Introduction.

From our experience access to countryside is varied around the country. It seems to depend on local organisations and interested parties pushing for disabled access.

Generally, the will seems to be there to provide access, however funds are not always available.

Our organisation work with-

  - Cornwall County Council
  - National Trust
  - Forestry Commission
  - South-West Coast Association

Promoting access for the disabled. Often with good success.

We see several areas for improvement

  1. Paths and surfaces.
  2. Gates and barriers.
  3. Public conveniences.
  4. People's perception what is possible and what is not.

1. Path and surfaces.

We realise that large number of paths may never be suitable for wheeled access. For instance many coastal paths and mountain paths. However, there are many paths that are accessible apart from small number of obstacles, rocks, gates, fallen away paths etc.

It is not unusual to find a stretch of path several miles long that is accessible except for a small number of obstructions which could be removed at minimal cost.

We would urge that these be identified and addressed when resources allow.

2. Gates and barriers.

When applied correctly, the principle of least restrictive BS5709:2006 is generally good.

However, it is not always applied to new structures. And to my knowledge need not be applied to existing structures.

It would help if this principle would be applied rigorously to new projects and applied (as resources
allow by existing paths.

**Motorbikes.**

The most common argument we come across for erecting barriers is to prevent illegal use by motorcyclists. We feel very strongly that legitimate use by the disabled should not be sacrificed in order to prevent illegal use by motorbikes. It is an enforcement issue. There are no gates or obstacles on pavements or other pedestrian areas in towns to prevent motorcyclists from riding on the pavement, it is well known to be illegal and any transgression will be enforced.

It would not be acceptable to erect barriers in a shopping centre that would prevent disable use from accessing that area, so it should not be acceptable in the countryside. It is far too easy to take the simple route and erect a barrier at the expense of disabled users.

The argument of safety could be used to justify the erection of barriers, however, I would ask how serious is this risk, I would agree it is a nuisance and not desirable but I would imagine anyone using a motorbike anywhere would be equally careful.

**Public conveniences.**

These are essential to our employment of the countryside, it is a primary concern of many of our members as to whether there are suitable for facilities en-route.

The British standard for public conveniences for the disabled seem to have been written around the use of wheelchairs (manual or powered). Most disabled people that I know who access the countryside to it on mobility scooters as they have a far better and are generally more capable.

Normal disabled toilets, will not accept large mobility scooters. This issue needs to be addressed.

**Kissing gates.**

The examples given for compact kissing gates in bs5709:2006 are not large enough to accept large class III mobility scooters, they are not deep enough.

Any 'gates' designed to allow disabled access should be large enough to allow any legal mobility scooter to use them.

This omission may seem trivial but potentially it is quite significant. Planners could follow these instructions attempting to provide access and believing that they have done everything that is required but providing inadequate access.

**Beach access**

Living in Cornwall, we love the beach.

Many people see the provision of 'beach chairs' as being a solution. It may be for some but others
don't have someone to push them around and in any case may prefer to be independent.

Unfortunately when we become disabled beach access is often not possible.

Some beaches may be designated 'accessible'. and the responsible bodies therefore consider that they have 'done their bit'. Many mobility scooters have a 'safe' range of only 10 miles or less. If people have no way of transporting there scooters what use is an accessible beach 6 miles away? Many beaches themselves are quite accessible apart from a small area of dry sand above the high water mark.

Often where a ramp (slipway) is provided it does not go far enough down into the beach and so as the sea naturally moves the sand it leaves a step the bottom of the ramp.

A rollaway wooden mat could be provided to enable beach access, which could be taken up before the winter storms.

The opinion seems to be that beaches are generally unsuitable for people on mobility scooters or in a wheelchair and that an accessible beach is the exception rather than the norm. We should aim for accessible beaches being the norm and unaccessible being the exception. We will not get there because of the nature of many beaches but it is something to aim for.

**Perceptions**

Many people are simply unaware of the capabilities of modern off-road scooters and so they see no need to provide access.

We in Cornwall have gone a long way to change this perception.
I have found very few footpath or bridleways that I cannot navigate on my scooter, provided the path is wide enough, has no gates or steps.

Have a look at-
- Tramper
- Terrain Hopper
- Countryside mobility Scheme

For examples

**Consultation.**

The [disabled Ramblers](#) is a national organisation and will have representatives in most areas and in Cornwall we have [Cornwall rolling Ramblers](#). I feel we are best positioned to help address these access issues and I feel consultation on whether or not a barrier should be erected and if so of what type should be strongly encouraged.

**Conclusion-**
Much work has been done in improving disabled access to the countryside but much more can still be done. In the areas of-

Gates and barriers
public conveniences
peoples perception
path improvements

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