

ACCESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES FOR ORGANISERS OF FELL RACES

Mountain/fell running is just one of many mountain sports and fellrunners are just some of thousands of people who find pleasure in wild and rugged places. As runners we love to run, love competition but also love the places through which we run. We have a responsibility for that environment and towards those who manage it. We are a minority sport but a part of the whole of mountain recreation. Our actions contribute towards damage and disturbance. Our objective should be to climb hills and run ridges without leaving a trace of our passing. Set out below are guidelines, modified for 2005 by implications of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) (2000) that restricts access for organised events. They are not rules but suggestions of ways in which races can be planned and organised to minimise the effect of the event on the environment. Much of the following is common sense and carried out already. Many of the actions involved depend on the resources of the race organisers, the sensitivity of the area and the number of runners expected.

Get the owners permission

Establish who owns the land and contact the owners in good time to obtain their permission. The CROW Act (2000) indicates that this should be in writing. The Land Registry or other local landowners should be able to assist. Natural England will be able to provide landownership details about areas that contain most of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Also consult tenants who manage land on a day to day basis. Make sure the owner agrees with your plans and that he fully understands your proposals and that costs of any damage will be reimbursed. Check the route before and after the event to record any damage. It is also courteous to contact owners and tenants after the event has taken place.

Consider Special Land Status

Check whether the route or any part of it lies in a designated area such as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Park. If so, consult the relevant organisation as well as the owners to find out if this entails any restrictions or particular considerations.

Path Protection

The most vulnerable areas are slopes of more than 30%, very wet slopes, bare earth or peat slopes and scree slopes. With increasing altitude, the vulnerability of soils and vegetation increases and the likelihood of re-growth reduces. Most of our erosion is caused by descending runners.

If in Doubt, Consult

If there is any doubt as to the vulnerability or condition of the proposed route, consult the National Park Authority in National Parks, the National Trust over land owned by them, Natural England or the Countryside Council for Wales, over Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves or other sensitive land.

Use Existing Paths

If there is a path in existence use it, following it as closely as possible and adhering to any erosion control instructions. Avoid creating new paths.

Pay Attention to Steep Slopes

Avoid steep, bare slopes, very wet slopes and scree runs, particularly if alternative routes exist and especially on descent routes.

Resting the Route

In areas suffering badly, consider resting the hill for the next few years until the ground has recovered.

Consider Ground Conditions

In very sensitive areas consider alternative areas when thawing snow, heavy frost or excessive rain have softened the ground to a considerable depth.

Boundary Protection

Limit wall and fence crossing to specific locations e.g. particular stiles or gates and ensure that this is enforced.

Race Numbers

Decide whether it is necessary to limit the numbers in the race to limit the damage. Pre-entry only may be necessary to ensure that limits are not exceeded.

Dates

Avoid coinciding with other events on the same ground on the same day, e.g. walking or mountain biking events, in order to avoid overloading the route.

Start Location

Consider varying the start location and if necessary requesting runners not to practice on the course beforehand. If possible, locate starts on areas of road or track, which can bear the pressure of many runners milling around. There should be adequate distance for runners to spread out before reaching any narrow footpaths, gates or stiles.

Wildlife Habitats

Consult locally about areas of sensitivity. Identify whether there are any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or other features of wildlife importance on the course. Certain types of habitat may be particularly vulnerable to damage, e.g. Summit plateaux, scree and rock gullies which support fragile fern, moss and lichen communities. Crags and rocky outcrops may have important nesting sites for birds of prey and others such as Ring Ouzel. Much of our moorland is of international importance for its unique bird population, these birds and their nests are easily disturbed, resulting in increased mortality. Meadows are easily trampled, losing wildlife interest and reduced haycrop for the farmer. Avoid planning races during the breeding season, mid-March to the end of June, or stay on well-used existing routes. Grouse moors should be avoided prior to a shoot, jobs may be at risk if the area is disturbed and the birds dispersed, consult relevant estate in advance for dates. Mark and marshal any known vulnerable sites, from your consultation, on route that must be avoided.

Farm Livestock

Consult early with landowners and tenant farmers regarding sensitive stock, stock movements and if necessary, plan temporary stock protection from the route or removal especially near the start and finish areas.

Dogs

Dogs should not be permitted in a race, they pose a threat to wildlife, livestock and fellow competitors, the CroW Act does not permit dogs in the new access areas except on a lead on an existing right of way.

Finally

In the heat of competition, runners may forget to follow instructions. Organisers must take steps to ensure that plans laid to protect the environment are effective on the day.