



Horseytalk.net BRIDLEWAYS WATCH

More letters sent to the National Trust, Surrey County Council, BHS Surrey, Headley Heath Riders Association and Surrey Local Access Forum

Those Gates on Headley Heath.

"My horse has been hit in the face by the handle and hit on the bottom and the leg by the gate"

Tasha writes

"Having only moved to ride in Headley Common a year ago, I was looking forward to the riding I would be able to use for the foreseeable future, and which I had heard so much about. Sadly I have not even managed a year of being able to ride freely round Headley Common as my riding has been restricted to when I have company to ride with me to negotiate the gates.

"As a person with hip problems I am limited to riding for a maximum of 1 - 1 1/2hrs, 2-3 times a week and Headley Common was perfect as I could reach beautiful countryside without having to waste time on roads. I can not keep getting on and off each time I have to negotiate a gate. Not only does this cause me pain, but it's not fair on my horse's back to have me constantly pulling myself on and off, (which isn't done the BHS way due to my problems).

"My horse is a wonderful old chap and very understanding with me and I don't wish for either of us to be harmed by having to negotiate gates which are heavy and close extremely fast, and for his ridden life to be cut short by back damage. When we have negotiated the gates together with me still on him, he's been hit in the face by the handle and hit on the bottom and leg by the gate. Thankfully he's a chunky chap and it didn't damage him, a finer breed would probably not be so lucky.

"The gates on Headley Heath are not just the only danger, so are the cows left to roam freely around the health, given at any moment to leap out and say "moo" when least expected."

Riders begin to get tough Brenda Spencer writes to both Surrey County Council and the National Trust

"You will be aware that the speed at which these gates are closing is causing problems to many riders, both experienced and inexperienced. They do not provide 'Access to All'. Reference to the survey of riders using Headley Heath on www.headleyheathriders.co.uk. Background information will show the speed of the gates and the catching of tack are putting riders in serious danger.

Can you confirm whether or not an Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken by the Council and/or the National Trust before the gates were erected and licensed to ascertain the impact on disability equality? If a Full Impact Assessment did not take place was the first part of the process undertaken, ie an initial screening to see if such an assessment was necessary? Is it possible to have a copy of the required Screening Report.?"

You tell 'em, Brenda

From Mrs Lorraine Halls

I feel that I need to write with my concerns regarding the new enclosure of Headley Heath. I have had horses in Headley for 23 years, and have always enjoyed the fact that we had such fantastic easy access hacking. I now find myself having to do more roadwork as the heath is no longer that. I have a 9 year old daughter who I sometimes do ride and lead with, so I can not go on the heath as it is impossible to get myself on horseback and my daughter on her pony on a lead rein through a gate safely. It is a very difficult manoeuvre to do.

The gates are difficult enough on your own on a skittish or young horse. I have also walked with my daughter and taken other children on their ponies to the heath to try the gates for themselves. Again this is very difficult as the children's arms are not long enough so they end up pushing the gates in hope they have time to get through but inevitably the gates fly back onto the ponies before they can position themselves to get through.

These are children who are old enough to ride the heath together without parents and have done in the past, but are not happy to have to dismount 3 or 4 times out on a hack. That is when ponies can start to misbehave and get into trouble. I have hacked out with friends on the heath a couple of times but have found the gates swing back far too fast and so making the horses start to rush through the gap nearly catching my leg as we go.

Other times the gates have been pushed too far and not closed behind us so we then have to try and get close enough once again to try and close the gate. Horse riding is a very pleasurable past time and Headly was very popular because of the relaxing hacks available, but I know quite a few people who have now moved away from Headly as they can't get their horses to do the gates even with dismounting.

This reflects in the fact that there are a lot of vacancies in livery yard surrounding the heath where as there was always people on waiting lists to get to the yards.

I have also noticed people with livery yards not close to the heath advertising gate free and cow free hacking!!!!

It is a very sad time when we can't enjoy the heath as we used to.

I personally won't walk my dog there as I have always had a fear from cows after being chased by a herd at the age of 8 when walking through a footpath through their field.

Will we have to wait for a serious accident to happen before this problem is sorted?

Bridleways. Signpost. Veal's Farm

Those gates at Headley Heath. Still more complaints.

Says Naomi

"Horse riders who use Headley Heath have also sent emails expressing their concerns and reporting accidents to the following organisations:

The National Trust, Surrey County Council, the local BHS bridleways association - Headley Heath Riders Association and members of the Surrey Local Access Forum.

Emails have gone unacknowledged and unanswered."

[Join the debate in the Forum](#)

Those gates at Headley Heath More letters sent to the National Trusts

From Lucie Jones

I would like to bring to your attention the many issues i have with Headley Heath since the gates and wire fencing have been erected. I first contacted you on the 12th March to notify you of my horse being hit by one of the closing gates. This same



problem has happened on at least four other occasions, the most recent being two weeks ago. This has meant that I now avoid riding on the heath where possible. The quick closure of the gates also means I am no longer able to ride and lead young children on ponies as there is absolutely no way that two horses would be able to get through the gates. After a meeting with the Surrey Countryside Access Forum members on the heath I had hoped that some measures would be taken to slow down the closure of the gates. If any action has been taken then it is far from adequate. Something needs to be done to make the gates significantly slower in closing.



Another issue that was raised then was the case of the mounting blocks. We were told that there would be three blocks, with a larger block in the middle with two smaller ones either side in case of a horse moving off before the rider has mounted. Unfortunately I have only found that two of the mounting blocks are like this. On a few occasions I myself have fallen off the highest mounting block as my horse has moved off before I have mounted. I was very lucky that I did not cause myself serious injury. I drop like that could easily end up with twisted knees, sprained ankles or even broken bones if a rider is to fall into the path of their horse. I would appreciate it if you would be able to make some amendments to the mounting blocks.

I also know that the state of the ground surrounding the gates has been mentioned before and that it should be in a satisfactory condition. However the ground surrounding at least 5 of the gates is not of a suitable standard. The ground around them is already very deep and as soon as we have rain the ground becomes very boggy straight way. This can easily lead to the injury of horses legs, especially in the deep sand or bog that is created when it rains.

On the 13th March I had my first confrontation with the cows on the heath. This was before they had been released on to the heath. So far I have been able to avoid any major confrontations with the cows however I have been forced to take alternative routes to get around them. I have also had to make sure when riding out with others that we avoid the heath as their horses are frightened of the cows and we can not chance meeting them.

The problems with the enclosure of the heath is also causing problems with livery vacancies in the area. At my own yard I have two vacancies that I am having trouble filling and in the yards immediately surrounding my yard there is at least 5 vacancies. This is very unusual as these three yards usually have long waiting lists, and to fill these current vacancies we will need to advertise. From people we have spoken to that have moved away from the area the main cause has been the enclosure of the heath. We now no longer have the amazing easy hacking that we used to. This is seriously affecting our businesses.

As a result of the above problems I now no longer ride as much on the heath. Previously I would ride at least four times a week on the heath but now it may be once every two weeks. It now means that I end up riding on the roads during rush hour which is not only dangerous for me but also annoying for those drivers that meet me. It now also means that my rides have at least an added 20 minutes if I go on the heath and also my rides avoiding the heath take much longer.

I would appreciate it if my concerns over the enclosure of the heath could be addressed in some way and that I could go back to riding more regularly on the heath.

- Have you had problems with bridlegates?

[- Please e-mail us and tell us your story](#)

"Please can you either remove the gates or alter them so that I can enjoy the heath again?" Claire, aged 13

This is the e-mail Claire Stallard-Penoyre sent to Surrey BHS, the National Trust, Headley Heath Riders Association, Surrey Local Access Forum members, Surrey County Council, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Dear Sir & Madam,

I am annoyed with the gates on Headley Heath because they won't stay open when you let go of them and they come flying back towards you. They are too heavy to push open away from you and I have to open them by pulling the gate towards me (my pony does not like going through them when they are pulled back towards her).

I have been on the area tetrathlon team for my pony club and we had no problem with the gates on those competition courses.

used to enjoy going out for a hack on the heath on my own but the gates spook my pony and me with all of the bangs and slams and these wind my pony up.

Please can you either remove the gates or alter them so that I can enjoy the heath again?

Yours sincerely,

Claire

Claire Stallard-Penoyre (13 years)

Ps: Thank heavens I have not met the cows!

Those gates at Headley Heath. Still more complaints.

[Says Hazel Imeson](#)

I am writing to voice my concern about the gates which are now in place on Headley Heath.

My daughter Katie used to ride on Headley Heath with her friends. She is 13 years old and I have every confidence in her riding ability and that of her friends to allow her to ride over on the Heath without an adult.

Katie has done Tetrathlon for 3 years, part of this sport involves riding a cross country course on horse back and opening and going through gates within a timed period. She has encountered many gates during the time she has done this sport and has never had any problems with them. However, the gates on Headley Heath now prevent her from riding over there without the aid of someone on foot to open the gates for her. They are difficult for her to reach down to and are very stiff. When she gets it open, the gates swing back very quickly and catch either her legs or the pony.

I am very worried that she may be injured or seriously hurt if I were to let her ride over on the Heath without someone on foot to open the gates. I would be most grateful if you will bring my concerns to the attention of those who need to know, as I feel a serious accident is waiting to happen.

[Says Helen Jones](#)

I am writing to express my concern about the new gates recently installed on Headley Heath. I ride and walk regularly on the Heath and have done so for many years. I am also a long standing member of the National Trust.

The problem is that the newly installed gates do not stay open long enough to allow a horse to pass through safely. The action of the closing gate can frighten the horse and even cause it to panic, endangering the rider and making the horse reluctant to go through the gate again. I have already informed you of an incident where my leg was trapped against the gate by Ashurst Drive car park. It was only luck I was not injured.

Where the gates are close to the main road, the situation is more serious. As many drivers travel extremely fast they may not be able to avoid a horse panicked by the closing gate, which could cause a major accident.

To address my concerns, I suggest the following should be carried out

1. Increase the amount of post and rail fencing surrounding these gates.
2. Full risk assessments for each gate should be carried out, if this has not been done already.

It is with much regret that this situation has made me consider withdrawing my membership of the National Trust.

- Have you had problems with bridlegates?

- [Please e-mail us and tell us your story](#)

- The more we can prove how dangerous these gates are, the more chance we will have of getting them modified or, better still, re-moved

Those gates. Another accident. The horse spun round. The rider ended up underneath the horse wedged against the gate. She is still having back problems.

"It was such a terrifying experience, " she says "I had shut it away mentally."

She has, however, agreed to talk to Horseytalk.net on condition we do not reveal her name or identity.

Because of the importance of the issue, we have agreed.

"I had an accident with a National Trust gate at the Monument on Reigate Hill. It happened over two years ago. "

"I was riding my 16.3hh coloured dressage horse along the top towards the Monument on my way back to the livery yard. A family were flying an aeroplane style kite which was upsetting Tonto, who was normally rock solid about nearly everything. I shouted to them to hold the kite as there were an awful lot of people about on bicycles and children in pushchairs and I felt a bit vulnerable."

"They did hold the kite until I was just about to go through the gate which is quite tight for a large horse to go through."

"Unfortunately as I was going through they threw the kite into the air and my stirrup caught on the catch, Tonto spun round and, therefore, my stirrup couldn't release and through the force of it all I ended up still in the saddle but nearly underneath Tonto and wedged into the five bar gate. "

"Fortunately the stirrup leather broke and he was able to get up off me but I have to admit it was one of the most frightening situations I think I will ever experience."

"My horse was ok but obviously shaken, people did run to help me and were very kind and I probably shouldn't have ridden home but I had no option."

"It was such a terrifying experience I had shut it away mentally, I have been having problems with my upper back and have now had it x- rayed and I have got some damage there,"

- Have you had problems with bridlegates?

- [Please e-mail us and tell us your story](#)

Those gates at Headley Heath.

Jill Straugham tells us about another near-miss and the "total lack of regard for Health and Safety."

"I have been riding on Headley Heath for the past nine years. When the Highland Cattle left I was saddened. The new fencing went up, gates erected and the Gallaways introduced. All of this I watched, accepting that changes sometimes need to be made. I continued to ride on the Heath on a seven year old mare and together we have learnt to open gates or dismount when necessary. An inconvenience. "

"My tolerance of the changes have now been completely undermined by an incident whilst out riding with two other competent riders. At the gate which



leads out to the lane by the house with geese, one of us opened it outwards with the intention of holding it open for the other two riders. However, before it could be held, the gate swung back much too quickly and caught my friend's stirrup and foot, wedging them firmly between the horizontal gate slats and the upright handle. "

"Had she not been on the most bomb-proof and reliable mount the outcome could have been catastrophic. Her leg was caught at a very awkward angle and the saddle began to be pulled from the horse. Keeping her mount calm and using all her skills, she was eventually able to dismount and wrench the stirrup from the gate. I am not one normally to dwell on 'what might have been' - but please imagine the possibilities."



'Health and Safety' rules often derive a snort of disbelief from myself and dismay in the seeming departure of crediting anyone with commonsense over recent years. However, here I must gape in amazement at the total lack of regard for Health and Safety when the issue of enclosure and gates was first brought up by whomsoever is responsible. "

"The possibilities for disaster are too numerous to mention. It is only a matter of time before those who made this ill-measured decision will have to come to terms with the consequences of their actions."

- Have you had problems with bridlegates?

- [Please e-mail us and tell us your story](#)