

NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK



Woodland ride, Hawkhill

Public access

Public access can be either linear or area-wide.



Solent Way sign

Within the New Forest National Park there is a high level of area-wide public access and a much lower concentration of linear access. In fact, most of the linear access lies outside the land that is accessible on an area-wide basis.

Introduction

The New Forest National Park provides superb access for the public to enjoy the open air and peaceful setting. It has over 30,000 hectares of accessible countryside and 310 kilometres of public rights of way for you to explore and enjoy.

There are therefore plenty of opportunities for getting out and about and enjoying the special qualities of the New Forest. Every year millions of locals and visitors alike take advantage of the fantastic access available. This factsheet examines the different types of access within the National Park, the legislation behind it and how it contributes to people's enjoyment of the New Forest National Park.

Linear access

Linear access, or route-based access, is largely provided for by public rights of way.

Public rights of way

The rights of way in the area are a great way to experience the New Forest on foot, bicycle or horseback. Public rights of way are classified as minor highways and highway law therefore applies to them. This means that all public rights of way should be signposted where they leave the metalled road. The signpost must indicate the direction of the public right of way, and its category (see table overleaf). It may also show a destination, and a distance to that destination.

Signposts may be made of any material, but they are most often made from timber or metal. Many of the signposts within the



Bridleway fingerpost

National Park are wooden fingerposts, which fit the character of the area.

Rights of way should also be waymarked along the route to assist people to follow them. Waymarkers are usually round discs with coloured arrows indicating the category and direction of the way.

Responsible Access

The National Park Authority and its partners work to encourage people to act responsibly in the countryside, and to ensure that the access and recreation opportunities allow people to benefit from the special qualities without detracting from them.

One of the methods for achieving this aim is through a National Park behavioural code entitled 'Caring for the New Forest'. This code provides advice for local residents and visitors to ensure that their visit has a positive impact on the Park and contributes to preserving the Forest for future generations to enjoy. The code of behaviour was agreed between the New Forest National Park Authority, New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission and is available on the National Park Authority website.



Who manages the rights of way?

The responsibility for managing and maintaining public rights of way lies with the highway authority. Within the National Park, the highway authorities are Hampshire and Wiltshire County Councils.

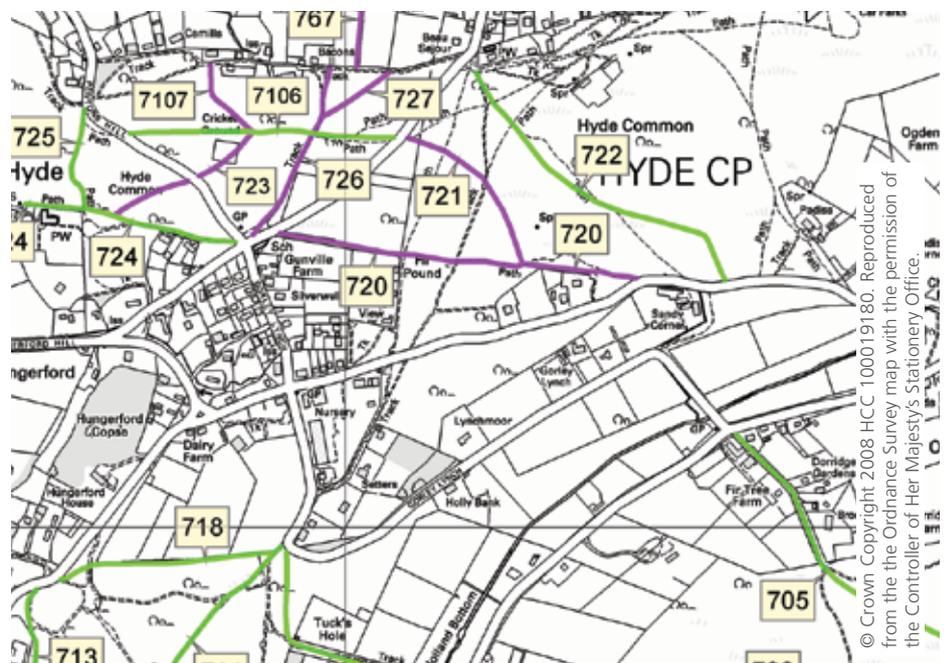
Definitive map

The official record of public rights of way is called the "definitive map of public rights of way". It is accompanied by a statement which describes each right of way in words. The responsibility for the preparation and upkeep of the definitive map lies with the surveying authority, which is usually the same body as the highway authority. Therefore, in the New Forest National Park, the surveying authorities are Hampshire and Wiltshire County Councils.

The definitive map is conclusive evidence of the public's rights. However, the map can be modified by a special legal procedure if it is found to be incorrect. Another legal procedure can be used to change the direction or nature of a way, to extinguish the public rights on a way, or to create a new way.

The definitive map is open for the public to view, but public rights of way are also shown on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps. The Ordnance Survey maps for the National Park are numbers OL22 (New Forest) and 131 (Romsey, Andover and Test Valley).

Extract from the definitive map



Cycling at Keyhaven



There are four categories of public rights of way:

Category	What is allowed	Colour of waymarker	Total length in National Park
Public footpath	Walking	Yellow	235km
Public bridleway	Walking, horse riding, cycling	Blue	57km
Restricted byway	Walking, horse riding, cycling, driving non-motorised vehicles, e.g. horse-drawn carriage	Purple	3km
Byway open to all traffic	Walking, horse riding, cycling, vehicle driving	Red	9km

Area wide access

There are no public rights of way on the Crown Lands of the New Forest. Instead the Law of Property Act 1925 applies. This Act gave the public the right to walk and ride horses anywhere on the Crown Lands of the New Forest, and still applies today. It applies to the forestry Inclosures as well as to the open heathland areas and Ornamental Woodlands.

The Crown Lands, which are managed by the Forestry Commission, make up the majority of the accessible land. Instead of designated public rights of way there are many tracks and paths to follow and you may walk freely across the open heathland and through the woodland. The Crown Lands are also crossed by a network of gravel tracks of varying width and surface quality. These paths may cross streams, and although the streams may be bridged there is no requirement to do so. Much of the Open Forest is Valley Mire or Bog, so it is advisable to always wear stout footwear when walking, and to be cautious when crossing wet or boggy land.

CROW Act, 2000

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) gave the public the right to access, on foot, areas that were mapped as heath, moor, down or mountain, or were registered commons. These areas are collectively known as access land. In the New Forest, there is no land which is classified as moor, down or mountains. In addition, most of the areas of heath within the National Park are located on the Crown Lands, which already had a right of access granted by the Law of Property Act 1925. This meant that as the public already had access rights to the Crown Lands, the CROW Act didn't give the public any additional access rights in these areas. Within the National Park, the Forestry Commission has dedicated as access land all the woodland areas that it manages which do not have access rights under the Law of Property Act 1925.

Outside the Crown Lands the CROW Act gave a legal right of access to the remainder of the access land within the National Park, which comprises 1,852ha of open country (heath) and 700ha of registered commons. Most, if not all, of this access land was already available to the public by agreement or by custom.

The recognised waymarking symbol indicating key entry points to access land is illustrated below. However, as virtually no new access was created by the CROW Act within the National Park, there is no necessity to erect new signposts to display this sign.



Access Land symbol



Other forms of Access

Permissive Access

A landowner may allow the public to access their land with his/her permission. This is called permissive access. This may be linear or area wide, but there are no legal rights associated with this permissive access, and it can be withdrawn at any time.

Promoted Routes

Two long-distance routes pass through the National Park. These are the Solent Way and the Avon Valley Path. Promoted routes usually follow public rights of way wherever possible, but also use roads where necessary. They may also cross area-wide accessible land, and may occasionally follow permissive paths!

The **Solent Way** is a 97km long walking route which runs between Milford-on-Sea in the west and Emsworth Harbour in the east. Following the path from west to east, it enters the National Park at Hurst Spit near Keyhaven and passes through Lymington to Buckler's Hard where it runs north along the Beaulieu River. From Beaulieu, the path crosses Beaulieu Heath on the Beaulieu Road before exiting the Park at Hardley. In total, 30kms of the Solent Way are within the National Park.

The **Avon Valley Path** is another promoted route which passes through the New Forest National Park. This 55km walking route extends from Christchurch in the south to Salisbury in the north. The Avon Valley Path crosses the western boundary of the National Park several times between Bisterne and North Charford. In total, 11kms of the Avon Valley Path lie within the National Park.

Both these promoted routes are marked on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps by a green diamond.

Access for all

The National Park Authority aims to enable as wide a range of people as possible to enjoy the special qualities of the New Forest National Park and to involve local communities, landowners and users in this work.

The Authority is working with land owners and managers to install accessible gates and to improve path surfacing on some routes to enable people of all abilities to enjoy the Park. The Authority will also be producing detailed accessibility information about many sites and areas which will help people to decide which sites are suitable for them to visit.



Access through gate at Wilverley Inclosure

Further reading/ useful information

Other New Forest National Park Authority factsheets
 Official website for the Countryside Code and maps of
 Open Access land : www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk
<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-rights-of-way-general>
 Access page : <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/row.htm>

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk Factsheet available on CD, in large-print, or Braille on request

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