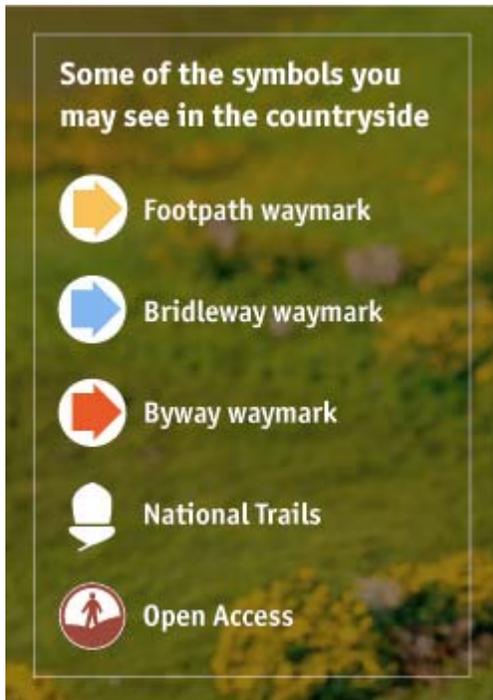


Finding your way

- signs, symbols and maps



Highways authorities are legally required to erect a signpost at every point where a footpath, bridleway or byway leaves a metalled road (i.e. one with a hard, usually tarmac surface), unless the parish council agrees that it is not necessary.

Rights of way

Signposts for public rights of way must state whether the route is a footpath, bridleway or byway, and may give a destination and distance.

To help people follow the route, waymarks are often installed along a right of way. These are usually arrows that are fixed or painted to stiles, gateposts and sometimes trees. The arrows are usually colored according to the right of way

These colour codes are sometimes repeated on finger posts. You may find other colours and designs used locally.

The colour of the waymark usually reflects the legal status that is currently shown on the highway authority's definitive map. Waymarks cannot, by themselves, change the status that might exist. For example, a path might be shown on the definitive map as a bridleway and be waymarked in blue. But this does not invalidate any unrecorded vehicular rights – if they exist. Anyone who is certain they can prove those additional rights may want to exercise them. If they are prosecuted for doing so, the onus will be on them to prove that the rights do exist.

Other types of symbol

In addition to waymarking, there are many routes for walkers and riders that are marked with their own distinctive symbols to identify the route and help people to follow it. These may be used alongside, or incorporated into, the waymarking arrow. For instance an acorn symbol is used to waymark National Trails.

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Access land

You will be able to find information about Access Land on the ground, at 'access information points' located on or near Access Land. The information will be kept as up to date as possible. Access information points will be publicised on the Ordnance Survey website www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk OS Explorer maps and on maps of Access Land on the Countryside Agency website www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

Most signposts and waymarks are protected as traffic signs and it is an offence to remove or deface them.

Misleading signs can deter some people or make them feel uncomfortable, even when they know they are on the right path. It is an offence for anyone to put up a sign or notice containing false or misleading information that is likely to deter people from using rights of way shown on the definitive map, or access land. You should report any problems to the Highway Authority through the appropriate county council. (or for access land in a National Park, the appropriate National Park authority).

Ordnance Survey maps

With a dedicated, large-scale map you can plan and follow a route through the countryside. They are especially useful when a path is difficult to see on the ground. Although there are many walking guides which contain maps as well as text, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps are recommended because they show a variety of land features as well as rights of way.

The most useful OS maps to help you enjoy the countryside are the 1:25,000 Explorer series. The scale is about 2.5 inches to 1 mile, (4cm to 1km). All public rights of way on these maps are shown in green and are based on information from the highway authority's definitive map. The Explorer maps also show land that has area wide access on foot (and on wheelchair where practical). Many small details of the countryside are shown, such as field boundaries, and they include information such as campsites, permissive paths and areas of open access.

The 1:50,000 Landranger series (about 1.25 inches to 1 mile) also shows most public rights of way (in red) but does not show as much detail as the 1:25,000 maps. There are also smaller scale 'Tourist Maps' covering some popular tourist areas and showing visitor attractions over a wider area.

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As well as showing public rights of way from the definitive map, OS maps show other roads, tracks and paths. Not all of these are open to the public and therefore OS maps include a statement that “the representation on this map of any other road, track or path is no evidence of the existence of a right of way”. It is usually safe to assume that you can drive, walk or ride along those roads and lanes that are shown in colour on the maps, unless there are indications to the contrary. But some minor lanes and tracks are shown uncoloured; these are sometimes known as ‘white roads’. It will often be obvious, from the map or on the ground, whether a particular lane or track is public or private. If it is the drive to an estate or a track to a farm it could well be private.

You should ask the local authority for advice before setting out, if you are unsure. If you find that a right of way does exist on a white road (usually it will be a byway open to all traffic), ask your highway authority if it can be added to the definitive map, so that it will eventually appear on the OS map.

Of course, maps cannot show changes that occur after they have been published. The only up-to-date source of information is the definitive map itself.

The Ordnance Survey publishes a free brochure giving details of all its maps. Many libraries keep a good supply of OS maps, in either the lending or reference sections. You can buy OS maps from most bookshops, and they can order those not in stock.