

**Letter from Viv Lynch to Alan Marlow**

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I strongly believe that equestrians should not be expected to pay to ride on FC land and tracks nor should they be the only group who pay to park.

There are over 2,500 miles of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways and National Trails in Buckinghamshire, of which only 15% (371 miles) are available to equestrians. Therefore this makes access to the FC forests very important to equestrians.

Some Forestry Commission sites in our county can be visited by horses, e.g. Hodgemoor near Chalfont St. Giles, Shabbington and Wendover Woods. Much of the work done, in conjunction with FC, to enable horse rider access to Hodgemoor Wood was undertaken by The Hodgemoor Riding Association, founded in 1995 by Susie & Marcus Bicknell (see [www.hodgemoor.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.hodgemoor.org.uk/index.htm)).

As to the supposed 'damage' that horses do to the forest tracks, it seems unjust that walkers and cyclists are excluded when they also cause damage/wear and tear. It should be remembered that cyclists also use bridleways but they do not have to pay. It is not right that equestrians should be the only group who have to contribute to maintenance of routes when other users do not.

Three-quarters of horse riders are female, with about one-third of that number aged under 16. Horse riders are a vulnerable group which need safe places to ride and exercise horses. Contrary to some images, many horse owners are not at all wealthy. A quarter of horse-owners earn less than £10,000 pa. Most of the people who ride in the forests are 'happy hackers' - ordinary people who ride for pleasure and work hard to keep their horse. They should have the same access as cyclists and walkers to these safe 'off-road' places.

Viv Lynch

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum

BHS North Buckinghamshire District Access & Bridleways Officer