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The cyclists' champion **UK**



Rides of Way

Cycling UK's Off-Road Report 2017

About Cycling UK

Cycling UK (formerly CTC) inspires and helps people to cycle and keep cycling, whatever kind of cycling they do or would like to do. Over a century's experience tells us that cycling is more than useful transport; it makes you feel good, gives you a sense of freedom and creates a better environment for everyone.

As a registered charity, we help millions of people to start cycling and keep cycling. We are the cyclists' champion.

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Off-road access Survey Results

11,482

people completed the survey



Top motivators for cycling off-road:

31%

health and fitness

24%

technical challenge



and for Women:

26.3%

health

26.1%

enjoying nature

65%

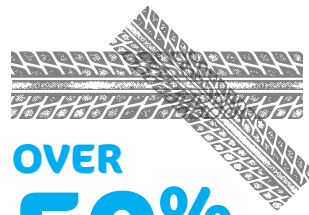
Of those using footpaths quote

lack of choice



to avoid traffic danger

52%



OVER 50%

back increased access as the number one off-road campaign goal

61%

say off-road cycling is their primary form of exercise



91%

rate off-road cycling fairly or very important for their mental health

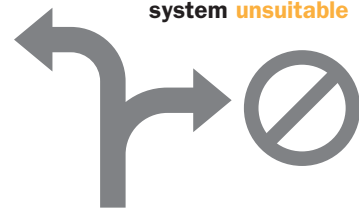


90%

say off-road cycling is fairly or very important for their physical health

74%

consider the rights of way system unsuitable



2/3

cycle from their door to ride on Rights of Way



Over 1/3

cycle regularly on trails whose status they don't know



Women cycling off-road are riding for an average of

3.5 hours a week



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For background details, see bit.ly/cyclinguk-offroadsurvey

Foreword

Cycling UK has been at the vanguard of opening up thousands of miles of off-road access for cyclists; from winning the rights to use royal parks in 1885, to gaining the right to cycle on bridleways and long-distance cross-country routes in 1968 and successfully campaigning for the 'Right to Roam' in Scotland in 2003.

The situation in England and Wales is very different.

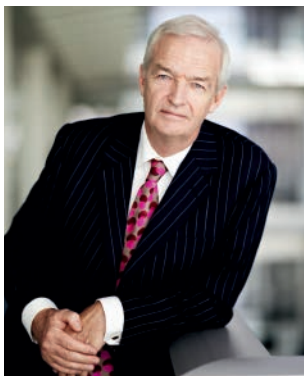
In these two countries, we have over 140,000 miles of Public Rights of Way, such as footpaths and bridleways. They form one of our most valuable rural resources, developed in some cases over thousands of years, and are open to everyone, so long as you're walking.

Should you wish to head off-road by bicycle or even on a horse, then you'll soon find yourself limited in where you can ride by a confusing array of archaic laws which block off close to 80 per cent of the network.

The confusion among those who cycle regularly off-road is clear, as we can see from the 11,482 from across the UK who took part in Cycling UK and OpenMTB's off-road survey. Surprisingly, this survey and the report which you'll read over the following pages, gives the first snapshot of the people who ride on our Rights of Way network.

For the first time, we have qualitative evidence of the whole spectrum of riders who enjoy swapping tarmac for turf. We've heard from the family riders who want the opportunity to ride away from traffic, those who seek the technical challenges of a trail centre, and even those who are on the hunt for 'mindfulness' in the hills.

The evidence we have gathered will be of use to everyone with an interest in the how, where and why of English and Welsh off-road cycling. Whether you're a small business developing trails, a large landowner looking to create coherent networks, national and local government working on maximising our rural economy, or a journalist after an authoritative resource, Cycling UK's 2016 off-road survey is the go-to document.



During 2017, Cycling UK, the organisation I represent, will use this research to help fuel our discussions with landowners and government to create coherent networks for cyclists based on suitability of use. Scotland has shown how it can be done with respect for all users and the environment, and for greater access to our green and pleasant land. It's about time people in England and Wales enjoyed the benefits too.

Jon Snow
Cycling UK President

Cycling has always been a part of my life, from growing up on a dairy farm, where I always rode bikes - old BMXs and massive old road bikes - to now where my day job is as a professional racer chasing ribbons of dust around the world.

Over time, the urge to point my bike downhill and throw myself down the mountain has begun to be balanced by an appreciation for simply riding, not racing, in the wondrous settings we have across the UK.

I've spent a lot of time riding in Scotland, seeing the way they manage a responsible access policy that's helped introduce engagement of the countryside and its enjoyment to so many. It's surely time that people throughout England and Wales can just head out from their own front doors and have a chance to experience that too.

I don't want to see a blanket right for cyclists to go everywhere - that wouldn't be sensible. The reason why I support Cycling UK's campaigning for increased access is because the charity understands this.



Cycling UK knows there's room for vast improvement, and being sensitive to the concerns of walkers, horse riders and landowners. It is looking to work with all of these groups to open up our landscape responsibly.

There's a lot to be gained for everyone by increasing access: from the physical and mental health benefits for the riders to reinvigorating a rural economy through increased tourism. The winds of change are blowing in 2017 and, together with this report, I'm looking forward to helping make cycling off-road more open for everyone.

Tracy Moseley
Cycling UK Off-Road Ambassador and Downhill and Enduro World Champion

Overview

Introduction

We carried out this survey, jointly with OpenMTB (the network of local off-road access cycling groups). It helps to make the case for greater access. Its findings are based on the views of almost 12,000 people who are already cycling off-road, and are predominantly male in mid-adulthood. The sheer size of the response suggests it is reasonably representative of the existing demographic of regular off-road riders. It is therefore a lot less representative of those who ride occasionally, or who might take up off-road riding if more and better legal routes were readily available, well-promoted and easy to find.

In recent years, the UK has become very successful at winning medals for competitive cycling. Yet despite this achievement, we underperform terribly when promoting other forms of cycling. Whether on or off-road, for day-to-day travel or for leisure, our failure to encourage and enable more people to cycle is a huge missed opportunity for our health, for local communities and economies, for the environment and for our quality of life.

The lack of opportunities for off-road cycling in England and Wales is all the more perplexing, given the remarkable success story of Scotland's open access legislation. In essence, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 allows anyone to go anywhere, within reason, in the great outdoors whether on foot, by bike or horse, in a boat or canoe. It is also subject to an Outdoor Access Code, whereby you forfeit your access rights if you behave irresponsibly.

We should stress that Cycling UK is not seeking a blanket right to cycle on all footpaths. We acknowledge that some footpaths are too narrow, fragile, crowded or steep for cycling to mix acceptably with other users or the environment. In some "honeypot" locations, we recognise that reasonable restrictions will be needed. In such cases we prefer to seek voluntary restrictions, such as the one we helped to negotiate on Snowdon. But most paths in England and Wales aren't like this. They amble across flat or gently rolling countryside – and sometimes have tarmac surfaces.

When the legislation for Scotland was first debated, some people voiced concerns that it would cause unbearable conflict, incur huge costs to landowners and result in appalling damage to the countryside. Yet this simply hasn't happened. As Richard Wakeford told us: "During my five years as Head of Scotland's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department, shortly after the new law came into force, I can recall no case of irresponsible mountain biking." This is despite the fact that, he added: "Not all of Scotland's countryside is upland mountains; there are plenty of areas of farmland where irresponsible cycling could cause damage to crops or livestock".

This is why Cycling UK wants to explore opportunities for people in England and Wales to enjoy similar access rights to those we now have in Scotland. We are already having positive discussions with several National Park Authorities, the Forestry Commission, Natural England and others, who are keen to open up greater opportunities for off-road cycling too. As are the Ramblers and the British Horse Society, who are with us in calling for a Scottish-style right of responsible access to the countryside.



England and Wales's archaic Rights of Way legislation is getting in the way of accessing the countryside for people cycling and horseriding: there are rights for these groups on just 22% of England's Rights of Way, and just 21% of the network in Wales. The distinction between footpaths and other Rights of Way (bridleways and byways) is purely historic. It is based simply on recorded evidence of how paths were used in past centuries. It has nothing to do with which paths are or are not suitable for cycling (or indeed for equestrian use) in the modern era.

The results of our new off-road cycling survey highlight the huge importance of off-road cycling for people's mental, as well as physical, health and wellbeing. But there were also real frustrations shared with us. In particular,

where access is denied to people attempting to travel on England and Wales's off-road routes, because they are confronted by archaic Rights of Way and access laws. This issue should be addressed to enable more people to benefit not only from the physical and mental health improvements we know exist especially when cycling in an off-road setting, but also enable them to make more journeys away from traffic.

Three things stand out from this survey's findings:

- Regular off-road riders generally do not fit the stereotype of mountain bikers as adrenaline junkies in their late teens and early twenties. Overall, it is now a much more mature activity.
- They attach great value to cycling's phenomenal health and wellbeing benefits.
- It's not all about driving with bikes on the car to "honeypot" locations. Many people just want to be able to ride out into the local countryside from their own front doors.

Introducing Scotland's right of responsible access into England and Wales would open up a vast network of footpaths for cycling and/or horseriding. Many of these are very lightly used, and their widths and surfaces are typically at least as suitable for cycling as those of bridleways and byways – sometimes a lot more so. Instead of having to sign routes according to their historic status, councils and others would be able to promote the routes that were best suited for cycling – and indeed for horseriding. Far from creating conflict, this could go a very long way towards diffusing it.

Getting England and Wales's Rights of Way laws changed won't happen overnight. We need to start by working in partnership with supportive National Park Authorities, councils and others, to demonstrate what can be done to create new linear or circular routes, using a combination of existing rights and voluntary agreements.

Over time though, we want to make the case for England and Wales to catch up with Scotland. The value of Scotland's recreational cycling economy is estimated to be between £262 and £358 million, with a cumulative gross value added of £129 million. It is time England and Wales had some of this too!

Assumptions

The results summarised in most of the following sections reflect the responses of the 11,482 people who filled in the survey. We know that about 8,400 of these were men, and 1,200 women. This means that the general findings by and large reflect the views of men. Section 9, however, specifically compares the responses from men with those from women.

The views in the survey are of people who are regularly cycling off-road in England, Wales and Scotland. We are uncertain about how representative the participants are of the overall off-road cycling population. However, as stated earlier, the amount of responses suggest it's a good snapshot of what regular off-road riders are doing - and what they wish they could do more of. The majority of respondents (60%) have been riding off-road for more than 10 years, though 6% have been doing so for less than two years and 2% have "just started". On average, they say they cycle off-road for about four hours a week. The respondents were predominantly white British (92% of respondents) and male (87%). This broadly corresponds with other recent surveys of off-road cycling participation. So we assume these views are broadly representative of those men and women regularly cycling off-road, but we note that the off-road cycling population looks distinctly different compared with the 'standard' UK demographic as a whole.

England and Wales access context different from Scotland

Scotland enjoys some of the best access rights in the world, care of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which came into force in 2005 and gives everyone rights of access over land and inland water throughout Scotland (subject to specific exclusions), as long as people behave responsibly by adhering to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. These rights are sometimes referred to as 'right to roam'.

In England and Wales, while there have been access improvements in recent history, like the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, these are somewhat restricted in terms of the types of land that have been made more accessible, and predominantly create better access for walking: you cannot cycle on CROW access land unless you are following an existing bridleway or byway.

Roger Geffen MBE, Cycling UK Policy Director

About the survey

- Our online survey ran for eight weeks from August to October 2016, and asked 53 questions. The survey was devised by Stacey King from OpenMTB with input from Cycling UK.
- We promoted it to our members, local off-road riding groups and to the cycling media, including specialist MTB magazines. A link was also available on our website.
- 11,482 people responded.



About our respondents

Off-road credentials

By and large, our respondents were long-term, experienced off-road riders, housing multiple stocks of specialist bikes:

- Most have been cycling off-road for over a decade (60%).
- The most common amount of time spent riding per week is four hours.
- Asked to describe their cycling ability on a scale of 0-100, the average score was 59, or just above 'intermediate'.
- Over half own around two to three bikes, but nearly a fifth have five plus.
- The majority usually rides off-road on full suspension mountain bikes (59%), or hardtails (54.5%). Other types (cyclocross-style, road, hybrid or touring) are much less popular.

Which types of bike do you usually ride off-road?



Other outdoor activities

- Of the 9,500 who take part in the other outdoor activities we listed for them, road cycling outranks them all (70%).
- Well over half participate in rambling and low level hiking, just under a half in hill walking or mountaineering, and about a third go dog walking.
- Other pursuits like rock climbing, river sports (e.g. canoeing) and coastal sports (e.g. surfing) attract around 14% each, with 'equestrian sports' way down the list (2%).

"I have enjoyed road cycling and commuting for years, but getting the cyclocross or MTB out brings my biggest smiles."

Katharine, riding off-road 2-5 years.

Demographics

The 9,600 people who gave us more details about themselves were mostly middle-aged white British men, with households earning £50-£100k, without children under 18 and with a degree or higher qualification:

- By far, men responded in the greatest numbers (87%).
- The clear majority described themselves as ‘white British’ (92%).
- A third are 40-49 years old, making this the most common age group. Otherwise, a quarter are 30-39; a fifth 50-59; 11% 60+; 10% 18-29, and only just above 1% under 18.
- The most common average household income is £50k-£100k (a third put themselves in this bracket), but people bringing in £30-£50k are well represented too (28%). Around 8% earn £100k plus, and only 3% under £10k.
- Three fifths said ‘no’ when asked if they have children under 18 (60%).
- Three fifths also have degrees or higher, and a fifth vocational qualifications (e.g. BTEC/NVQ). A further fifth have A levels or similar, and just over a quarter GCSE/O Levels.

What cycling organisations do they support?

- Around 7,000 said they were members or supporters of a cycling organisation, most likely a local cycling club (43%).
- Just under two fifths are Cycling UK and two fifths British Cycling members (38% and 40% respectively).
- 14% support Sustrans.
- One in ten belongs to an advocacy group, and the same proportion supports other cycling organisations.

“My kids love being part of it [an MTB club] and riding off-road is so much safer for them and gives them a sense of independence and keeps them away from technology.”

Dan, active member of an MTB club.



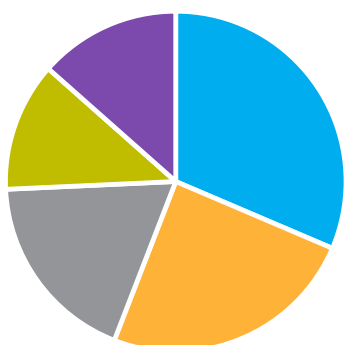
1. Motivations for cycling off-road

- Health and/or fitness is the strongest motivation for most, with just under a third ranking it first and over a quarter second.
- About a quarter put 'technical challenge' above all else; about a fifth go off-roading principally to enjoy nature; 13% say they ride off-road mainly to avoid traffic, and a slightly smaller proportion ride mostly for social reasons (e.g. with friends or family).

"... it's therapy for the soul and like being a kid again."

**Neil, off-road tourer,
2-5 years.**

Top motivations for riding off-road



- Health and/or fitness
- Technical challenge
- Enjoying nature
- Social (riding with friends or family members)
- Avoiding traffic

"Made so many friends through mountain biking that my whole life has changed ..."

**Tracey, cycling off-road
2-5 years.**



2. Impact on physical and mental health, and wellbeing

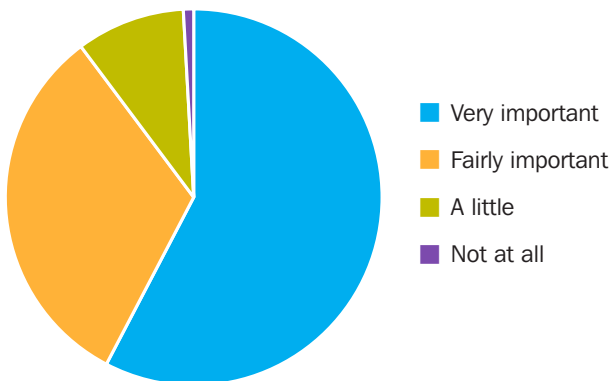
10,200 people answered our questions on how important off-road cycling is for their physical and mental health, and wellbeing:

- 90% say that off-road cycling is either 'very important' or 'fairly important' for their physical health (it's 'very important' for three fifths, 'fairly important' for a third). Only a tiny 0.88% dismiss it as 'not at all' important.
- Asked if they have any disability or chronic health condition, 12% answered 'yes'.

"Mountain biking is massively important to me as I have a long-standing knee injury that prevents me from doing high impact activities such as running."

Lynsey, cycling off-road 6-10 years

How important is off-road cycling to your physical health?

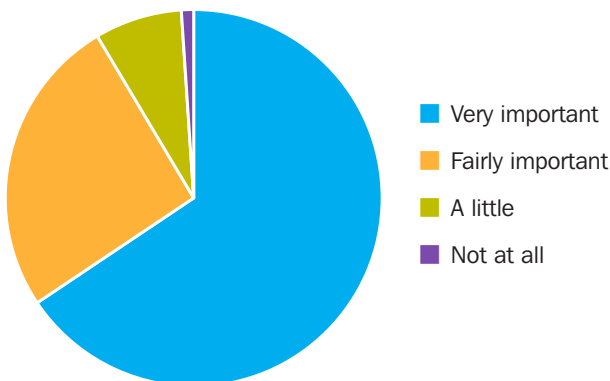


"I have mild, well controlled COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], and find that cycling helps me [...]. I am 79."

Yvonne, cycling off-road for over ten years.

- Equally, two thirds say that off-road cycling is 'very important' for their mental health and wellbeing, and another quarter 'fairly important'. The remaining 8% says it's 'a little' or 'not at all' important to their mental health and wellbeing.

How important is off-road cycling to your mental health and wellbeing?



"Been riding 20+ years and it's always been my fitness bedrock."

Richie

"I've only got into mountain biking over the last 6 months but it gives me a freedom/thrills I've not experienced in any other type of exercise."

Ricky

- Off-road cycling is the primary form of exercise for 61%.

3. Riding habits

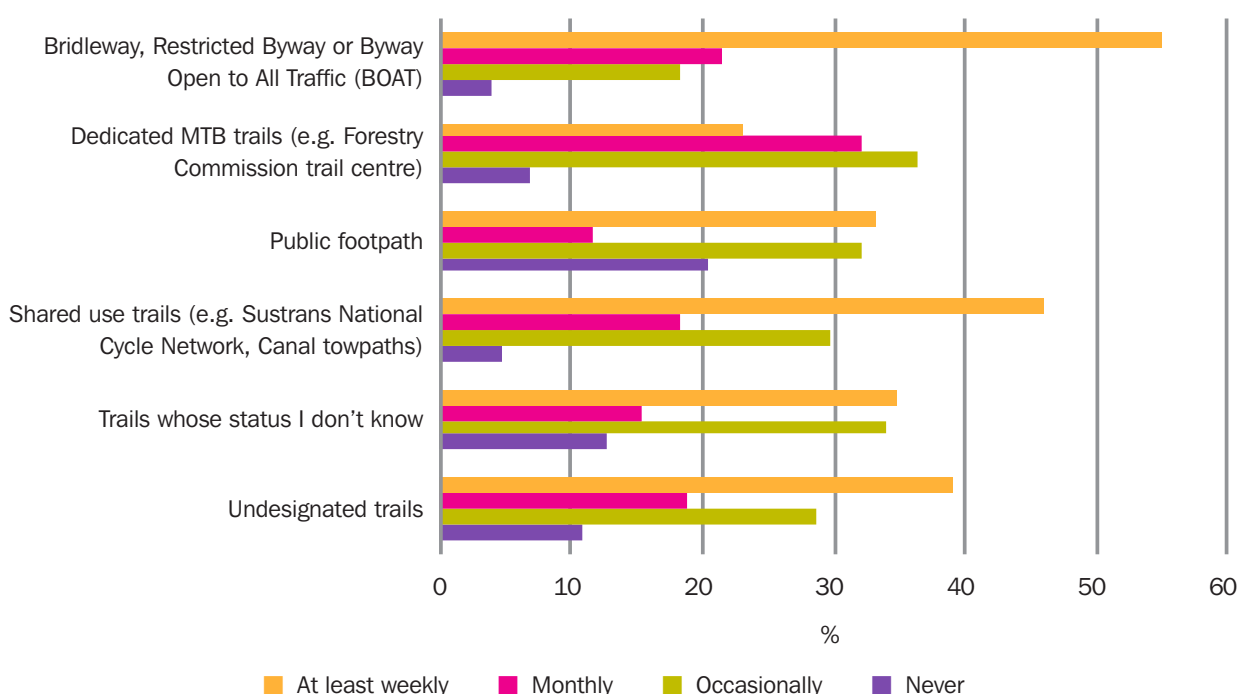
Where, when and how often?

- For everyday riding, most choose bridleways and byways, with well over half riding them ‘at least weekly’ (56%). Shared use trails such as the National Cycle Network and towpaths are not all that far behind (47%).
- Dedicated MTB trails are popular, but seem to be reserved for monthly or occasional treats rather than weekly visits.
- Many ride regularly on trails whose status they don’t know: over a third cycle on them at least weekly, and half monthly or occasionally.

“I use off-road routes to plan Breeze Rides that I lead regularly. I find the women like them partly because they can relax and socialise.”

Sarah, cycling off-road for over ten years.

How often do you ride on these types of trail?



Owned or managed land

- Forestry Commission land attracts most riders most often (around two thirds at least weekly or monthly, and another third occasionally).
- Local wildlife trusts and National Trust land do well too, each drawing just under half of our respondents occasionally, and around 30% monthly or at least weekly.
- A significant proportion, though, never ventures onto Ministry of Defence (MOD) or Crown Estate property (63% and 54% respectively), although this may well be because this type of land is not as ubiquitous as the other options. Also, MOD land is not always easy for cyclists to access.

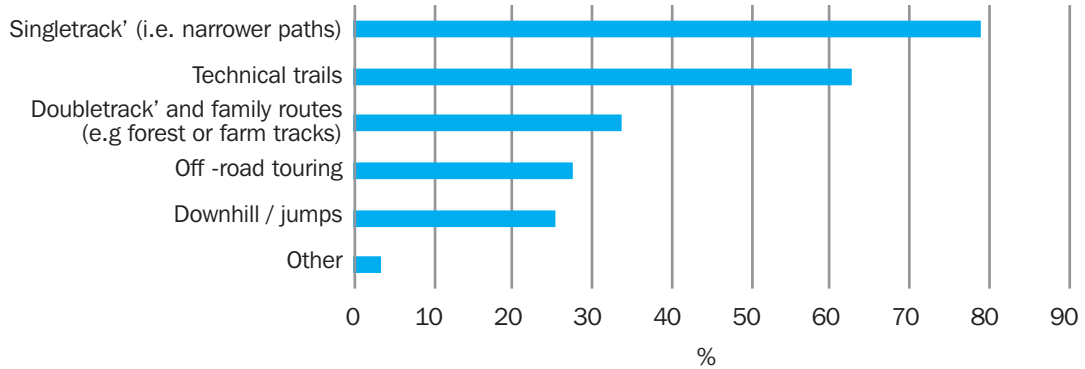
“If you’d told the 10-year-old me that in 36 years’ time my favourite thing would still be riding bikes in the woods with my mates, I wouldn’t have believed you, but it is true!”

Andy

Type of riding

- Top choice of trail is 'singletrack' (i.e. narrower paths) – 80% say they prefer it. 'Technical trails' are next, at 63%. Downhill/jumps are the least preferred but they still attract over a quarter, and not much less than off-road touring (27.5%).

Which type of riding do you prefer?



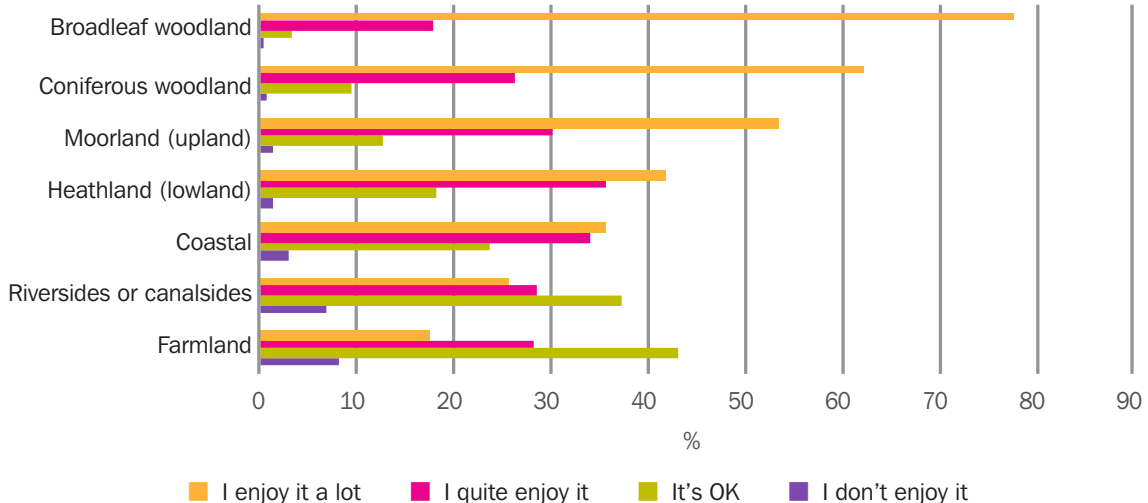
Environments

- Broadleaf woodland gets most votes, with four fifths saying they enjoy it 'a lot' (78%). Runner-up is coniferous woodland - 63% also enjoy it a lot.
- Farmland isn't quite so enjoyable, it seems, with 44% rating it only as 'OK', and 9% not enjoying it at all, making it the territory that people liked least.
- Otherwise, very few say they don't enjoy riding in the other environments we listed, i.e. woodlands, moors, heaths, river/canal sides and on the coast. With the interesting exception of river/canal sides, most people are more likely to enjoy these settings 'a lot' or 'quite' enjoy them, than say they're merely 'OK'.

"I think there is some classic world class riding in the UK which we should be selling to the world."

Gez, cycling off-road for over ten years.

What type of environments do you enjoy riding in?



Getting there

Our survey suggests that putting bikes on the back of the car rather than riding to an off-roading venue isn't as common as may be thought. The decision, though, does seem to be influenced by the type of trail in question:

- Most people cycle from their door rather than drive for rides on rights of way (66%).
- It's the reverse, though, for trail centres/bike parks: only one in ten gets there by bike, and just about one in a hundred by public transport (almost always the train, according to the comments, which some people use when they go off-road touring too). The rest drive – two fifths for more than an hour.

“Use Glentress in Scotland or BikePark Wales as a business model and you will bring bikers in from all over Europe and be booked up for months!”

Nick, riding off-road for over ten years.



“Cycling the Ridgeway was wonderful, full of history and cycling.”

Female cyclist, riding off-road for over ten years.

4. Off-road tourism

Trips away from home in the UK or abroad

Around 10,500 people told us they take cycling trips away from their home areas.

- Nearly 10,000 of them said they'd travelled away from their home area for a ride in England during the last two years.
- Of these, almost three-quarters visited trail centres, while around three fifths chose national parks, rural rights of way and/or open country (mountain or moorland).
- Trail centres were also the most likely destination both for the 4,000 who'd gone riding away from home somewhere in Scotland and for the 6,500 who'd ridden in Wales. Welsh bike parks and Scottish open country drew around half of those countries' off-roading visitors.
- Wherever they rode, bridleways were top of the 'away' trails list, with three quarters homing in on them. Shared use traffic-free routes were of middling popularity at just under half, and footpaths least popular, although still over a quarter rode them.
- Of the 3,600 people who reported trips abroad, open country proved the biggest attraction for most (over half). Trail centres were popular (36%), but pipped by rural rights of way and bike parks.

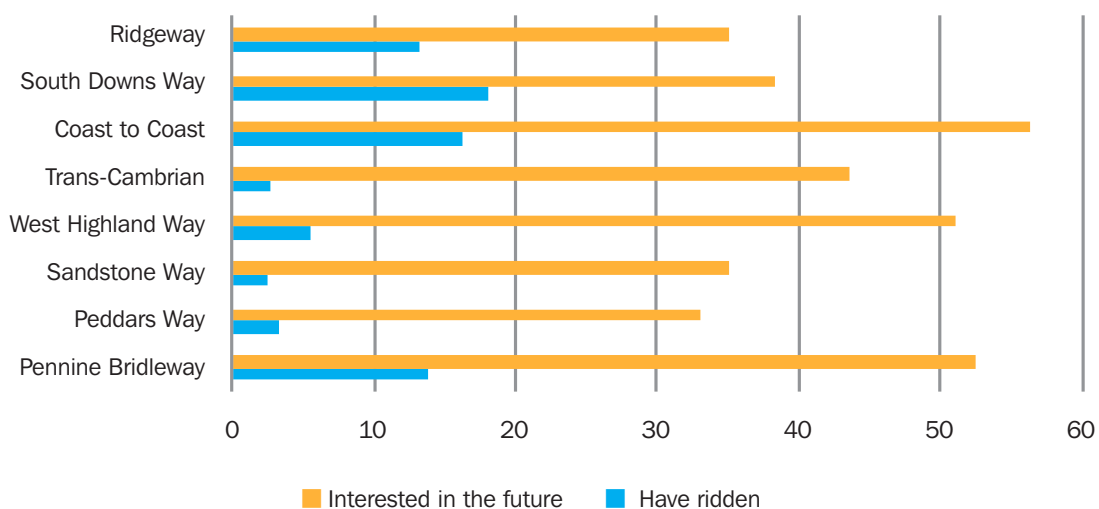
"I live in the Forest of Dean and we have two cycle hire centres and clearly marked family routes, which makes a huge difference to the number of family groups I see compared to other parts of the country."

Steve, riding for over 10 years.

Multi-day trails

- Asked whether they'd ridden any of the eight multi-day trails we listed, the most popular proved to be the South Downs Way (about a fifth of the 10,800 people who answered the question have ridden it). This just beats Coast to Coast (17%), the Pennine Bridleway and the Ridgeway (14% each).
- Coast to Coast is top of the ride wish-list for nearly three fifths (56%), with the West Highland Way, Pennine Bridleway and Trams-Cambrian not far behind.

Riding multi-day trails

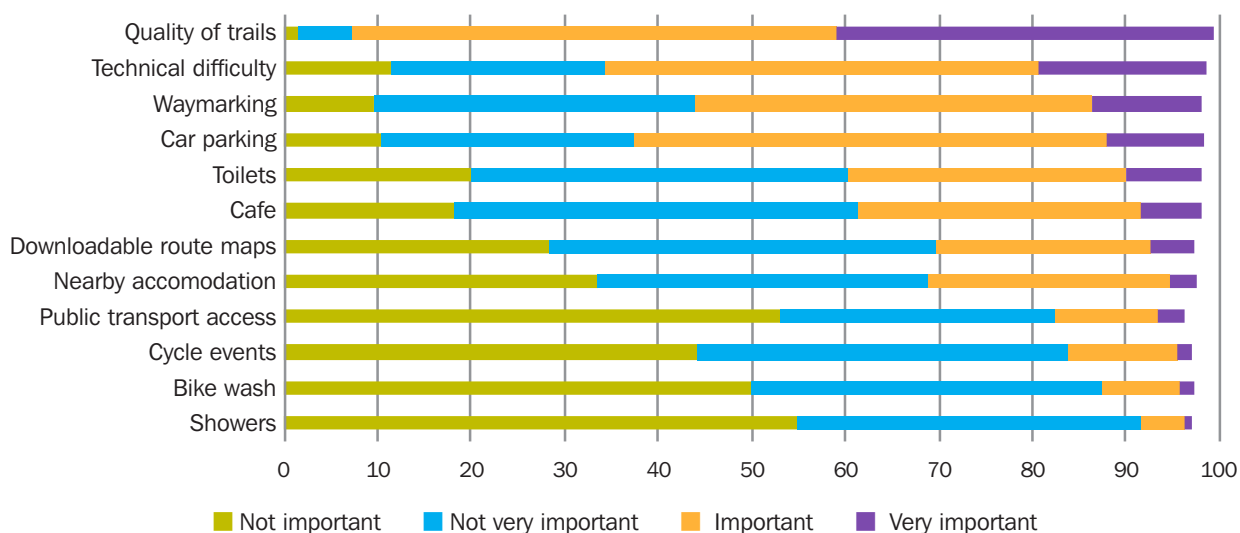


What cycling visitors like

For the 10,800 people who answered this question:

- Quality of trails outshines all else as an 'important' or 'very important' factor (93%).
- Around two thirds rate 'technical difficulty' and car parking likewise, and just over half waymarking.
- Our off-roaders set store on cafes and toilets, but not quite so much: just over 30% rated each of them as 'important', but fewer than one in ten rated either facility as 'very important'. One respondent commented, though, that his wife's priorities at a trail centre are very different to his and that a "clean toilet and cafe are a must!" This is reflected in the survey responses from women.
- Washing their bikes or themselves hardly figures in comparison – only around one in ten put any importance at all on bike washes, and even fewer on showers.
- People seem to like to do their own thing: 86% rated cycle events as either 'not important' or 'not very important' (46% and 40% respectively).

When visiting an area to ride, what do you consider important?



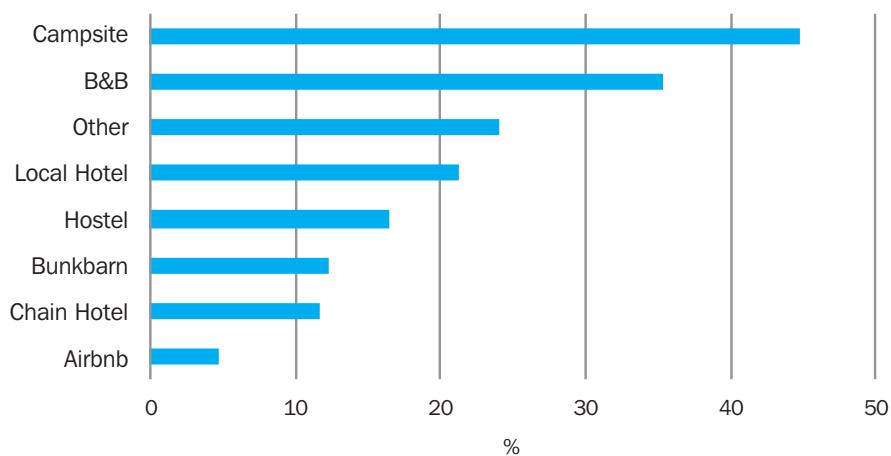
Length of stay

- Most of the people who ride away from home normally go for just the day (about half). A fifth stay for two nights and 16% for one night.
- Longer visits are less common. Just over one in ten typically stays for three nights to a week, and only just over one in a hundred for more than a week.

Bedding down

- Of the 9,000 who answered our question on where they normally stay, most cited campsites and B&Bs (45% and 35% respectively). Local hotels attract just over a fifth, beating chain hotels and bunkbars.
- Airbnb has yet to take off amongst off-roading tourists – under 5% say they typically book into them.

Where do you normally stay?



5. Benefits for local economies: how much off-road cyclists spend

- On a typical 'away' visit, just over half of our off-roaders spend in total £10-£50 on food and drink (25% £10-20 / 28.5% £20-£50).
- Inevitably, accommodation is the biggest outlay, with around 29% spending between £50- £100, and 13% £100+.
- Shopping sprees max largely at £50, with just about a fifth spending £20-£50, and almost all others £0-£20.
- Spend on local services and activities is mostly £10-£20.

Of the 10,200 people telling us about their annual cycling-related spending habits:

- Just over half typically spend under £500 on UK cycling trips or holidays, and about a third £500-£1,000.
- On foreign cycling trips or holidays, the majority spend under £500 (65%).
- More generally, our respondents were most likely to put their outlay on cycling products at £500-£1,000 (39%). Big spenders are less apparent – 7% hand over £2,000 - £3,000, and 5.5% £3,000+. More modest are the 28% who reckon their tally is less than £500.

"... we were having a breather and some food when some local came by with their dog. We got chatting for a bit and during the conversation they said they actually like mountain bikers as they have kept the local shop in Peaslake going."

**Peter, riding off-road
2-5 years.**



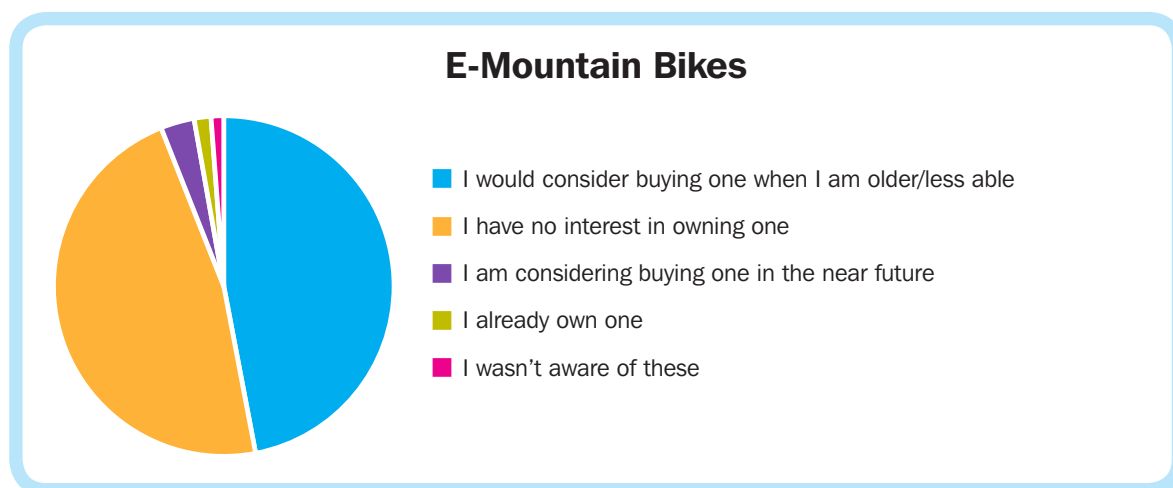
"Some bridleways lead into footpaths & give no option to either carry on along the footpath or turn around & go back the way you came from."

**Female cyclist, riding
off-road 6-10 years**

6. Technology: E-mountain bikes, GPS and Strava

E-mountain bikes

- The same number of people say they'd consider buying an electrically assisted mountain bike when they're older/less able as have no interest in owning one (47% in each camp).
- 178 people said they already owned one (1.5%), and 364 are thinking about one for the near future (3%). Just over 1% said they weren't aware of such things.



Logging rides

- Just under two fifths record all their rides on GPS devices, and just over two fifths most or some of them (37% and 41% respectively). The rest say they do not log them.
- Of the 8,904 who do use a GPS device, nearly half choose Garmin. Most of the others use iPhones or Androids.
- While just over a fifth don't share their GPS logged rides, around 70% do so on Strava, which is considerably more popular than any other site on offer.



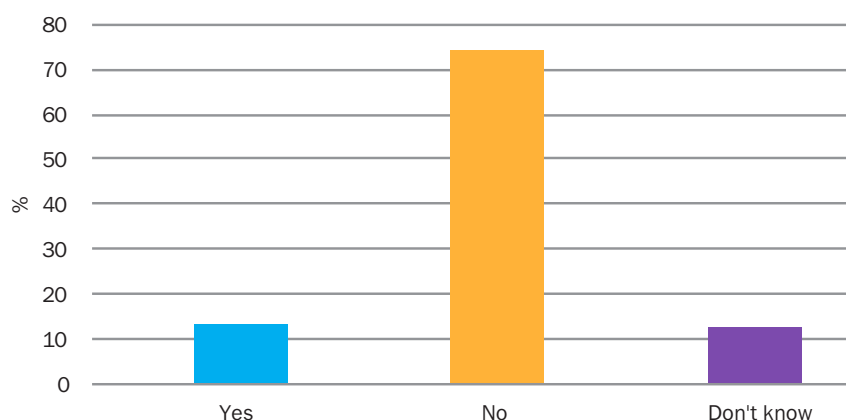
7. Maximising the benefits of off-road cycling: what needs to change?

Rights of way and modern usage

As mentioned above, it's clear that the enjoyment factor of off-road cycling is deeply important to many of our respondents, along with its positive impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing. They make it equally clear, though, that experience tells them that the Public Rights of Way network in England and Wales is profoundly at odds with modern cycle usage.

- Of the 10,200 people who shared their thoughts on this topic, almost three quarters feel that the Rights of Way network is unsuitable. This compares to 13% who think it is suitable and 12% who don't know.

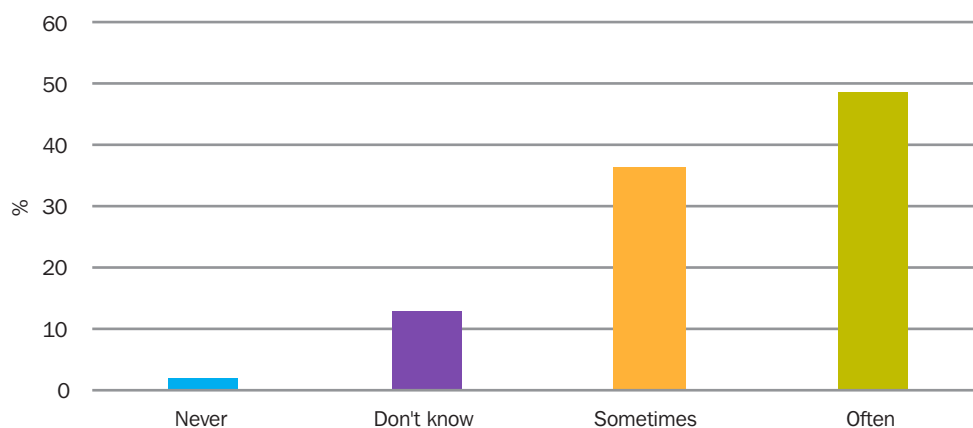
Do you feel the existing Public Rights of Way network is suitable for modern cycle usage?



Putting together a 'legal' route

- Nearly half say the existing network often makes it difficult to put together a 'legal' route; and 37% say that's the case sometimes (2% say never, and 13% say they don't know).

Does the existing Public Rights of Way network make it difficult to put together a 'legal' route?

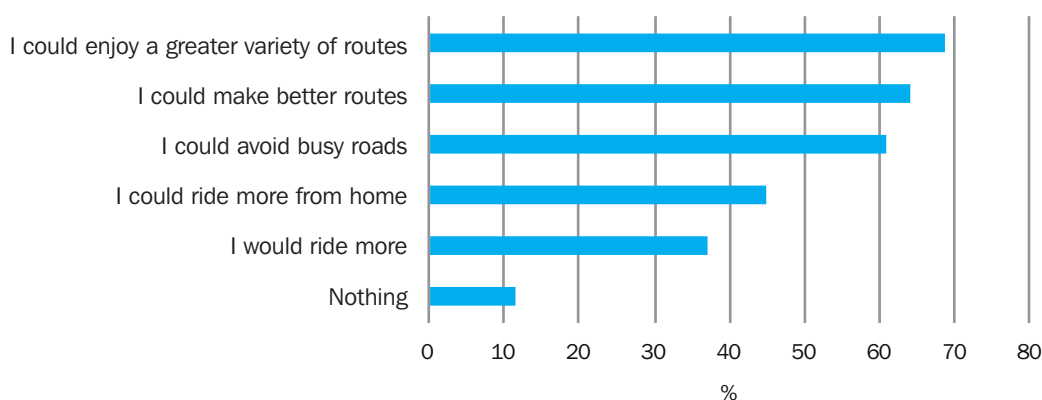


The footpath potential

If it were legal to cycle on public footpaths, of the 10,200 who answered the question:

- Seven in ten say they could enjoy a greater variety of routes.
- Around two thirds could 'make better routes' and avoid busy roads.
- Almost half could ride more from home, and 37% ride more overall.
- Nothing would change for the remaining 11%.

If it were legal to cycle on public footpaths, what would change for you?

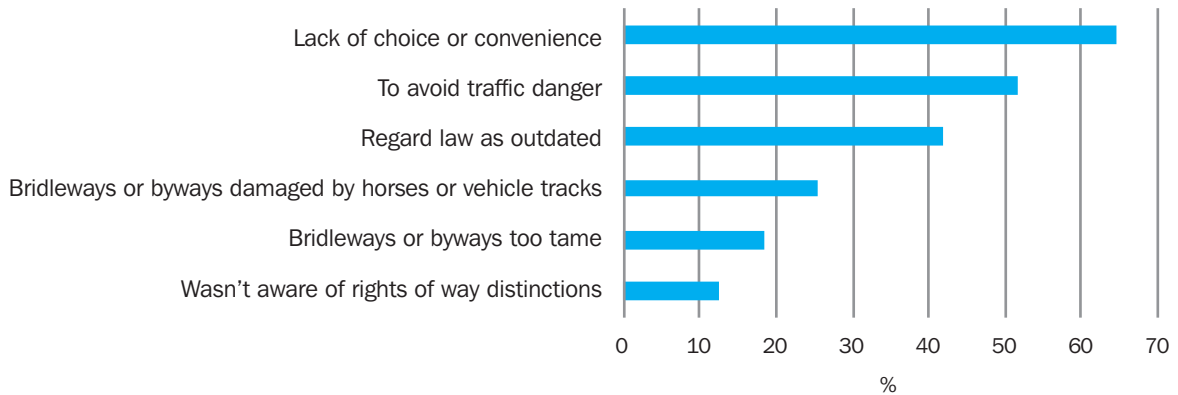


In England and Wales, cycling on footpaths is not usually a criminal offence, although it could be trespass against the landowner. Important! 'Footpaths' are not the same as 'footways'. Footways (pavements) run alongside roads and it is illegal to cycle on them, unless they have been converted to 'shared use'.

However, where a way is used openly and 'peaceably' (i.e. without using force or causing damage) by walkers, equestrians or cyclists, then rights of way can be acquired over time if the landowner does not indicate any objections. Hence it is possible to acquire cycling rights by riding on footpaths (or on other trails where there are no recorded or permissive cycling rights), providing this is done openly and peaceably, and without contravening signs or objections from the landowner.

- While just over a fifth of our respondents say they currently don't/won't cycle on public footpaths, around a third do so at least weekly, 12% monthly, and another third occasionally.
- For most of the 9,460 people who tell us they do ride on public footpaths or undesignated trails, it seems to be a conscious decision:
 - 65% say they do so because of 'lack of choice or convenience';
 - Just over half cite 'traffic danger';
 - Two fifths 'regard the law as outdated' (42%).
- People who aren't aware of rights of way distinctions are in the minority (13%), although that doesn't necessarily mean that everyone else is aware of the status of every path they use. As noted above, over a third of the 11,482 people we surveyed don't know the status of trails they use at least weekly, and half say the same of trails they ride monthly or occasionally.

If you ride on footpaths and undesignated trails, please explain why



- A number of respondents comment that some of their local countryside footpaths have much to offer cyclists, but are appreciably underused by walkers. They also say the mix of footpaths and bridleways makes the network disjointed for cycling, and that the distinction is, in any case, hard to fathom (“Some bridleways just stop and turn into footpaths for no reason”.)
- Importantly, many people living in Scotland pointed out that the footpath challenge doesn’t apply to them because cyclists are allowed to ride responsibly on any path, as long as it is not restricted by a traffic regulation order, or by some other legal means.

“Often you’ll find what is a bridleway one side of the road, is a footpath on the other.”

James, riding off-road for over ten years.

“I find it hard to understand why some ROW [Rights of Way] are classified as footpaths and are plenty wide enough to cope with a bike, and some bridleways are narrow enough to have to stop when meeting walkers.”

John, riding off-road for over ten years.



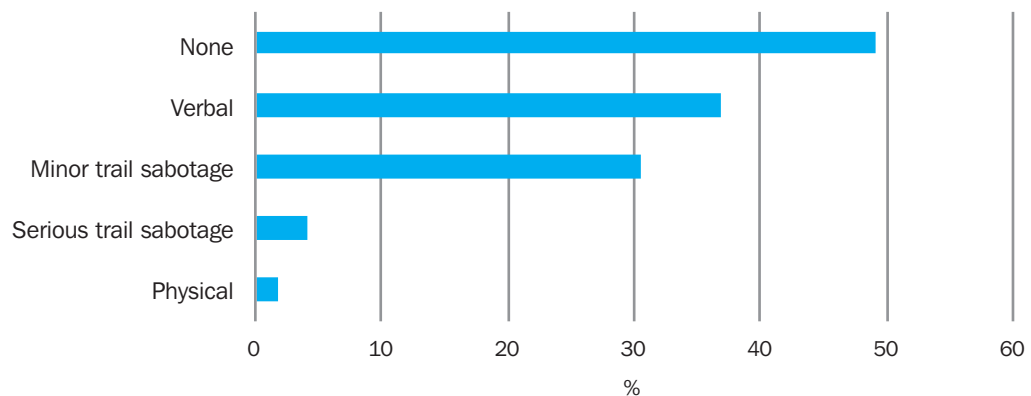
Conflict on trails

- With around half saying they've never experienced problems with other trail users in the past two years, conflict is not rife.
- It is by no means unheard of, however: almost two fifths report verbal altercations (according to the free-text comments, this mainly comes from walkers, with and without dogs – although gamekeepers, landowners, farmers and anglers all got a mention).
- Just under a third has experienced 'minor trail sabotage' (logs on trails etc.).
- Very few have come across major sabotage, though (4%), and only a tiny proportion have suffered physical conflict (2%).

"We cycle regularly in the Swiss Alps where they operate an open access policy based on a mutual respect for each other's right to be there. It works!"

Mark, riding off-road for over ten years

Have you experienced conflict with other trail users in the last two years?



Other problems

Most frequently mentioned in free-text comments, are: poor signage, inadequate maps, churned up surfaces, routes surfaced with un-rideable material, overgrown vegetation, uncontrolled dogs and not being able to access routes with non-standard cycles (hand-cycles, child trailers etc.).

It was also clear that not all off-road cyclists want the same thing out of the network: some, for example, value smoothly surfaced bridleways, while those who like a technical challenge despair of 'sanitisation'.



"I live in Scotland. These archaic trail designations don't apply. I ride the local trails because they're local and provide a degree of technical challenge and exercise within a short ride in pleasant surroundings. I simply don't have to worry about what label is applied to the trail."

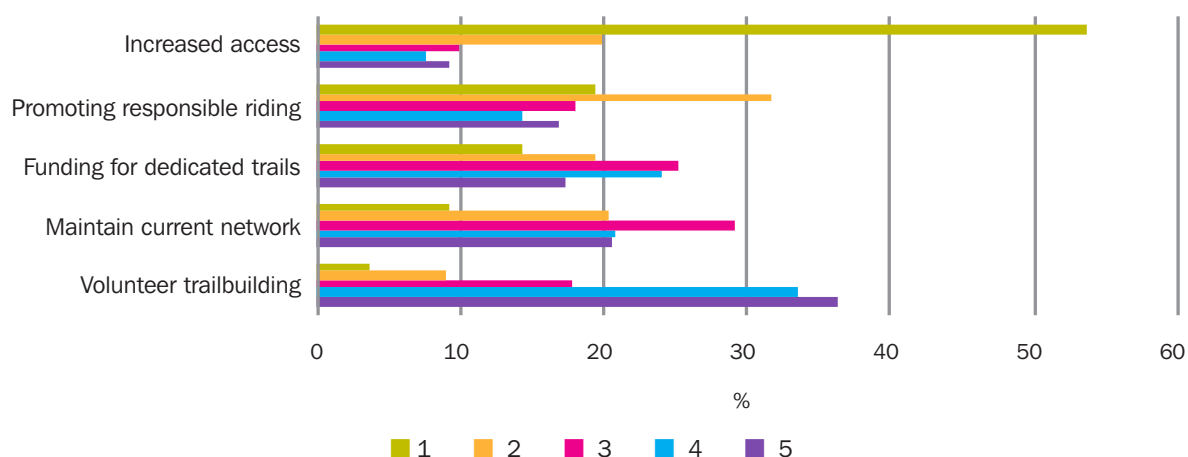
Off-road cyclist, Scotland

8. Campaign priorities

Campaigning priorities: access and conduct

- Asked what issue they think off-road advocacy groups should prioritise, over half put 'increased access' top.
- Conduct is clearly important too, as nearly a fifth cited 'promoting responsible riding' as the first priority, and it was the most popular choice for the second slot (32%). This theme was reflected in the free-text comments box at the end of the survey: of the 303 people who filled it in, 36 (12%) plugged the cause of polite and considerate cycling, saying that it worked for them.
- Perhaps rather surprisingly given the comments about un-rideable paths, maintaining the current network came fourth out of five contenders for the top spot for campaigning priorities, but it did rank equal third for second priority.
- 'Volunteer trail building' only attracted 4% of the vote for highest priority, but it was the most popular choice for third.

Which issue would you consider as the priority for off-road advocacy groups (1 = most important)?



9. Women and off-road cycling

Amongst the 11,482 respondents in total more than 9,600 volunteered further details about themselves. From this we know that just over 1,200 of them were women, and just under 8,400 were men.

In a number of respects, the thoughts, attitudes and experience of women were similar to those of men: for example, as with men, health was a top motivation, and ‘quality of trails’ the most important feature when visiting an area to go cycling off-road. However:

Women were MORE likely than men to:

- Have ‘just started’, or been off-road cycling for less than two years;
- Rank ‘enjoying nature’ as a top motivation for cycling off-road (equal first with health);
- To say they ride on footpaths/undesigned trails ‘to avoid traffic’. This was women’s top reason, but not far behind was ‘lack of choice or convenience’, men’s top reason;
- Consider waymarking, toilets and downloadable maps as important features when cycling away from their home.

Women were LESS likely than men to:

- To have been cycling off-road for over ten years;
- To rate their off-road cycling skills as above ‘intermediate’;
- Rank ‘technical challenge’ as a motivation for riding ‘off-road’;
- Prefer technical trails, off-road touring and downhill/jumps (although a much lower proportion of women said they prefer ‘singletrack’ than men, as with men, it was still the type of riding they were most likely to opt for);
- To ride on footpaths/undesigned trails because they ‘regard the law as outdated’

“Getting better off-road facilities is frankly the least we can do to get young people more active in the fresh air to learn about their environment and physical challenges.

Female cyclist



Survey question	Options	Women	Men
How many years have you been cycling off-road?	Over 10 years	40%	63%
	Just started / less than two years	16%	6%
On average, how much time per week do you spend riding off-road?		3.5 hours	4.2 hours
How would you describe your off-road cycling ability?	Average score on a scale of 0-100 (where 0=novice, 100=expert)	46	62
Which type of riding do you prefer? (Select as many as applicable)	'Singletrack' (i.e. narrower paths)	27%	81%
	'Doubletrack' and family routes (e.g. forest or farm tracks)	18%	31%
	Technical trails	16%	67%
	Off-road touring	14%	27%
	Downhill / jumps	4%	27%
Top motivation	Health	26%	32%
	Enjoying nature	26%	17%
	Avoiding traffic	17%	12%
	Social (riding with friends or family members)	15%	12%
	Technical challenge	14%	26%
If you ride on footpaths and undesignated trails, please explain why (select as many as applicable)	To avoid traffic	64%	48%
	Lack of choice or convenience	56%	64%
	Regard law as outdated	22%	45%
	Bridleways or byways damaged by horses or vehicle tracks	19%	26%
	Wasn't aware of Rights of Way distinctions	17%	16%
	Bridleways or byways too tame	9%	19%
If it were legal to cycle on public footpaths, what would change for you? (Select as many as applicable)	I could enjoy a greater variety of routes	66%	70%
	I could avoid busy roads	66%	61%
	I could make better routes	59%	66%
	I would ride more from home	45%	46%
	I would ride more	36%	38%
	Nothing	10%	11%
Top priority for off-road advocacy groups	Increased access	48%	55%
	Promoting responsible riding	20%	19%
	Funding for dedicated trails	17%	14%
	Maintain current network	12%	9%
	Volunteer trailbuilding	3%	4%
When visiting an area to ride, what do you consider to be important/very important?	Quality of trails	93%	92%
	Waymarking	67%	52%
	Car parking	67%	60%
	Toilets	54%	35%
	Technical difficulty	52%	67%
	Cafe	44%	36%
	Downloadable route maps	38%	27%
	Nearby accommodation	30%	29%
	Public transport	20%	13%
	Cycle events	13%	13%
	Bike wash	12%	9%
	Showers	6%	5%

10. Tapping into voluntary energy

- Most of the 10,200 who told us about their volunteering habits say they aren't volunteering, or haven't ever volunteered, either to build/maintain trails or take on advocacy/representation (66%).
- Just under a third have volunteered for trail building/maintenance, but only 9% for advocacy/representation.
- Trail building/maintenance is obviously an inspiring prospect, however, as two thirds say they're up for it.
- Over a quarter would consider advocacy/representation, but about the same are not interested in volunteering in either activity.

For further reading, see Cycling UK's campaign briefings on off-road access:

www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings

"... as I rounded a corner and breasted a hump of chalk pathway I came upon a fox, a rabbit and a blackbird all sitting in a group in a small patch of sunlight! As soon as they realised I was there they all bolted. But that image is with me for ever."

Paul, riding off-road for over 10 years.





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