

Dealing with Livestock on Walks

Cattle

Are they Cows or Bullocks?

You should be able to tell which they are from a reasonable distance. Then you will know what behaviour they are most likely to exhibit.

Bullocks

Bullocks are generally curious but not often aggressive. They are likely to approach you out of curiosity but will usually stop before they reach you. Keep together and walk at a steady speed through the field, skirting round the group if necessary rather than exactly following the footpath.

Cows

Cows will usually take less interest in you, but if they have calves with them, they will be protective of them and can get aggressive if you get between them and their calves. Keep together and walk at a steady speed as you cross the field. Take the long way around rather than cutting through a group of them.

Bulls

There will only be one adult bull in a field. They are territorial and won't like you crossing their field. Find another way round.

Occasionally you'll see a bull in a field of cows. You should be able to cross the field if you keep your distance from the bull and keep close together as a group, but if you have any doubts, find a different route.

Sheep

Sheep are usually quite timid and will avoid you, but be careful when there are lambs in the field. Don't get between the parents and their young. Take a slight detour if following the path exactly will cause the sheep to scatter into two groups.

Horses

Talk to Horses

Horses have been reared to interact with people (their keepers and riders) and calm voices will help the horse remain calm.

No Surprises Please

If emerging from woodland or cover onto a bridleway or road where there are horses, talk or make some noise to alert them to your presence in advance. If you get too close before they notice you, they can panic and kick out or throw their riders.

Approach from the Front

If approaching a horse in an open field, don't sneak up behind them or they may kick out! Approach from the side or front, so that they are aware of you before you get too close. Again, gentle talking will help them know you're there before they see you.

Dogs

Guard Dogs

You may come across guard dogs on farms or as you pass by other property in remote areas. They should be separated from the public footpath by a fence but will more than likely bark at you through the fence. Just keep going on the footpath and don't approach them or even make eye contact.

Your Dog

If you have a dog with you on walks, please take consideration of where you are. The walk is likely to pass through farmland at some point, and where there is livestock the dog should be kept on a short lead and under control. If your dog is small enough, pick it up when crossing a field of livestock.

The walk leader may ask you and your dog to wait at the entrance of the field while he/she leads the rest of the group across the field and then comes back for you. This allows other members of the group to cross the field before the livestock notices the dog.

Only if things have gone really wrong and you are under direct threat from an animal, should you let your dog run free. This action may save you from getting hurt and your dog can probably out-run the cattle, but letting your dog run free when there isn't an emergency may well create one!

General Advice

Stick Together

When crossing a field of livestock, the leader should try and persuade the group to walk together at the same speed and remain as a tight group. Most livestock will view the group as one large object and avoid it.

Gates

In general, you should leave gates as you found them. Sometimes livestock are occupying two connected fields, but water may only be available in one field. Closing the connecting gate will deprive some of the animals of drinking water.

If a gate has a notice attached stating that it should be kept closed, close it behind you, even if you found it open.

Report Incidents

If you are unfortunate enough to encounter trouble with livestock, you should report it to the local authority, giving details of the incident and identifying the farm. OS maps usually include the names of farms, but if not, use the grid co-ordinates when reporting the incident.