

# TOWPATH CODE OF CONDUCT

Making the towpath  
safer for everyone



## About the canal and towpath

The Grand Western Canal was opened in 1814, with its main business being the transport of limestone from quarries near Westleigh. This trade continued on the Devon section of the canal until 1925.

In the late 1960s a campaign to save the canal from proposed development led to its acquisition by Devon County Council in 1971. The Canal was declared a Country Park and work commenced on repairing and dredging the canal so that it could be enjoyed by local people and visitors.

Nowadays, the canal is managed in partnership with Mid Devon District Council and in 2005 was declared a Local Nature Reserve. Cycling is permitted and National Cycle Route 3 follows much of the canal towpath.

The towpath is a shared-use right of way and is maintained by the Canal Ranger Service. Since 2002, most of the towpath has been resurfaced, providing a better facility for everyone, but particularly for wheelchair and mobility buggy users.

The towpath connects Tiverton and several villages and as well as enabling visitors to enjoy this beautiful canal, it also plays an important role in providing sustainable and healthy routes to work and school.

## Towpath code of conduct for all users

- **The horse pulling the passenger barge has priority over all other users.** Please stop and make way well before it passes.
- **Pedestrians have priority over cyclists** but must not unduly block the towpath when aware a cyclist is approaching.
- **Considerate cycling is permitted** provided this code of conduct is followed.
- **Give way to oncoming users at bridges.** Most of the bridges have poor visibility so check that someone isn't already coming through. Never try to pass oncoming walkers or cyclists under the bridge – there is insufficient width or headroom to do this safely. Cyclists must dismount and walk under bridges where signs indicate this is required.
- **All users are obliged to keep the towpath free from obstructions to other users.**
- **Consider other users and the environment.** The canal and the land beside the towpath have many historic structures and valuable wildlife habitats that people enjoy. **Please take your litter home with you.**

## Code of conduct for pedestrians

- **Listen for Two Tings.** **Two Tings** is not an order for you to get out of the way. It is to make you aware that the cyclist is looking for a safe opportunity to pass. You should allow passing as soon as it is safe to do so. We advise pedestrians not to use headphones whilst walking the towpath, as you may not hear a cyclist's Two Tings.
- **Allow cyclists to pass.** Allow cyclists to pass as soon as it is safe.
- **Be considerate to cyclists** Remember that cyclists need room to stop and brake. If a cyclist stops or waits for you to pass, thank them and they are more likely to be considerate again next time.

## Code of conduct for cyclists

- **Ring with Two Tings.** Use a bell, giving **Two Tings** when approaching pedestrians, particularly when approaching from behind. Ringing with **Two Tings** is not an order to pedestrians to get out of your way. If you do not have a bell, politely call out 'excuse me' well before you reach other users. Be aware that some pedestrians and anglers may have visual or hearing impairments and may not hear your **Two Tings**.
- **Pass people slowly. Give people space.** Slow down when approaching pedestrians and anglers and only pass when it is safe to do so. Extra care should be taken when passing children, less able people and animals. Pass on whichever side pedestrians make open for you. Be patient and courteous. Saying 'thank you' to pedestrians or anglers who move to let you pass will make them more likely to move next time.
- **Ride at a sensible speed.** The towpath is not suitable for cycling fast as there are many other users, narrow sections and lengths with uneven surfaces. Anglers are often difficult to see amongst the bankside vegetation, dogs often pop out of hedges and people may emerge from gateways or linking paths.
- **Cyclists must dismount and walk under the bridges where indicated.** There have been many near misses and several accidents reported when cyclists have ridden under a bridge and met cyclists or pedestrians coming the other way. A very serious accident could occur if a cyclist were to hit the passenger barge horse under a bridge.
- **Dismount and make way for the passenger barge horse well before it passes.**

**Please Note:** Horse-riding and the use of quad bikes and motorcycles is not permitted on the towpath. Mobility buggies are allowed but must not exceed 4mph (brisk walking pace).

## Code of conduct for anglers

- **Anglers are obliged to keep the towpath free from obstructions to other users.** Tackle must be kept off the towpath and rods must be promptly moved out of the way when cyclists or pedestrians approach. Listen out for **Two Tings** and try to position yourself so as to be visible to approaching cyclists. If a pedestrian or cyclist stops and waits for you to move equipment, they are more likely to be considerate again if you thank them. Anglers must move rods, umbrellas and themselves completely out of the way to the far side of the towpath if the passenger barge horse is approaching.
- **Take care when casting.** Please take particular care of towpath users, boaters and offside landowners when casting. Please take care not to cast into overhanging trees on the offside as lost tackle is a serious threat to canal wildlife.

## Code of conduct for dog walkers

- **Dogs must be kept under control at all times.** They do not necessarily have to be kept on leads at all times, but this is strongly advised in busy areas and when cyclists are approaching. Dogs must always be kept within sight and away from angler's equipment.
- **Always clear up after your dog.** Dog mess on or beside the towpath can spoil a visit for everyone and poses a serious health risk – particularly to children. Dog mess disposal bins are located at all major towpath access points. It is an offence to leave dog mess behind, with fines of up to £1000.
- **Do not allow your dog to chase or worry wildlife, other dogs or people.** Dogs must be kept out of adjacent farmland at all times.



Please use a bell and ring it twice when approaching pedestrians and anglers. This will provide a signal that you wish to pass when it is safe to do so.

Consider how you would like to be treated!



## Reporting incidents

To report any incidents or provide feedback on your visit, please contact the Canal Ranger Service using the contact details below:

**Grand Western Canal Country Park & Local Nature Reserve**

The Moorings, Canal Hill, Tiverton, Devon EX16 4HX  
 Tel. 01884 254072 Fax 01884 255935  
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