



Another bridleway closed to riders. BHS Development Director for London and the South East, Claire McCaffery-Clarke, and local campaigner, Nick Coleman.

Horseytalk.net BRIDLEWAYS WATCH

More and more bridleways are falling into disrepair.
Many are dangerous. Tell us about them.
Send us photographs. [E-mail them to us here](#)

BRIDLEWAYS WATCH: East Sussex

The appalling state of bridleways is putting riders lives at risk

The appalling state of bridleways in the Low Weald is putting the lives of many horse-riders, amateur and even Olympic, at risk.

So says local farmer and rider, Nick Coleman, who has just launched the Low Weald Bridleways Action Group to fight for improvements.

"As more and faster traffic drives equestrians off our roads it becomes more and more essential that our bridleway network is improved and extended and that our country lanes are not permitted to become no-go areas for horse riders," says Nick. "Unlike the footpaths for walkers, it really is a matter of life and death that improvements are made for riders."

So is this bridleway safe for riders? Nick Coleman shows how deep it is >>

Among 100 respondents to a survey just conducted by the Action Group, there have been 27 accidents on the roads so serious as to require a doctor or vet.

"Our bridleways are especially important in the Low Weald," says Nick "because horse riding is such a very important part of the local economy, worth many millions of pounds, with bridleways needed for horses ranging from your childrens' ponies to the Olympic hopefuls being trained at the Golden Cross Equestrian Centre. Bridleways are not just for country dwellers, riding is undertaken by all ages and walks of life and gives access to the countryside for many from our towns. Though every parish has on average 200 riders, if equestrians don't fight for their corner the bridleways will not get a fair share of attention."

Nick, 61, has only just taken up riding again after a lapse of over 20-years.

"I was shocked to find," he says, " that the bridleways are in a worse state now than they were when I was riding 20-years- ago." Nick has a long list of complaints against East Sussex County Council, which is responsible for maintaining them.

"The almost total lack of proper bridlegates cuts access to our countryside for the disabled and those unable to remount, contrary to the requirements Disability Discrimination Act. Whilst every hedgerow seems to sport a new stile there is hardly a decent bridle gate to be seen."

Backing Nick in his campaign is Claire McCaffery-Clarke, BHS Development Director for London and the South-East.

"An almost total lack of routine maintenance of ditches means that the majority of paths are unusable in winter. The Council's remedy, for those that are so deep in mud that they are dangerous, is simply to place a closure order on them". she says. "Little effort is made to keep them clear of undergrowth, with some bridleway exits so overgrown with foliage or scrub riders cannot be seen by on-coming motorists."

Says Nick, "I am not asking for anything we're not entitled to, I'm only asking the Council to do its duty. On a bridleway near here there is a Council sign at the beginning of it. It says, Closed for Repairs for Six-Months. It's already been there over a year with no sign of any repairs being made. I've got two grand-children who have both just started riding. I want all this to be sorted out before they die of old age."

It was because the Council were not doing their duty that he decided to launch the Low Weald Bridleway Action Group.

Nick is not just complaining about bridleways. On the country lanes the neglect of verges results in poor visibility for motorists, a common cause of riding accidents, and the loss of an escape route when trouble occurs. Slippery road surfaces are also a major cause and Highways need to be reminded that their own Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance tells them to take the safety of non-motorists such as horse riders into account when prioritising work on the country lanes.

"We're not insisting on special privileges for riders," he says. " All we're insisting is that the Council does what it is supposed to do. They appear to have little knowledge of the numbers and needs of equestrians, and now to add insult to injury we have just discovered that they are planning to literally dump all kinds of rubbish on the riders of the Low Weald. They intend to cut several of our best bridleways, at Ripe and at Hellingly, by placing rubbish tips across them, without a thought or care for riders."

For further information: www.bridlewayaction.com or contact Nick Coleman info@bridlewayaction.com

