

Ride UK: The National Bridleroute Network

A Briefing Note

Under the project title 'Ride UK', the British Horse Society launched plans for the National Bridleroute Network in May 2000.

The aim of the project is to create a comprehensive network of community circuits, and strategic linear routes for horse riders across the United Kingdom. This briefing paper introduces the Ride UK rationale and concepts.

Introduction

Horse riding is a significant and growing participant sport and leisure activity.

More than 2.4 million people ride regularly, and many more ride occasionally as a weekend or holiday activity. Riding is a sport and leisure activity that is available to people from all walks of life, to men and women, to young and old, on equal terms.

Bridleways and byways are an important but undervalued national treasure. Few other countries can rival the network of paths or the diversity of British riding country. Massive post-war development of roads, housing, industrial and retail sites has fragmented the countryside and destroyed the coherence of the ancient rights of way network. The links between town and country have been weakened. Yet the majority of riders live in towns and suburban areas. In the countryside, the roads are now heavily used and are becoming increasingly unsafe for equestrian use. There are at least 8 accidents a day between vehicles and horses. A network of safe, off-road bridleroutes will promote safe leisure and healthy sport for riders, walkers and cyclists.

The British Horse Society is working to create a National Bridleroute Network.

Starting with existing national routes (such as The Ridgeway and the Pennine Bridleway), regional routes (including

Swan's Way, the Icknield Way) and promoted circular rides, the network will build up over time into a comprehensive network of paths available to all users.

The National Bridleroute Network will fill the gaps.

The creation of promoted Community Circuits will ensure riders have easy access to local, mostly motor traffic free routes. Regional Routes will link the Community Circuits, so allowing longer rides, and reducing the need to travel by horsebox or trailer to places of equestrian interest. The National routes will consist of major strategic routes across the country linking up the regions and, potentially, linking into Europe too.

The Network will promote active sport and healthy leisure.

It will provide opportunities for quiet, outdoor activities in harmony with the environment. In a 1998/9 national surveyⁱ, 53% of people said their main purpose in owning a horse was to go hacking.

The Network will increase access for all.

Bridleroutes represent best value as they are open to riders, cyclists and walkers. Money spent creating and promoting links will therefore benefit the whole community not just horse riders. The development of new Community Circuits will ensure that everyone has access to safe leisure and sustainable transport.

Economic diversification can benefit rural areas.

While most riders live in towns and cities, the development of the National Network will enable people to ride further afield. There is already a growing demand for horse-based holidays, and the provision of well-signed routes through rural areas will bring money into the local economy. Cyclists spend, on average, £35 per day per person on cycling holidaysⁱⁱ, straight into local pubs, shops and bed and breakfasts.

Ride UK: The National Bridleroute Network

A Briefing Note

Riders will spend this on themselves plus more on their horses.

Toolbox

The British Horse Society has created a web site for the project at www.ride-uk.org.uk. This provides information about the existing and proposed network, answers to frequently asked questions, guidance on materials and structures and advice on procedures. Reports on how different problems have been overcome will be published, so that councils can gain from the experiences of each other.

Extent and Planning

Surveys of promoted routes are being undertaken by the British Horse Society to see what exists on the ground and what is feasible to create the strategic network. At the same time, Parish, Town and Community Councils, Riding Clubs, Bridleways Associations and other access groups and organisations are being encouraged to develop local Community Circuits. These will typically be between 5 and 15 miles in length providing safe, mostly off-road routes. In most cases, the routes selected will also be of use to walkers and cyclists, but in areas where width is restricted or particularly high usage is expected, it will sometimes make sense to have separate routes for the different user types.

Strategic planning will enable highway authorities to take community-led requests for paths into the newⁱⁱⁱ rights of way improvement plans. Local planning authorities will be able to include the vision in their local plans. By publishing a plan for each area in terms of safe route development, it will enable authorities to look for synergies with other schemes and to include appropriate schemes in grant

package requests. Partnership between local authorities, equestrian user groups, landowners and farmers will be important to the success of the scheme.

Key Initiatives

To develop the Network, the British Horse Society is:

- Creating a strategic route development plan for each region
- Working with landowners, farmers, parish and community councils, riding clubs and bridleways associations to complete Community Circuits from the existing fragmented network
- Assisting highway authorities on road safety issues by contributing to Local Transport Plans
- Building up a one-stop shop for technical information and guidance for implementing new routes
- Actively seeking sources of funding to assist the creation process

Conclusions

Ride UK brings together common objectives in health, sustainable development, recreation and sport, through effective partnership between land custodians, local government and the voluntary sector. The British Horse Society commends it to those who can assist in its development.

This briefing note may be reproduced freely without further permission providing it is reproduced in its entirety.

ⁱ British Equestrian Trade Association, Jan 01

ⁱⁱ *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 Dec 99.

ⁱⁱⁱ Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 duty for county and unitary authorities