



PROBLEMS and SOLUTIONS whilst WALKING

Cattle

Guidelines for walking through a field with cattle.

When crossing a field of cattle walk steadily and quietly – and if with friends stay as one group. If there is a person who is nervous of animals, keep them in the middle of the group with others around them.

Do not deliberately split animals from the main herd and consider walking around the field and close to the hedge. This will give you added protection if you are approached by a herd of young ‘teenage’ bullocks - they will have to stop running before colliding with the hedge.

Cattle and Dogs

Cattle see dogs as a predatory threat and may charge as a way of defending themselves. If it is a medium or large dog set it off its leash and let it find its own way out of the field – it can run faster than you! If it is a small dog, pick it up and hold it close to you. The dog becomes part of you and is no longer a threat.

For more information on why cattle react as they do see the section on Bovine Behaviour at the end of this document.

Electric fencing

Technically any electric fence across a PROW is an illegal obstruction. However if there is an ‘insulated handle’ break adjacent to a stile, for example, this is usually looked upon favourably. If there is no break and there is a suspicion that the wire is live then listen for ticking at the control box by the battery supply or use an electric cable detector (available from countryside shops) or touch the wire with a blade of grass or lightly touch the wire with the **back** of the hand.

Close to the top of the metal poles supporting the electric cable will be a plastic ‘collar’ that is an insulator. If you have to cross a wire that you suspect is live, lift the nearest wire support by its insulator and place it on the ground. Once clear, reinstate the support using its stirrup. Becoming more common are all-plastic wire supports which means that they can be held anywhere away from the wire.

Ploughing and Cropping

If it is at all possible a farmer must not disturb the surface of a PROW that either crosses or follows the edge of a field. If it is necessary to disturb the surface it must be made good within 14 days of the first disturbance so that the definitive line is apparent. Tractor wheeling is considered the minimum reinstatement. If there are subsequent disturbances they must be rectified within 24 hours. The minimum width for a cross-field path is 1 metre and for a hedge path is 1.5 metres (2 and 3 metres respectively for bridleways). Legally you are entitled to walk through a crop as long as you stay on the line of the PROW.



Trespass

Whilst walking on a PROW you are not trespassing irrespective of what the land is used for. If it is necessary to deviate from the permitted route for any reasonable reason, such as cattle or a crop for instance, take the shortest practical route. If you have to leave a field, try and stay on land belonging to that farm. In law you are not trespassing if you take reasonable steps to surmount an obstruction.

Intimidation

It is illegal to put up signs like 'Private Property' or 'Beware of the Bull' to discourage people from using a PROW. If a land owner or farmer challenges you, try to explain the situation using the OS map. If he/she continues to protest – retreat gracefully! Report any of these types of situations to the Society who will pass the incident on to the CC Enforcement Officer personally.

Path Clearing

It is Cornwall Council's duty, usually delegated to the parish or town council, to maintain the surface of a PROW. The landowner is responsible for preventing the hedgerows from obstructing a PROW. If, in your walking in the countryside, you come across a PROW blocked by vegetation that you wish to walk or you think could be a benefit to the local community, then let your Society know and we can incorporate it in the path clearing programme. Light clearing of annual growth like brambles and nettles that obstruct stiles, which can be cleared with a pair of secateurs or a bash with a walking stick, can be done at any time of the year. However the clearing of the heavier growth, in a green lane for instance, should only be done out of the bird nesting season which is from March to September.

Reporting

On the Cornwall Council website on the title page of 'Public Rights of Way Interactive Mapping' there is a link under 'Feedback' to report any issues with footpaths, bridleways and byways. Alternatively, either use the report proforma on the Society's website under 'Rights of Way' or contact any member of the WCFPS Committee (details at the top of your Walk List) who will ensure that all the details are collected and passed to the appropriate officer at County.

It is hoped that this information will help members to have more confidence when walking in the countryside.

Bovine Behaviour

In nature there two types of animals. There are the predators (meat eaters) who usually hunt singly, or in small packs/flocks, and have binocular vision and their prey (herbivores) who live in large herds/flocks and have almost 360 degree of monocular vision.

Domesticated cattle are descended from the prehistoric aurochs. Consequently, their instincts and behaviour are tuned towards survival and not becoming a meal for a carnivore. They prefer to stay in the open, away from areas where a predator could hide. They like to stay in a herd so if they are attacked the odds are that only one animal on the periphery will die whilst the others can escape.



To that end, the dominant animal in the herd spends most of its time in the middle of the herd. Unlike sheep who continually call to their lambs to follow and avoid predators, a cow will hide her calf and then return to it if she becomes anxious. Consequently, cows will become anxious if they are separated from the herd and especially so if separated from their calf. Most animals, cattle and humans included, have their own private space. Thus, if you get too close to a cow it will move away as long as it is not cornered/trapped. To avoid upsetting a herd of cattle, a walker should avoid fragmenting a herd especially if there are calves and it is preferable to walk around the perimeter of a field so that the cattle are not pushed towards the hedges.

So, fear is most easily engendered in cattle by isolating them. However, they can become apprehensive if confronted by strange objects [walkers in varied clothing], a new location [recently turned out young animals] and signs of fear in other members of the herd. They can exhibit their fear by ceasing to graze and raising their heads, ears 'locked' in the direction of the perceived threat, increased tail swishing, increased vocalisation, restlessness and/or increased defecation.

Because they are herbivores cows spend most their day head down eating. Therefore, their senses have been attuned for survival whilst grazing. Their eyes are set on the side of their heads so they only have a small angle of binocular vision, straight ahead, so that they can see what they are eating. The rest of their almost 360 degree vision is monocular [except towards their tail] so that they can detect predators [and walkers] by noticing movement against a background. They have a heightened sense of smell that can identify individual members of the herd [and their farmer]. Hence why cattle can be anxious when a vet visits as they detect disinfectant and associate it with the cattle crush and being subjected to testing. Also, walkers will smell different and arouse suspicion. A cow's hearing is attuned to the higher pitched sound of a calf in distress. Therefore, the sounds of young children or the yapping/barking of a small dog can be unsettling for a cow.

All these reactions by cattle are instinctive behaviour handed down over the millennia. But they also have learnt behaviour. Cattle, especially young animals, may be used to being fed from a bucket or a bag by the farmer. So, when a walker appears, they may think they are about to be fed and come running across especially if you are carrying something in your hand. They are also used to being milked daily so will progress to and loiter near gates as milking time approaches and possibly be reluctant to move back. They will also learn that an electric fence hurts and will avoid wires even when they are not turned on. Tape or twine may have the same effect.

As well as considering cattle as a whole, there is also the issue of bulls. A farmer is not permitted to leave a bull on its own in a field that has a public footpath in it. Nor is he allowed to have a bull in a field with dairy cattle such as Friesians, Holsteins, Jerseys, Guernseys, etc. But he may leave a bull in a field with beef cattle. In the end it does not matter whether or not you can recognise a particular breed of cattle. All animal owners must ensure there are no dangerous animals, be it a cow, horse or dog, loose in a field with a public right of way (PROW).