

We believe that everybody should have a right to enjoy and participate in the spiritual, physical and mental benefits of nature and that to deny this to the people simply because they cannot or have difficulty walking is undemocratic.

Walk Don't Walk is a campaign to improve access to Britain's countryside for the elderly, less mobile and disabled.

Government studies indicate that by 2010 farming will account for less than 65% of land use in the UK. Subsidy is therefore being switched from exploitative models of farming to stewardship schemes aimed at preserving habitats and maintaining our unique heritage for everyone to enjoy. However as more and more of the countryside becomes managed for leisure one key element seems to be missing, access.

Although the Disability Discrimination Act of 2005 means that access has been improved to many public buildings many parts of the natural environment remain inaccessible. Over 85% of Britain's landscape has no level access or interpretation for the 3 million registered disabled and the 20 million people over 65 in this country (a figure set to rise from 38% of the population in 2004 to 43% by 2031).



The view from Haytor towards the Teignmouth estuary

Better access to the countryside is crucial in order to address the increasing need for improving levels of fitness and reducing the costs of the national healthcare budget. According to the Ramblers Association 77% of UK adults, or about 38 million people, say they walk for pleasure at least once a month. Based on national averages this would translate into approximately 22 million elderly and disabled ramblers.

Walking is the best choice for regular, healthy exercise. Unlike most other forms of exercise walking is free and requires no special equipment or training, is safe and low-impact, with a low risk of injuries and accidents. Regular walking can reduce the risk of a number of health problems including coronary heart disease, alzheimer's disease and bowel cancer.

Steps forward have been made. The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2005 gives people the opportunity to walk freely across mapped 'access land', without sticking to paths. In England, the public now have 'open access' to around 940,000 hectares (3,629 square miles). This represents 7% of the country.

The new right covers most recreational activities carried out on foot, including walking, sightseeing, bird-watching, climbing and running. The new right of open access does not include camping, cycling, horse riding or driving a vehicle but does include mobility scooters and buggies.

All that's needed now is somewhere to go...



Photo by kind permission of the Disabled Ramblers

**Walk
Don't
Walk**