

Launch of the National Land Access Centre 14 September 2018

I attended the launch of the National Land Access Centre, which took place at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve in the Chilterns AONB.

The launch information describes its purposes thus:

“The National Land Access Centre has been developed to demonstrate the use, maintenance and installation of gaps, gates and stile which meet the new British Standard for countryside access.

“The centre has been developed by Natural England, in partnership with the British Horse Society, Centrewire and the Pittecroft Trust, to demonstrate how access to the countryside can be improved for those with mobility needs, horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

“Training courses will be available to land managers, rights of way officers and users, to help understanding of the new standard and its application. Practical and classroom based training will demonstrate safe and appropriate use, correct installation and maintenance on a range of infrastructure.

“The centre will also consider the performance of the structures, including the robustness of the infrastructure, and user feedback will be monitored over time. This will influence the design and development of future gates and structures which will also be trialled on the site.

“The centre will continue to test new equipment and trial designs to help everyone access and enjoy the countryside.”

There were a large number of people attending the launch, including members of local access forums, rights of way officers, AONB and wildlife trust reserve managers, and representatives from the Forestry Commission, Defra, Natural England, Disabled Ramblers, and a number of user groups, including BHS, Ramblers and Open Spaces Society.





Following the opening of the centre by Lord Blencathra (deputy Chairman of Natural England), users, disabled ramblers and horse riders demonstrated the use of the various structures, and we were able to inspect the different structures.

The Bridlegate Trial run by Natural England (which took place in 2015) informed much of the work of the British Standard, particularly with regard to self-closing gates. That trial also noted that many horse riders were not aware of how to open and close a gate correctly, and this lack of knowledge was leading to difficulties passing through gates. It recommended that riders should receive training and I understand from discussion that this centre is one place where this could now happen.

Watching some of the riders on the day, it was clear that training in how to open gates remains an issue, notwithstanding that these appeared to be experienced riders. The most popular gate for the horse riders was the Swiss gate, and this is probably because no particular technique is needed to open the gate!

Sarah Slade



A rider demonstrating a self closing bridlegate.



A rider attempting to open a gate from the wrong end. Riders should approach from the hinge end of the gate.



The propotype Swiss gate, popular with riders. All the gates were marked with yellow at opening points in accordance with the new British Standard. It was pointed out that the entire ring could be painted yellow, as the gate can be opened at any point along the ring. There is a separate lower latch for walkers.



The Swiss gate could be opened from any angle. Some people suggested that it was not an attractive structure, and could be intrusive, especially in protected landscapes.



*Scooter passing through a motorcycle inhibitor
This model passed through easily.*



*A tramper attempting the same structure. It also passed through, but very accurate driving
was required!*



A timber kissing gate with bypass. Although to British Standard, you can see that this only just fits the mobility scooter. In the foreground is a metal kissing gate with 'radar' key opening bypass.