

Out and about on foot and bike in Finchampstead

Perhaps because of the unusual times in which we live, many more of us have been out and about locally this year, discovering the wonderful countryside around Finchampstead via our extensive network of Footpaths and Bridleways, on foot, bike or horse.

Footpath



**But do you know where you can walk
and where you can ride?**

Bridleway



Whilst we want everyone to enjoy the countryside as much as possible, there are some rules which we all need to follow to respect property, protect the landscape and avoid injuring others.

What is the 'Countryside'?

Countryside is land away from large towns and cities; the land and scenery of a rural area either used for farming or left in its natural condition. Some very small amounts of our local countryside are owned by the borough council, but the great majority is in private ownership.

A '**Public Right of Way**' gives you a right to pass across private land along the line of the right of way, which is usually about a metre wide. In lowland areas like Berkshire, it does not give you, your pets or your children the right to wander across open fields or through private woods away from the line of the path. There are different sorts of Rights of Way.



A **Public Footpath** (usually indicated by a yellow arrow on a sign) means that you have the right to go along the path on foot. You don't have the right to cycle or ride a horse on it unless the landowner has given you their permission. If you do so without their permission, then you are trespassing.



A **Public Bridleway** (usually indicated by a blue arrow on a sign) means that you can walk, cycle or ride a horse along the path.

You can't take a motorised vehicle (motorbike, quadbike or car) along either path without the landowner's permission; if you do, it's not just trespassing but a Road Traffic Offence.



You can freely walk, cycle or ride along
Byways and Restricted Byways.



Why are these rules important?

Well, firstly, **Rights of Way** cross private land and the people who own it are not obliged to let you do more than the right of way permits.

But there are also very good practical reasons. **Bridleways** are built with the specific intention of letting horses pass along them. They are wide enough for them and generally have a good enough surface to cope with it. That is why they are also good for cycling.

Footpaths are designed for people travelling on foot. They are usually too narrow for horses or cyclists, they may have gates or stiles, they might have tight corners or steep inclines and the surface has not been built to accommodate heavy loads. If they are used by cyclists or horse riders, the paths can often be damaged very quickly and, more importantly, dangerous situations can easily arise for both riders and walkers.

Finchampstead Parish Council is working with local landowners and Wokingham Borough Council to expand the options available for horse riders and cyclists. However, it will take time and money to bring suitable paths up to the standard required and make them safe for everyone.

So, when you are next out and about exploring our marvellous countryside, please bear the following points in mind:

- Take time to check where you can walk and where you can cycle or ride
- When crossing private land, especially farmland, please do keep to the path and keep children and pets under control
- Don't leave rubbish behind, especially 'doggy bags'!
- If you are riding or cycling on a bridleway, please keep your speed down and be courteous to other users.

That way, everyone can enjoy the 'great outdoors' which we are so lucky to have on our doorsteps.



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