was designed to reflect both the changes that had happened over the previous 20 years and the introduction of the new public right of access to open country and registered common land (regional commencement in England from 19th September 2004 to 2005, and across Wales from Spring 2005).



The new Countryside Code

The new Countryside Code, launched in July 2004, followed extensive consultation with the public and stakeholders carried out through the summer of 2003. The new Code is designed to reassure land managers as new public rights of access begin, and to make the public aware of their new rights and responsibilities across the whole countryside.



- **Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs**
Even when going out locally, it's best to get the latest information about where and when you can go; for example, your rights to go onto some areas of open land may be restricted while work is carried out, for safety reasons or during breeding seasons. Follow advice and local signs, and be prepared for the unexpected.
- **Leave gates and property as you find them**
Please respect the working life of the countryside, as our actions can affect people's livelihoods, our heritage, and the safety and welfare of animals and ourselves.
- **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home**
We have a responsibility to protect our countryside now and for future generations, so make sure you don't harm animals, birds, plants, or trees.
- **Keep dogs under close control**
The countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, but it's every owner's duty to make sure their dog is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, wildlife or other people.
- **Consider other people**
Showing consideration and respect for other people makes the countryside a pleasant environment for everyone – at home, at work and at leisure.