The Scottish Outdoor Access Code, A Replacement for the Country Code

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The Scottish Outdoor Access Code

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) replaced the Country Code that first appeared in 1931 and is probably the best-known attempt at educating the public on the countryside.

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as you found them
- Keep your pets under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone

- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

There were a number of variations to the Country Code, the best-known of which was the Countryside Commission version from 1981.

The enactment of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was the death knell for the Country Code in Scotland. People only have the new right of access to land if they take that access responsibly. What is responsible was to be defined in a new Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Access Forum, created, consulted and discussed the content of the new code. It was much more expansive than the Country Code had been, but revolved around three key principles:

- Respecting the interests of other people,
- Care for the environment, and
- Taking responsibility for your own actions.

In another difference to the old Country Code, SOAC applies to everyone, visitors, residents, land managers and those managing access.

SOAC was approved by the Scottish Parliament on 1 July 2004 and came into operation in February 2005.

As you might expect there was a lot of publicity, leaflets, website, TV and radio adverts. Do you remember the traffic lights in those old promotion TV adverts used?