

Guide to Country Signs

Scope

This guide provides an introduction to signage for path developers and managers. Signage and wayfinding can be a complex subject therefore, the following covers the basic minimum's signage provisions you as a developer/manager need to consider.

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Guide to Country Signs

1 Introduction

Note: in this guide the term Path is used to include footpaths, hiking paths, cycle ways, bridle paths, tracks and other non-motor vehicle routes.

Getting lost – failing or not knowing how to get where you want to go.

This is an important factor for older and many disabled people. Many people have limited reservoirs of energy and need to make the best use of what energy they have. Good maps and signage allow people to judge their ability to visit a location. Distance, surface finish and inclines are factors which must be taken into account. Refreshments, rest points and sanitary facilities all contribute to making a location or route accessible. Wasting energy by travelling the wrong way or finding that the slope or surface becomes impassable is not only frustrating it can place people at risk.

Good signage increases safety and comfort on country paths.

The inclusion of signage on paths is an important amenity not to be overlooked. Signs may assist in the navigation along a path or a path network, warn of approaching roadway crossings, regulate path use, or interpret natural features. Providing good signage on paths is often overlooked and managers in tourist areas should consider how well their paths are signed.

Standard highway signs can be used for many purposes (see Highway Code) and other Department of Transport (UK) signs guidance.

The inclusion of signage in a path project should be planned from the outset, but each project is vastly different, and signage should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Maps can be used to assist orientation and give guidance into the conditions users will meet along the route, i.e. advance warning of steep inclines, narrow or un-surfaced paths, cliff edge routes.

Over use of signs can cause visual clutter; too many lose impact and reduce the sense of freedom found in open areas. Some messages might be better communicated in leaflets or general publicity at visitor centre or public buildings, or by using your ranger service.

There are six basic types of signs.

- **Directional signs** give street names, path names or numbers, direction arrows, mileage to points of interest, and other navigational information.
- **Cautionary signs** warn of upcoming roadway crossings, steep gradients, blind curves, and other potential hazards.
- **Regulatory signs** tell the "rules of the path" by prohibiting certain uses or controlling direction of travel.
- **Mandatory signs** – fire sign escape signs and similar warning and prohibitive signs.
- **Information signs** offer educational information on the trail environment (see Country Path Service Areas)
- **Objective signs** provide information about the actual path conditions, including grade, cross slope, surface, clear path width and obstacle height. This allows users to make more informed decisions about which trails best meet their path needs and abilities. For example, a wheelchair user may be able to travel over very steep gradients provided the path is at least 12000 mm wide. Learning this information at the path head will help this user avoid the potential frustration of having to turn back if the path becomes too narrow.

Good signage provides a harmonious and aesthetically pleasing arrangement in the following three areas of design:

- **Communication** — What signs say, to whom, and for what purpose; how they say it; where the signs are located; and how well signs communicate.
- **Graphic Design** — How typography, maps, diagrams, iconic and coded symbols, and colours are used to organise information, emphasise messages, and help to create an overall visual identity.
- **Hardware Design** — How signs are fabricated and installed, their size and shape, and how they are maintained and integrated within the physical environment.
- **Standard designs** – many signs have standard formats, text and symbols. Where these exist use the standard sign, colour and symbol. Changing something as simple as colour can make the sign lose its meaning.
- Signs should be placed where they will be clearly visible. Hedgerows and overhanging branches should be kept clear.
- Placement is dependent on the sight lines (eye-level) and relative to user speed of each path.

- Signs should be placed at a constant distance from the path edge, 1000 mm is preferred. Lettering less than 50 mm in height is not recommended for directional signs.
- Text should be avoided on regulatory or cautionary signs wherever possible.
- Multiple signs may be mounted on the same post, but the primary message should be in the top position on the post.
- Tactile signage may be considered on some routes to aid people with low vision.

Note - People with hearing impairment use their vision to communicate. The ability to do this is dependent on environmental conditions. In addition to acoustics, the light for lip reading, the colour or pattern of a back ground against which a person is seen may have impact on the ease of communication. The multiple tasks such as navigation and wayfinding while holding a conversation may be more challenging if these conditions are difficult. Tactile signage might be appropriate in some locations, for example some busy sites, or around buildings, but its use is likely to be limited in the environment of open countryside. Braille is unlikely to be necessary, except perhaps for information point material.

When deciding priorities in introducing new signage on path networks and to access land considerations are likely to be: -

- Deciding where signs are really required and where information could better be provided in other ways;
- Agreeing the location and content for access information points and arranging their installation;
- Arranging for the location of access information points to be depicted on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps and the Countryside Agency (England) and Countryside Council for Wales websites;
- Agreeing the locations for the new path route and open access signs and symbols and installing them on site;
- Putting in place mechanisms to put up restrictions notices in the interests of public safety, prevention of fire, nature conservation, and heritage preservation;
- Agreeing specific messages about nature conservation, in conjunction with (as applicable) the
England - Countryside Agency and English Nature;
Wales – Countryside Council for Wales, CADW,
UK - National Parks and Forestry Commission, Local Authority Path and highways departments, Local Access Group (relating to accessibility and disabilities),



- Agreeing your policy with regard to contributing to costs or help for other types of signs, including informing the public about other types of restriction, warning signs and other signs in land management interests; You should talk to the Local Access Forum on this matter.
- Agreeing a policy for removal of signs that are no longer required.

DRC CoP Part 3 Example - There is no signage to assist people with visual impairments within the visitors' centre with the result that some people become disorientated and are unable to locate the toilets or cafeteria. The service provider would be expected to consider what reasonable steps might be taken to remedy the situation, including the provision of signage.

2 Organising Visits to the Country

When organising a trip to the country either for yourself or for others remember the country is different to the town and that shelter, help and assistance may be miles away when you need them.

Whether planning for older people, young children or people with disabilities remember they can be more vulnerable to stress and strain, temperature, wind chill, climbs and slopes. Where an organiser is expecting to conduct a group including people in the foregoing categories they should always be prepared for the worst weather which can be expected during the season. Even in midsummer mountain passes and sea coasts can receive unseasonable weather in UK this could include winter type conditions. Fog and mist can arise in any season and precautions and plans should take this into account, can you navigate to the nearest shelter? In case of injury or illness the organiser should know how to make rough shelters (see Appendix) and lay a safe fire.

Organisers should never take people into locations which are potentially hazardous without notifying someone and where they are available park or forestry wardens etc. Where possible before taking the group, the organiser should travel the planned route on foot so that any barriers or hazards can be identified and planned for. Check that any mobile phones or radios taken along will work at all points along your planned route.

Even for a short hike across country with people who are vulnerable consider the following - Clothing, drinks and some items which can be used to make shelter should be shared through the group along with at least two compasses. Every member of the group should

have a torch and a whistle to call for help (whistles can be heard further and need less effort than shouting).

2.1 Wayfinding - Signs, Maps & Literature

Trip organisers should make sure they have suitable maps of the area. When moving away from roads, Ordnance Survey maps should be used to provide detailed descriptions of the area. These maps may not be suitable for all members of a group and organisers should ensure that a buddy system is in place so that those with low vision or cognitive or learning impairment are partnered at all times by another person who can read the map. All members of the group who might become separated from the group and experience difficulty in reconnecting should be given and written itinerary with contact phone numbers. Group members should be made aware that signage may not be as frequent as in urban areas and that there may be no obvious person to ask the way.

Local Authorities and others responsible for route maintenance should ensure that signs and where deemed appropriate local maps are in place. Signage along a route should appear at each change of direction as a minimum. Where long stretches have no turn an occasional confirmation sign will reassure those with less confidence. Use of numbered routes based on local maps is a good way of providing information and guidance especially where place names may be in an unfamiliar language and place names difficult to remember. (For example, in Wales, Cornwall & West England, Manx, Scotland, Ireland, some outside visitors may experience difficulty with names).

2.1.1 Liability

The act of sign posting in itself does not confer liability on the party doing the sign posting. What is important are the following considerations:

- Is the signpost accurately sited?
- Does it display accurate information?
- Is the sign legible?
- Does the signpost direct users along a safe route (according to the characteristics of the visitors) or expose them to certain hazards?

A sign warning of the danger of electric shock should be displayed at the entry point to any Fields or areas where electric fences are used. The power could stop pacemakers and may cause injury to other people.

3 Waymarking & Signage

3.1 Waymarking

The requirement of the Countryside Act 1968 is for signposts wherever a path leaves a metalled road and showing, so far as the highway authority consider convenient and appropriate, where the path leads, and the distances to these places. Convenient and appropriate means to the public: not to the highway authority. To ensure that everyone can enjoy walks good signage and waymarking are essential. Highway authorities have a duty to put up signposts at all junctions of footpaths, bridleways and byways with metalled roads. The signs have to indicate the classification of the path (whether it is a footpath, bridleway or byway) and, unless an officer has decided that it is neither convenient (for the users) nor appropriate to do so, must also include destinations and distances. The Countryside Act also requires waymarks to assist people unfamiliar with the locality in following the route of the path. By agreement with the highway authority, parish (England) and community councils and even local and national user groups or individuals can help with these duties.



There does not appear to be a commonly agreed signage system for footways/ footpaths or bridleways, there are for cycle routes.

The widely varying (generally missing) signs used to designate footpaths and bridleways is confusing to most people and can be very difficult for people with low vision or learning difficulties. The following are suggested for use in order to reduce confusion.

Additional text may also be included giving the names and distances to various locations served by the route. The text should be at least 75 mm high, and 25 mm added to the height for every 10 metres distance the sign should be read.



Tactile information at waist height may help people with visual impairments. A geometric shape, such as circle, square, triangle or star, could be used along a particular route

Consider informing path users of steep inclines and other barriers they may find along the route.

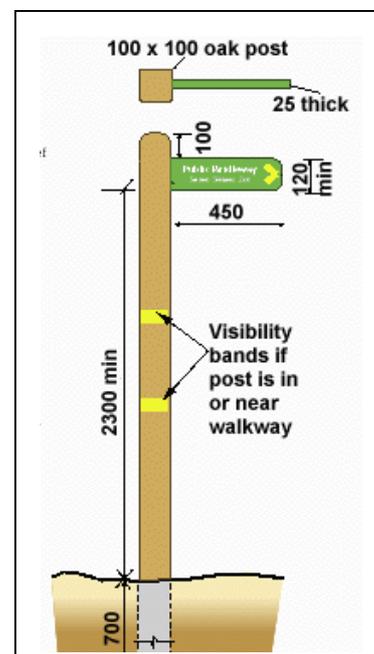
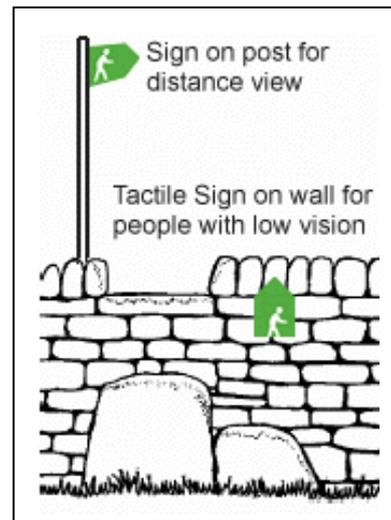
Signs need to be available at two levels, the upper above 2500 mm height for distance viewing. The second 950 – 1200 mm height for the guidance of those with low vision, this sign should provide tactile information symbol raised 3-5 mm above sign background.

An information warning tile/paver can be placed on the surface at the sign location of the stile or gate to inform people with low vision that the route and sign exist.

Signs should inform clearly and logically, use of local slang names should be avoided. Naming should follow that given in Ordnance Survey maps. They should be large enough, contrast with their surroundings and be well lit. Lettering used should be large enough and should be legible and contrast with its background.

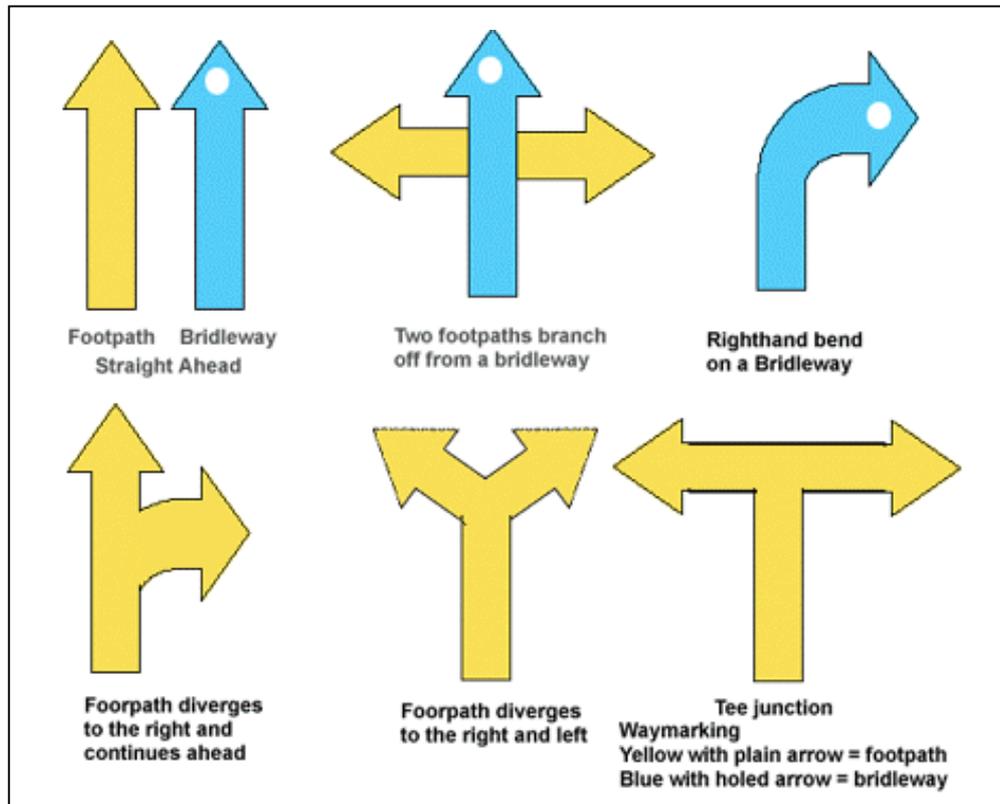
The words should be as short and simple as possible.

It is advisable to walk routes on which direction signs are to be placed. There should be a sign at the start and at the end and at logical changes of direction in between. Additional explanatory signs may be needed to reassure on a long route. The wording used should not change along the route.



Waymarking Arrows are often made by the use of emulsion paint on trees or posts. These can be useful for sighted people but have limited utility for those with low vision.

In their general shape and the way they are used they are similar to the arrows used on road signs and surfaces by highway authorities.

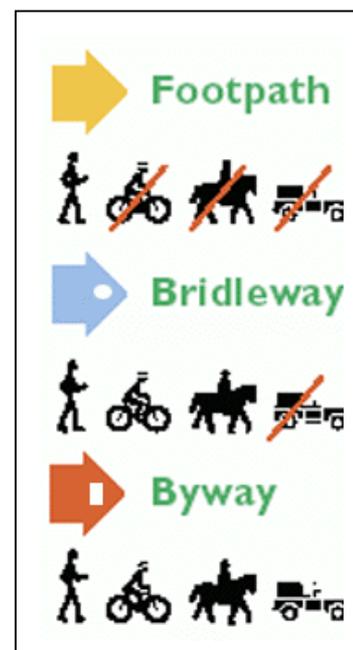


The arrows have a solid triangular head of 50 to 75 mm long and wide, and a shaft of 100 mm x 25 mm wide. The sizes may have to be varied, of course, when painted on restricted surfaces.

Where possible the accessibility of the path indicated should be given using a standard rating code.

To differentiate footpaths (yellow) from bridleways (blue) and byways (Red) paint in accordance with the Countryside Commission may be added. Additionally where tactile signs are provided a circular hole in the arrow head indicates a bridleway and a square hole to indicate a Byway.

As currently used these signs are often too small for people with low vision to identify and should have a raised tactile finish to aid use.



The preferred height is 780-1200 mm above the ground surface, a second arrow could be placed at 1700-1900 mm height on bridleways.

Ideally waymarking should be sited to show what happens immediately ahead. Remember to waymark for people approaching from all directions. Three waymarks are usually necessary at 'Y' junctions, and four at cross paths. A confirmatory arrow on each path, shortly after the junction, may be useful.

Where a path crosses a large open space and its course is not easily seen, it is helpful to paint readily-distinguishable patches (or the crossbar of a gate or stile) at the exits so that they can be seen from the far side of the field.

Signs must not be fixed to live timber, because nails or screws may inhibit tree growth and damage saws.

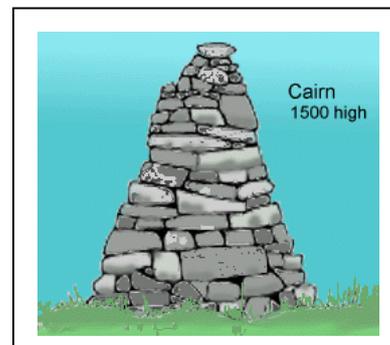
Signs should not be placed where plant growth will obscure them. Many routes are shown on maps giving route numbers. Where the path network is complex, it is useful at junctions to show these numbers alongside arrows or on the arrow itself.

3.2 Landmarks

Landmarks can take many forms; the basic need is for something which is identifiable and describable. A cliff face or an unusual shaped tree, a stream or water fall can all be used as recognisable landmarks. In some places tall steeples or smoke stacks can provide long distance guidance and orientation.

They should not become lost due to snow fall and should be located where mist and fog are less likely to hide them

Cairns are a cheap robust method of marking along open moor land and similar places. They should be sited close alongside the route but not on it.



4 Signs

As a service provider, you will need to decide the extent to which the DDA applies to your plans for signage. Where the DDA might apply, you are only required to make adjustments that are reasonable.

The Merseyside Code of Practice, give the following relations ships to sign board and text colour

Background	Board Colour	Text/Graphics colour
Red brick or dark sandstone	White	Black, dark green, dark blue
Light brick or light sandstone	Black / dark	White or yellow
Whitewashed walls	Black / dark	White or yellow
Green vegetation	White	Black, dark green, dark blue
Back lighted sign	Black	White or yellow

Property signs need not be obtrusive, but should use clear large text to give the name and facilities. Inclusion of standard sign symbols make the sign more quickly read by all and help those with learning difficulties.

The text should contrast with the backboard while the signboard colour should not cause it to merge with the background. Signs should be placed where they can be seen, preferably



lighted, and do not obstruct pedestrians. Placing a tactile sign close to the edge of a walkway improves accessibility for those with low vision.

For information notices that can be read close, a summary in 28 point is recommended, and the main body in 14 point bold (minimum).

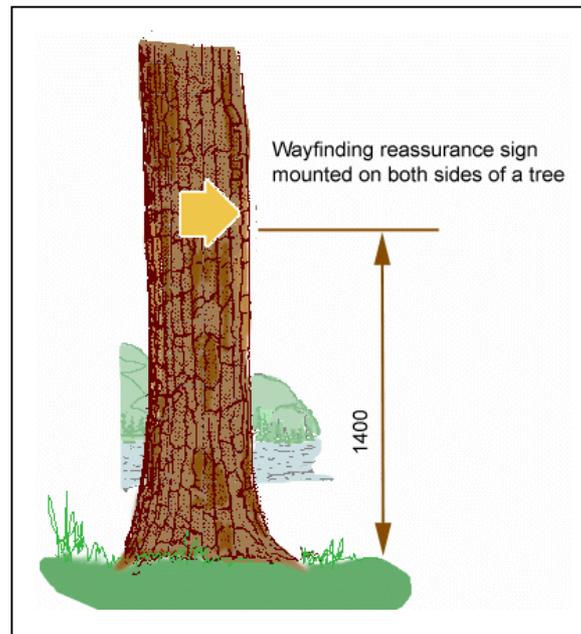
Where open access land is at a distance from public rights of way or car parking a signed route should be established. Making a formal route helps keep people from wandering in



areas where land owners wish to exclude wanders. The sign should be clear and adhere to the standard symbols and usage.

4.1 Sign Installation

The amount and type of signing and reassurance markers should be detailed in a sign plan for the area you are working in. Consistent with the plan, signing and marking should be esthetical appropriate, the number necessary for guidance and reassurance, visible, in useful locations, and well maintained. Reassurance markers are used to mark the path corridor when the tread may be difficult to follow.



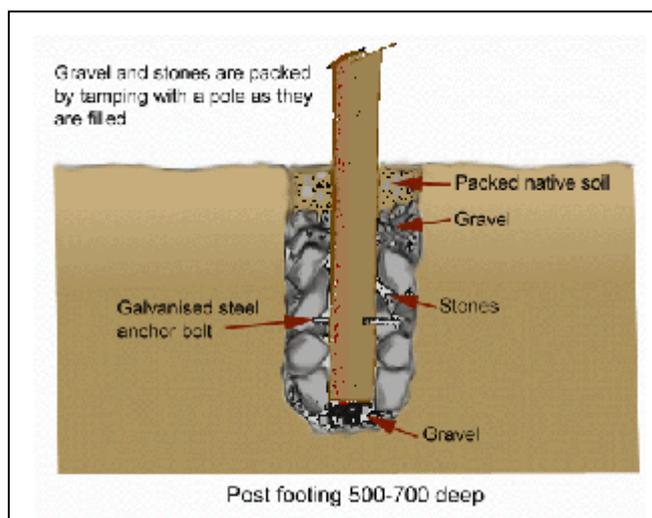
Path signs are made of a variety of materials; the most typical is a routed wooden sign. These are not suitable for all signs as they cannot be read by touch. On paths likely to be used by people with low vision signs need to be colour contrasted and have raised characters and symbols for touch reading.

Signs mounted on trees should not damage them if you do not use copper or galvanised nails as these can kill a tree.

Place markers carefully. They should be clearly visible from any point where the path could be lost. This is a judgement call, and often controversial, based on the challenge level served by the path and the conditions along it. Higher challenge paths need fewer markers; lower challenge paths may need more. If part of a path has reassurance waymarking, all of it should be marked.

Be conservative with way markers. It's better to improve path surface visibility than to rely on markers except on high challenge paths where a formal path/surface may frequently be absent.

Signs are usually mounted on posts or trees. Signs in rocky areas should be mounted on a post seated in an excavated hole or supported by a well constructed cairn.



Post need to be well seated into the ground and the footing reinforced by packing the hole with stones and gravel. This helps with drainage and reduces rot. The base of poles should be well coated with preservative before installation.

Signs should have holes predrilled so they can be attached to the post. Level each sign and secure it to the post using galvanised fixing screws. Galvanised hardware reduces rust stains on the sign. Galvanised washers should be used between the head of the screw and the sign face to reduce the potential for the sign to pull over the screw. In areas where sign theft is a problem, use speciality theft-prevention hardware. The bottom edge of signs should be set about 2100 mm above surface level on pedestrian routes, 2700 mm on cyclist routes and 3700 mm on equestrian routes. The sign's top edge should be 50 mm below the top of the post.

Consider placing secondary tactile readable signs at 1400 mm height, these should not project into the pathway.

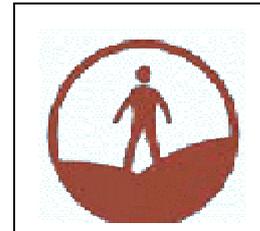
Where snow build-up is a problem sign may need to be higher to provide clearance during winter. The average snow depth should be added to the foregoing heights.

Painted way arrows are sometimes used for visibility. Be absolutely sure to use a template of a size specified in your path management plan. Always use the specified colour. Don't let just anyone start painting way arrows. They should never be painted on rocks.

4.1.1 Survey and Planning

Before you start work installing a sign,

- Check at the sign location, where signs point, what space is available, fencing requirements, ground conditions at installation points, presence of underground and overhead utilities (gas, electricity etc.)
- Decide who are likely to use the signs; do you need larger text and tactile marking? Make sure you comply with Disabilities needs and those of specific user groups.
- Determine the wording/layout, symbols, get a proof design from the manufacture and obtain manufacturers installation recommendations.
- Specify insertion depths, post fixings, preservatives or other treatments.
- Get any approvals from relevant authorities (e.g. highways department).



The CDM regulations may not apply for a few sign posts. The contractor should provide a method statement and risk assessment

as they are still needed. Key issues are protecting the public who will want to use the path while the signs are being installed.

Before the contractor starts work mark locations clearly where and signs are to go and where the signs are to point. Ensure they are put in correctly; signs are in the right place, and pointing in the right direction.

5 Cairn Construction

Two or three stones placed on top of each other do not form a cairn and they are easily scattered when kicked by vandals or passing animals. They will also be lost at night, by plant growth or snow cover.

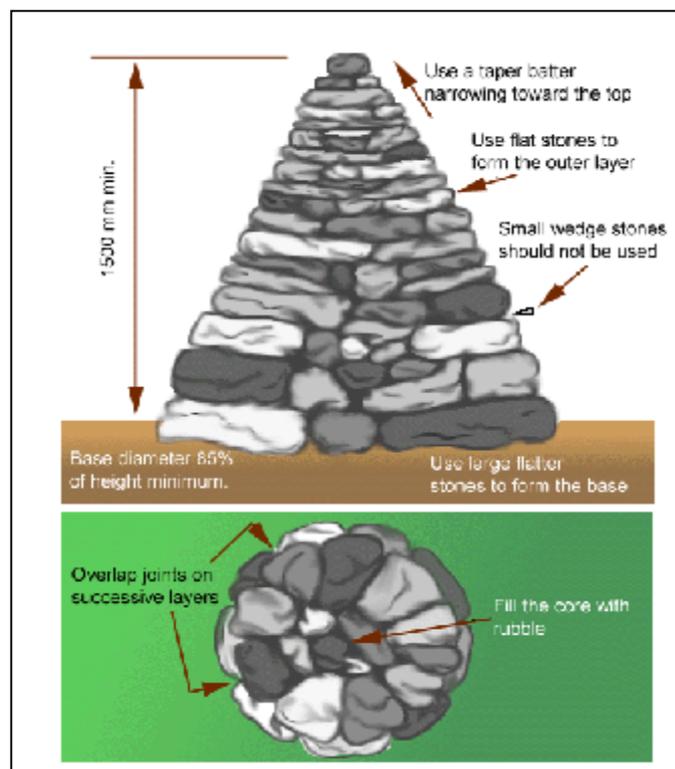
Cairns are similar in construction to rock crib and consist of circular tiers of flat stones. Small stones should not be used as wedges as they will make the structure unstable when frost causes the wedge to slip out.

Where vandalism is a problem the outer layer of stones may need to be cemented to prevent scattering of the cairn.

The minimum height should be 1500 mm.

Make the base wide enough to provide enough batter for stability. In really deep snow country, it might be necessary to add a long guide pole in the centre as the cairn is built. An anchored pipe can be built into the centre of the cairn so a pole can be replaced or removed each summer.

Cairns should be spaced closely enough that during typical episodes of poor visibility (such as dense fog) the next cairn is visible in either direction from any given cairn. Cairns should be placed on small rises (not in dips or swales). Check your cairn placement plans during typical poor visibility conditions to ensure continuity.



6 Guide Posts

Small guide posts (1000 mm high) are sometimes sited alongside (500 mm from the path edge) the path to provide guidance for people with low vision. These posts are found with a tapping cane or colour contrasted to the background and preferably with a reflective white band 75 mm high near the top.

6.1 Winter Posts

Guide posts are used in similar locations to cairns. They are most useful in snowfield crossings to keep traffic in the vicinity of the buried path.

Guide poles should be long enough to extend about 2 m above the top of the snow pack during a typical winter, and in areas with long grass. Guide poles should be at least 100 mm in diameter and preferably have white reflective bands at intervals up the post to reflect torch light. They should be sturdy enough to withstand storms and snow pressure.

7 Information Features

See also our related guide 'Interpretative Sign and Brochure Design and Content'.

7.1 Access Information

Under the CROW Act Access information points are places where the public can find up to date information about access land in the locality. They will be publicised on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps and on maps of access land on the Countryside Agency (England) and Countryside Council for Wales websites.

All access information points should: -

- Provide long term information about access land (and other types of access where relevant), including its location, generally on a map, and people's rights and responsibilities;
- Provide short term information, for example about restrictions;
- Include contacts for further information;
- Be available for the public to view 24 hours a day;
- Be made of durable materials, well maintained and kept up to date.

7.2 Design

Part of the draw to a country path is to gain an understanding of the environment through which it passes. Many paths will offer the opportunity to educate the user on various aspects of the landscape, including native plants and animals, geologic history, local history, and local economy.



Information facilities should offer a view of the item to be interpreted, whether that be the agricultural landscape in general or a specific type of tree.

Some paths may capitalise on many Information opportunities, while others may offer them as educational diversions incorporated into rest areas. Each path's Information program is different and the extent of interpretation should be based on the use of the path, with interpretation facilities decreasing as user speeds increase. The following guidelines offer some general suggestions regarding Information facilities.

- Information facilities should include signage with ample graphics, to engage users of all ages. They may also include any of the rest area facilities listed above.
- Consideration should be given to providing information in a format that is accessible to people with vision impairments and people with limited language skills. This may include providing objects that can be examined or manipulated, or providing audio information in addition to written information. Providing tactile readable 3D maps of the area providing text and audio in alternate languages (dependent on likely visitor numbers)
- Information facilities should be placed wherever there is a significant cultural, historical, or natural phenomenon.
 - Small Information facilities may be implemented more frequently if user speeds are low, as on walking/hiking paths.

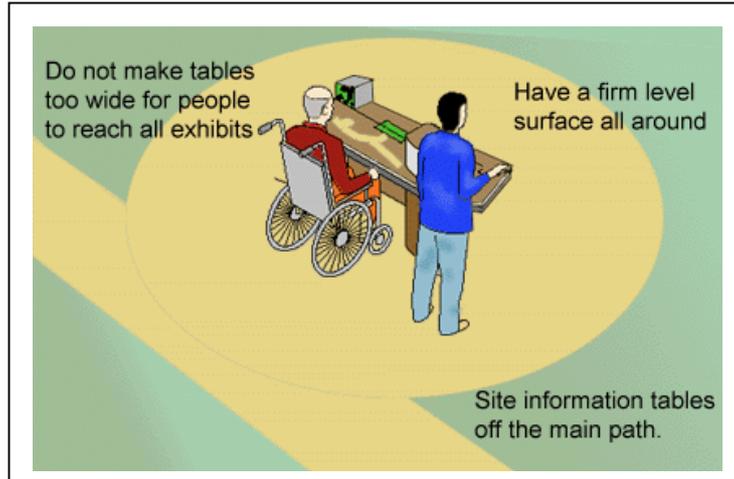
- Forest management and archaeological sites should also be included. Erect signs explaining work done at a site. Thinning areas and even small clear cuts can be interesting. Explaining what has been found and what the site hopes to achieve are of interest to visitors.
- Selection of the colour scheme for the notice board and its text is another consideration in making information accessible. See table.

Background	Sign Board (matt surface)	Legend
Red brick or dark stone	White	Black, dark green or dark blue
Light brick or light stone	Black / dark	White or yellow
Whitewashed walls	Black / dark	White or yellow
Green vegetation	White	Black, dark green or dark blue
Back-lit sign	Black	White or yellow

- The size of the text relates to the distance and emphasis placed on the information, the table illustrates good text sizes for notices and information boards.

Viewing distance in Metres	Good Text Height mm	Minimum Text Height mm
1.0 metres	29	15
1.5 metres	44	22
2.0 metres	58	29
2.5 metres	74	37
3.0 metres	87	44

- Text and illustrations on information and notice boards should not be below 720 mm or above 1800 mm above the ground surface.
- Table exhibits should not be too deep for people to reach all parts.



Tables should have tops and exhibits between 730 and 1100 mm height. Clearance for wheelchairs and legs (700 high x 620 deep) should be available under the table allowing people to approach and reach into the exhibit.

- Have a level drained surface around the exhibit/information table at least 1500 mm wide where possible, 1200 mm min.
 - Place information off the main path so that people can pass safely.

8 Sign Maintenance

Sign maintenance is essential. Regular inspections should be made to ensure that signs have not been damaged or vandalised.

- A sign pointing in the wrong direction is less useful than no sign at all.
- Vandalism and paint spraying are common in some areas if your signs are in one of these areas regular checks need to be made and cleaning chemicals may need to be used. Do not forget the CoSHH regulations.
- It is suggested that a stock of generic signs is kept to provide quick replacement of missing or damaged signs.
- Paint on signs may also fade over time and these should be replaced.
- Plant growth will need to be cut back regularly so that signs remain visible.