

## Email sent by CAROL DOUGALL to SRPBA on 22 Feb 2007

Hello

My husband and I joined the SRPBA last June because we were having increasing problems with public access to our croft. We hoped that you might be able to help, we hoped that you would be supporting farmers/crofters experiencing problems with the Access code. One of the leaflets you sent said you could offer "defence of your interests and property rights, when challenged by ill-considered legislation". I've been on the website and seen Janice Gray's letter to Peter Rawcliffe of the SNH and can see that you are certainly doing something.

Last year we had the factor for the National Trust for Scotland and someone from SNH come to see our croft and the problems we were experiencing. They all agreed that we had exceptional problems with, literally, hundreds of people walking - and trying to cycle - through our croft EVERY DAY between March and October. But the season is lengthening - we have had dozens of tourists almost every day this month. They agreed that we could keep our sign asking people to leave their bikes outside, keep dogs on leads, not to camp or light fires and to keep balls for the beach.

They suggested kissing gates to prevent bike access, and we talked about providing bike racks for people to lock their bikes to as at present they lean them on our fences, which have to be renewed every year.

We live at the tip, the north end, of the island of Iona, and people have always walked through to get to the beaches. We don't have a problem with this. But every year the abuse of this access has got worse. Middle aged people, who I would have thought would know better, climb over the fences into enclosed lambing fields, or where we are growing hay and silage, hurt themselves and rip their clothes and then have the cheek to complain, they leave gates open and my horses get out, they let hogs into the tup field to get pregnant when they shouldn't conceive for another whole year, they cycle over the sand dunes and break bits off so that when the next gale comes along (they are very regular) the whole top of the hillock breaks off and is useless. They feed my horses despite the sign asking them not to, they walk through in the middle of the night disturbing sheep, cattle and the horses, they insist their dogs don't need to be on leads as they are well trained, but every year at least 2 of our hens are killed by these dogs. Many dogs who are well behaved in the city have never seen a hen before, and go tearing after ours (who have the run of the place) and tip them to pieces. I have taken photographs to show the hundreds of tourists coming through the croft, and some dead hens, and intend to get a camcorder this year, as no-one seems to believe just how many people come through - they all think I'm exaggerating. When the Trust and SNH came it was at a quiet time of year and it was raining and grey, but they still witnessed dozens of folk go through in the course of a 15 minute discussion at the road-end. When I emailed the Factor yesterday to ask how things were going with signage and bike racks and kissing gates, he replied to say that the local access officer is being very restrictive about the wording and chapping at the bit for the current sign to come down. You can imagine the fury this provoked (not at the Factor, at the access officer!) There MUST be other crofters/farmers out there who are also having problems. Are there ever any exceptions made to this code, where it can be accepted that a particular area is suffering unreasonable traffic, and where it can be agreed that dogs MUST be kept on leads, bikes MUST be left outside, camping ISN'T possible?

They want our sign to say "Welcome to Ardionra Farm" (I asked for the word farm to be used because many visitors here are foreign and don't know what a croft is). We do not want to say Welcome, a) because they aren't, but b) most importantly, it implies we have made provision, everywhere is safe, the horse won't tread on you, the bull won't chase you, feel

free to climb over the fences and yes of course we'll pay for your snagged trousers. What is the position with liability for people like us? We CANNOT make the rocks and beaches (technically part of the croft, and the sheep and cows graze on the seaweed) safe, we CANNOT guarantee that the bull, normally a quiet chap, won't one day turn on someone. Who pays for the constant erosion of the tracks, the damage when children swing on the gates (my husband has to re-hang them several times a year and replace them at least once a year), the damage to animals let into the road or wrong field to get pregnant? Once a hogg is pregnant, it never goes on to reach it's full mature weight, it is too young to have a lamb, and apart from the stress to the beast itself, what about the loss of it's value to us?

We found a man in one of our agricultural sheds last year, camera out, thoroughly enjoying himself and stressing our puppies out dreadfully. I came home to find my 22 year old Highland pony no-where to be found. I thought she must have walked into the sea and committed suicide, but eventually found her in a barn we never use, which had pallets on the floor. She could have stood on a pallet, broken the wood and lacerated an artery and bled to death. The barn had been carefully closed behind her, and we have no idea to this day who put her there. Another one just a week ago was photographing some of our junk (the council won't collect it, we are no longer allowed to dump it, we can't afford a skip just yet). The talk about "responsible" access is just ridiculous. No-one reads these leaflets, they just see that they have the right of access to everywhere (they think) and that they can do as they like, they don't want to know about "responsibility". All the leaflets talk about what the public has a right to do, nothing talks about our rights to protect our animals and land.

What other business in the world has people tramping through it's offices, breaking computers or pulling over filing cabinets (the equivalent of what is happening to us), - how would people like it if we sat down in their front garden in Bearsden and got out a picnic? And then left the bottles and wrappers behind?

We have people playing golf in a field of pregnant ewes. We have frisbee contests over the heads of the cattle, and football just about everywhere. I've reduced this with the sign the access person is complaining about.

Please, please, is there anything you can do to help? Where can we ask for help with prevention, with costs, with gaining an exemption or exception or amendment to this code?

Yours sincerely

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Reference on your letter dated 21 June DOUJU4167 M/NM/1