

DOGS ON LEADS

Presentment by Lucie Rowe, practising commoner

Can I request that the Verderers consider that they ask Forestry England to make an amendment to the current byelaw ruling regarding dogs in The New Forest.

As I understand it the 1982 Byelaws state the following, That no person shall:

Xii Permit any animal in his charge to be out of control.

Xiv Permit a dog for which he is responsible to disturb worry or chase any bird, mammal or animal or on being requested by an officer of the Commission, fail to keep the dog on a leash.

Whilst I believe these 2 byelaws should manage the dog problem, I feel that they are never seen to be enforced. Therefore, I think that the time has come to insist that all dogs being exercised in The Forest should be on a lead at all times. Most dog walkers do not seem to understand the meaning of keeping a dog under control and every time I am out in The Forest I have to deal with unruly dogs and disrespectful owners.

When on horseback I have had to contend with dogs running at my pony, jumping and barking at my pony, nipping at my pony's heels, I have had dogs charging towards me with bells on their necks ringing wildly and I cannot count the number of times I encounter a dog with no owner even in sight. Commoners need to be able to ride on The Forest safely to check their stock. The Health & Safety Executive record when accidents happen in the workplace but they also take account of 'near misses' as a way to improve safety. They suggest that stopping a near thing prevents a real thing. Well, I can't count the number of 'near misses' I have experienced due to out of control dogs and I am glad that I have a particularly tolerant pony to ride! I have witnessed dogs chasing cows several times & I have seen a large dog bring down a calf. My mother's hens have been killed and traumatised by a spaniel that entered our yard, and the owners were so far away that they never even knew it had happened and only this past weekend a commoner friend had a poodle crossbred enter her yard and kill her chicken in front of her eyes. Again, the owner was lagging far behind and obviously not in any control of that dog.

If the rule were that dogs were on leads at all times, there would be no confusion as to the meaning of under control. The owners would be on hand to clear up the dog mess and not only would the commoners stock have less disturbance, but the wildlife would benefit greatly too. With so many people now using The Forest to exercise their dogs it is proving more and more difficult to be safe whilst out on The Forest and with one report I read saying there are 25,000 dogs being taken onto The Forest daily I really think that the time has come to have a more stringent ruling on all these unruly creatures. Many of these dogs have never seen loose animals before and the owners do not realise the consequences of their actions. With all of the puppies purchased during covid lockdown by inexperienced dog owners the future looks depressing to say the least.

The New Forest is a Special place and as such should have a Special Rule – Dogs on Leads.

NB. The only concession for a loose dog would be when it is being used to herd a commoner's livestock, something which it has obviously been trained to do.