

Summary guidance on managing woodland and forestry access

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers the legal right of access to most land, including woodland and forestry, provided access rights are exercised responsibly. Land managers in turn are obliged to respect access rights and take proper account of the right of responsible access in managing their land. For further information on the law see <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/act-and-access-code>.

- Locked gates, cattle grids and traditional access controls such as kissing gates, squeeze and ladder stiles are no longer acceptable unless there is a suitable adjacent alternative, such as an unlocked gate at least 1.5 m wide. These types of access control also conflict with the Equalities Act 2010 because they present a barrier for walkers unable to climb a stile, anyone using a wheelchair or pushing a buggy.
- Locked gates or barriers which are necessary to restrict illegal vehicular access, prevent theft or straying of livestock or to stop poaching or fly tipping are not a problem provided suitable adjacent alternative access is provided such as a gap or self-closing gate minimum 1.5 m wide.
- Fencing around new planting areas is often essential and is fine provided there is suitable access provision for walkers, cyclists and horse riders in line with paths and tracks.



Finding the least restrictive option which works for everyone

The aim in deciding on design of access controls should be to choose the least restrictive option to achieve what you need without unreasonably restricting non-motorised users from exercising their legitimate access rights. Any structure which presents an obstruction should be removed or suitable alternative access provision made.



Where livestock control isn't an issue, leaving a gap at least 1.5m clear passable width alongside a vehicle barrier or locked gate is the simplest solution and maintains access for all types of legitimate recreational access.



Where deer or livestock control is important, a suitable gate at least 1.5m wide should be installed adjacent or close to any cattle grid or locked gate. Make sure the ground under the gate and on the approach either side is level and firm.

2-in-1 combination gates incorporating a self-closing 1.5m section are an easy solution. A drop-bolt on the main section of gate prevents illegal vehicular access.





A side-gate minimum 1.5m wide adjacent to a locked gate, cattle grid or barrier will stop vehicles but still allow walkers, cyclists and horse riders access. Offset self-closing hinges will ensure the gate is stockproof. Commercially produced 1.5 m self-closing bridlegates with an integral H-frame are worth the investment to minimise future maintenance (available from www.centrewire.com and www.secureafield.co.uk)

Remember that closure of any paths, tracks, or sections of a wood or forest during harvesting or timber extraction should be limited to the minimum duration and extent. Alternative routes should be clearly signed well in advance and be suitable for all legitimate path users. Access should be reopened when work is not underway e.g. at weekends.

Preventing illegal motorcycle use

Where motorbikes are a problem, horse stiles (or bike traps, as they are also known) may be a practical solution and the least restrictive option. Provided the basic principle, and provided they are the least restrictive option. There are two basic designs: parallel or offset sleepers critically spaced 1.2 m apart to catch the sump of a motorbike, or a barrier with a lowered central section which allows horses to step over.



Provision of an adjacent kissing gate maintains unrestricted access for walkers. A RADAR gate would maintain access for wheelchairs too.

On this example in South Lanarkshire, some local riders complained at first that their horses were reluctant to go over the horse-stile, but with gentle persuasion and perseverance riders soon found that this type of access facility is easily negotiated by horses and riders of all ages and abilities.

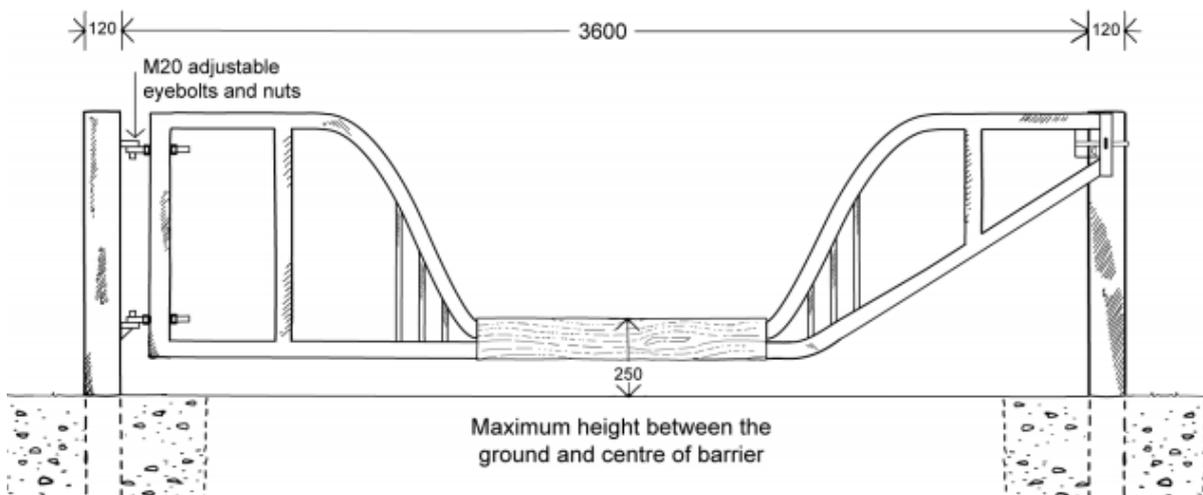
- ✓ Horse stiles need to allow at least 1.5m clear width to allow a horse through without catching the side rails.
- ✓ The ground between the sleepers, and either side of the horse stile, needs to be firm and well drained. Most horses will balk if the section between is boggy.
- ✓ Any kind of structure designed to stop motorbikes works better alongside local campaigns working with motorcyclists to find mutually acceptable solutions.



Informal wooden horse stiles such as this can easily be created but may be less effective at stopping determined motorcyclists than parallel sleepers or metal barriers



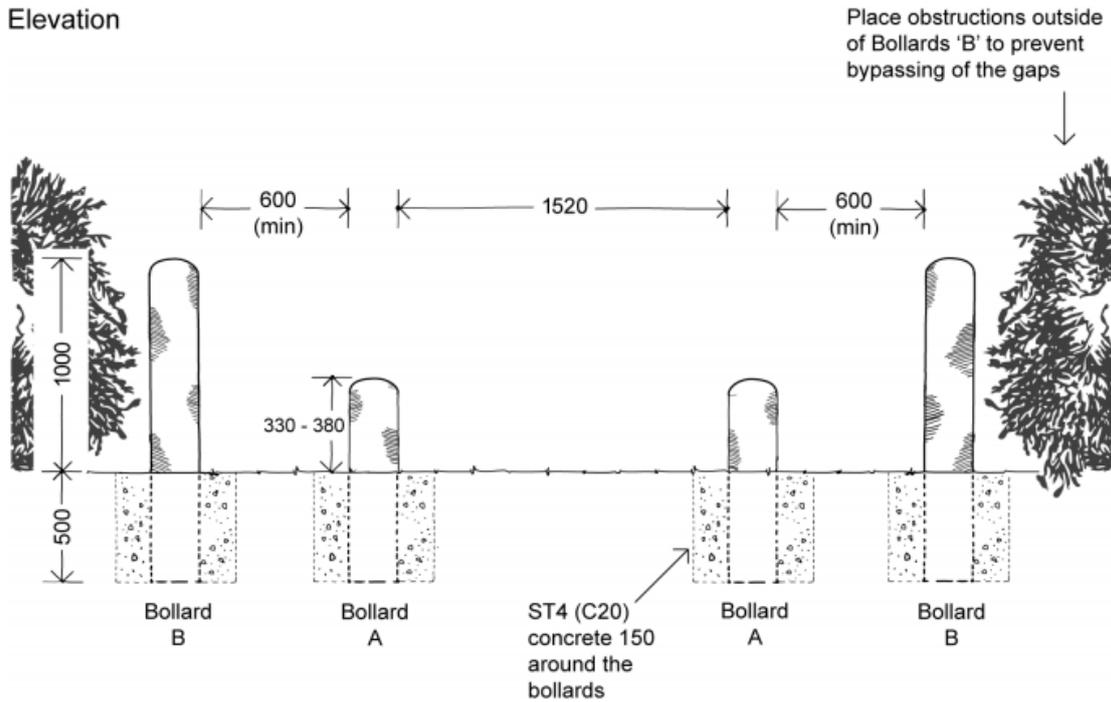
Elsewhere in Scotland, lockable vehicle barriers incorporating a horse stile have been used to good effect to restrict vehicular access whilst still maintaining equestrian access. The gap in the middle needs to be a minimum 1200 mm wide at the bottom and 2000 mm at the top. Timber rails over the lower section stop horses clanging their hooves on the metal.



The disadvantage to any of these designs of horse stile is that they do not allow access for wheelchair users or people pushing buggies. This should not be used as an excuse not to use horse stiles where appropriate. The basic principle of inclusive design remains the same – priority should be on using the least restrictive option.

Controlling vehicle access but still maintaining access for carriage drivers

The Kent carriage gap uses critically spaced bollards to control illegal vehicle access while still maintaining access for walkers, cyclists, wheelchair users and carriage drivers. Use of one or more retractable bollards will allow access by legitimate vehicles.



For further information on design and location of access controls and technical specifications for any of the above see <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/resource/outdoor-access-design-guide>.

Signage

Signs discouraging or banning unauthorised motor vehicles are entirely justifiable, but make sure the wording of any signage is clear and legally compliant without discouraging or restricting legitimate recreational access.

