



## Horseytalk.net BRIDLEWAYS WATCH

### We moved for the Bridleways.

But most of them are unuseable, says Linda Wright

We moved to a Shropshire location a year ago having surveyed the local OS map and noted the significant number of bridleways around the property.

Sadly the map appears a total fiction. Scarce any of the bridleways are usable. One right on the doorstep does not appear to exist at all, one is accessed via a narrow gate perched up a steep bank through an overgrown hedge and if you can make it to the other side into the field, there is electric fencing anyway! Another has electric fencing run all the way along its length with a gap of about 3 feet left between it and hedging and a gate to open and close within this - physically impossible to use safely on even the quietest horse. Another is blatantly padlocked.

There appears to be scarce any bridleway direction signs at all and the list goes on!

I am aware that the BHS are running a logging exercise and I would love to participate but I run two businesses, have a family and scarce get time to even ride, let alone walk and document these routes.

This is not apathy, just frustration because I really would like to do something but the problem is so huge I don't know where to start. Most important, for me to take action in my own neighbourhood would most definitely be to alienate myself from my new farmer neighbours, a prospect I do not relish.

I have previously been lucky to live in areas where the local council are very keen on footpaths and bridleways. Why is it that this only applies in certain locations? All councils have the department - why is not every council taking action to monitor these routes and keep horses and riders off the roads where their presence is increasingly unsafe? Councils are also very loath to permit those of us with riding arenas to allow their use by our friends and neighbours and any commercial hiring is absolutely frowned upon. Just where then are horse owners meant to ride?

I believe the support of the government is needed in this and farmers need to be encouraged to think positively about horse riders. On the converse side of this, horse riders need to remember their manners when crossing other people's land. Sadly not all do and hence the few spoil it for the many.

There is huge support in the country for cycling with paths made etc - why is the horse riding community not considered in the same way?

The whole issue is a vicious circle - the landowner deliberately or through ignorance makes the bridleway unusable therefore it becomes unused. There a comes a point then when someone moves to the area and tries to use it and can't - then you have to prove continuous use over decades to get it opened again. A delightful catch 22 if ever there was one.

I will find time to do my bit as best I can some day, but in the meantime a higher level action is essential if we are not to soon have bridleways in only one or two very select parts of the country.

Linda Wright North Shropshire

