

Staying Safe Around Cattle

This advice is produced as a supplement to advice contained on the Ramblers website at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-finder/areas/northumbria/groups/alnwick/walking-near-cattle.aspx> and results from consultations made with Chris Stephenson of Bradley Burn and John Stephenson, both of whom are experienced in the farming of cattle.

- Most cattle are out in the pastures approximately between April and the end of October. Some hardy breeds, often used for conservation grazing may be out for much longer than this and these are often Highland or Galloway types, both of which pose very little risk to the walker and may be found in rough areas of grazing and nature reserves. In the main, it means that you are unlikely to encounter cattle in the winter months.
- Cattle are regularly moved between pastures to provide fresh grass. This means that cattle encountered on a walk recce may have been moved somewhere else when a walk takes place, or cattle may appear where there were none a week earlier.
- Farmers are advised, if possible, not to graze cows that are calving or have very young calves at foot where there is a footpath. The few days either side of calving, and when the calf is least mobile, is where the protective maternal instinct kicks in. You will find plenty of suckler herds with older calves on footpaths, and they are generally quite calm. Further advice for walkers with dogs is given below.
- Many people are frightened to pass through fields with cattle, especially walkers who have a dog with them. However, farmers will not tolerate aggressive cattle for obvious reasons and such cattle will usually be disposed of quite quickly.
- Cattle are inquisitive and may well approach walkers. They may run towards walkers and this could be quite frightening. They will also follow walkers along a path. The advice is to walk at a calm and quiet “normal” pace and, if the cattle get very close, to turn and face them. Do not run since this will just increase the pace of the interaction and they can run faster than you anyway. If you were to trip and fall with a herd of running cattle behind you, there's a high chance that they would not be able to stop in time and you could be injured. Walking slowly slows down the interaction and turning to face them will stop

them. They will usually stay at least 2 metres away. If one gets very close, a tap on the nose with a walking stick or the handle end of a walking pole will turn them away. Also, holding a stick or pole upright in front of you will increase the distance between you and the cattle by another metre or so.

- Some cattle, specially bullocks, may run towards you and may run away and charge about the field. The same strategy as detailed above will apply. If you stand still and face them they will stop.
- Do not leave the footpath. If you cross into another field you could well be trading one risk for another one – the alternative field could contain more cattle. Its all right to walk around a group of cattle to avoid close contact but the general line of the path should be maintained.
- If you have a dog and cattle threaten the dog, let the dog loose. A dog should be able to run faster than cattle and is more manoeuvrable and will usually escape. Cattle will chase a dog in preference to a walker.
- On well-used footpaths, cattle are much less likely to react than on less well used paths.
- Suckler cattle are those cattle with calves. There is often a bull included in a field with a suckler herd but these pose little additional risk. Suckler cows are very protective of their calves and are more likely to attack a dog and/or a walker if their instinct tells them that their calf is under threat.
- The general advice is the same as for other cattle – pass by calmly and quietly and do not run and in addition, do not get between a calf and its mother and avoid close contact. In general terms, the risk is higher where calves are very young and decreases with the age of the calf as well as the popularity of the footpath.
- The presence of a dog increases the risk significantly and seeking an entirely different route to avoid these cattle altogether is probably the best strategy. However, if this is not possible or sucklers are encountered unexpectedly, taking a wide berth and following the advice about letting the dog go if cattle attack the dog is the best tactic.