



Horse Riding on Headlands and Field Margins

The British Horse Society (Scotland) is concerned that some horse riders are behaving irresponsibly by damaging crops as they ride through or around cropped fields, and have issued a plea to all riders to familiarise themselves with their access rights and responsibilities.

Scotland

Fields of growing crops are excluded from access rights but the Scottish Outdoor Access Code states quite clearly that horse-riders, as well as other access takers, can exercise their access rights around the margins of fields in which crops are growing, even if the margin has been sown with a crop. Grass grown for hay and silage is regarded as a crop – and therefore excluded from access rights - when newly sown or when it reaches above ankle height (about 20cm), when it is far more susceptible to damage. Access rights can be exercised in fields of stubble and fields where grass is grown for hay or silage before it reaches this stage of growth.

Chairman of BHS Scotland's Access Advisory Group, Vyv Wood Gee said: "We appreciate that the current agricultural support system puts pressure on farmers to crop right up to the field edge. Access rights still apply around the field margin, even on the crop when there is no alternative, but riders are responsible for doing whatever necessary to minimise any damage or disturbance wherever they are riding – including areas such as crop margins or field headlands. If there is a parallel track, or other alternative to riding around the edge of the crop, then any responsible rider should use it."

BHS (Scotland) has issued the following guidance to help riders, based on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

When exercising access rights, riders should avoid causing unnecessary damage by:

- **Using any paths or tracks.**
- **Using the margins of the field. If the margin is narrow or has been planted, keep close to the edge in single file.**
- **Ride along any unsown ground (providing this does not damage the crop).**
- **Using parallel or alternative routes on neighbouring ground.**

Remember to take account of weather and ground conditions. The wetter the ground, the stickier the soil, and the greater the number of riders, the more easily damage is likely to result.

For further information see <http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk/resources.html>

May 2012. BHS Scotland, Woodburn, Crieff, PH7 3RG.