



# HORSES, THE LANDSCAPE AND YOU

EQUESTRIAN GUIDE TO KEEPING HORSES IN  
PROTECTED LANDSCAPES



**SOUTH WEST  
PROTECTED  
LANDSCAPES**



*South West  
England*



Horse owning and riding is an increasingly popular activity that is growing across the south west of England. How horses are cared for and the developments associated with keeping a horse have a significant impact on the character and quality of the South West's special landscape.

Owners of horses have an important role to play in keeping the south west a beautiful place. In this publication you will find helpful guidance, sources of information and useful contacts to make sure your horse is well cared for and makes a positive contribution to our landscape.

South West England is defined by the richness and diversity of its landscape. Nearly 40% of the region is recognised as internationally important through the designation of 2 National Parks and 14 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

Keeping our landscape rich and distinctive is a job for everyone. By understanding what makes our National Parks and AONBs special we can all play an active part in ensuring the landscape we pass on to future generations retain the special qualities we all value so highly.

*Our aim is for happy and healthy horses in a thriving and distinctive landscape. Please encourage friends and other horse users to follow this guidance too.*





## Managing your horse's grazing

Pasture is vitally important to any horse owner. It provides both essential food and an area in which a horse can roam and graze. Well kept pasture land will ensure your horse has an adequate supply of year round forage and provide benefit for plants and wildlife.

Overgrazed land presents the horse owner with problems, affects the health of your horse and looks unsightly.

The more land available to each horse will generally mean less pressure on the pasture but good management can help to reduce problems.



## Top tips for looking after your grazing:

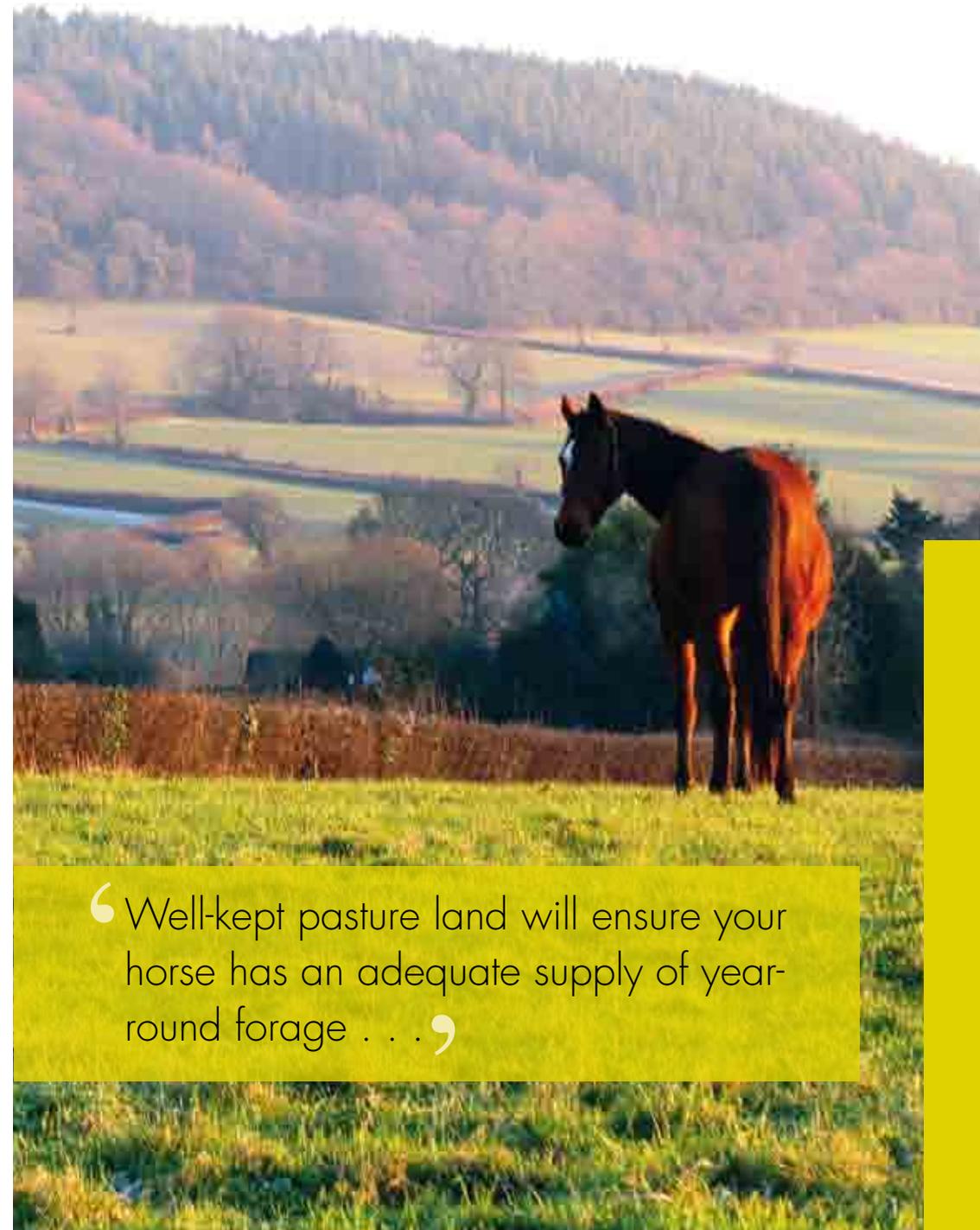
- Plan ahead – think about your horse to pasture ratio,
- Ryegrass is not the best pasture for horses – They need low calorie high fibre forage – a mixed grass pasture provides this,
- Keep the sward length of winter grazing as long as possible to reduce poaching and run-off. Try not to graze a field below 2.5cm,
- Mixed grazing with sheep/cattle can reduce parasites and worms, improve control of weeds and helps create a better structure for your pasture,
- Remember not everything in the field other than grass is a weed. Many species are palatable to your horse and beneficial to wildlife,
- It is essential that you remove poisonous plants, especially ragwort and manage invasive species that horses will not eat,
- Move feed areas and mineral licks regularly to avoid creating muddy areas,
- Avoid using inorganic fertilizers, they can reduce plant and wildlife diversity, and
- Seek advice on how to maintain or improve your lands value for wildlife.

### **More information:**

National Guidance on Horse Pasture Management, available Spring 2010 from South West Protected Landscape Forum [website](#)  
[The British Horse Society pasture management guidance](#)  
[BHS ragwort leaflet](#)  
[Natural England guidance](#)  
[www.fathorseslim.org.uk](http://www.fathorseslim.org.uk), a Blue Cross campaign

### **Helpful contacts:**

Local authority Countryside Departments  
Natural England - Environmental Stewardship teams  
National Park Authorities,  
British Horse Society  
[Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group](#)  
[Wildlife Trusts](#)  
Specialist seed companies such as [MAS Seeds](#)  
[Flora Locale](#)



“Well-kept pasture land will ensure your horse has an adequate supply of year-round forage . . .”

## Why 'over grazing' is a problem?

Over grazing and poor management can result in the pasture becoming 'horse sick'. Horse sick pasture develops into 'roughs' (unpalatable areas, avoided by horses) and 'lawns' (overgrazed, sparse areas).

*Overgrazing can:*

- Threaten your horse's health by increasing the risk of harmful worms in the pasture,
- Increase the risk of 'stressed' grass which is thought to contribute to the causes of laminitis,
- Lead to bare or poached ground. Poached ground can lead to mud fever in wet conditions and provides an ideal seed bed for poisonous plants e.g. ragwort,
- Look unsightly - the landscape looks exhausted and it gives a negative impression of horse-keeping and horses as a part of the landscape,
- Decrease the wildlife value of grassland.

*The British Horse Society recommend a ratio of two horses per hectare on permanent grazing (1 – 1.5 acres per horse). A number of factors will affect this recommendation, such as:*

- Size and type of horse/pony
- Length of time spent stabled or exercised off the pasture
- Time of year
- Quality of the pasture, underlying soil and topography
- Number of other grazing animals on the pasture



## Fences, Trees and Hedges

Fencing, hedges and new tree planting can play an important part in managing your land effectively. The key is ensuring boundaries and field sub divisions are right for your horse and in sympathy with the surrounding landscape.

A well-managed hedge provides natural shelter from the weather and is one of the best boundaries for horses and wildlife. If you need manufactured fencing, consider what this will look like in relation to the area you live in. What material would be both effective and blend in to the surrounding countryside?

Internal fencing is sometimes necessary to limit grazing areas or to rest areas of land. Consider how this will look for the time it is in place. The increasing sub-division of fields, fenced with a variety of materials gives an impression of clutter and over intensive use of the land.

### Top tips for managing boundaries and sub-dividing fields:

- Try to reduce visual impacts on the landscape by using common local or traditional materials – for example Limestone walls on Mendip, beech hedgebanks on Exmoor,
- Avoid or minimise sub division of fields. If you have to sub divide fields look to mirror the lines of existing field boundaries and use low visibility/mute coloured materials,
- If electric tape is necessary it comes in a variety of colours. Use with black/brown posts to temporarily sub-divide fields and keep well maintained,
- If a post and rail wooden fence is used, unpainted, half round rails and round posts are preferable to sawn timber. Hedge planting with appropriate native species can reduce impact,
- Manage your hedgerows to prolong their life and increase their stock proof nature – Hedgelaying is a traditional management technique that is easy to learn or use a local hedging contractor and help support a traditional local craft,
- Alternatively, trimming hedgerows on a rotation, every two or three years is best for wildlife, and
- Horses can damage trees by chewing and stripping bark and branches that may result in the death of a tree. This is unsightly and potentially damaging to your horse. Providing mineral licks can offer vitamins and minerals that a horse may be looking for if it chews tree bark.

#### More information:

National Guidance on Horse Pasture Management, available Spring 2010 from South West Protected Landscape Forum [website](#)

[Hedgelinek](#)

[The British Horse Society pasture management guidance](#)

#### Helpful contacts:

*For practical help with boundary management and the possibility of funding speak to:*

National Park Authorities & AONB Offices

Local Council

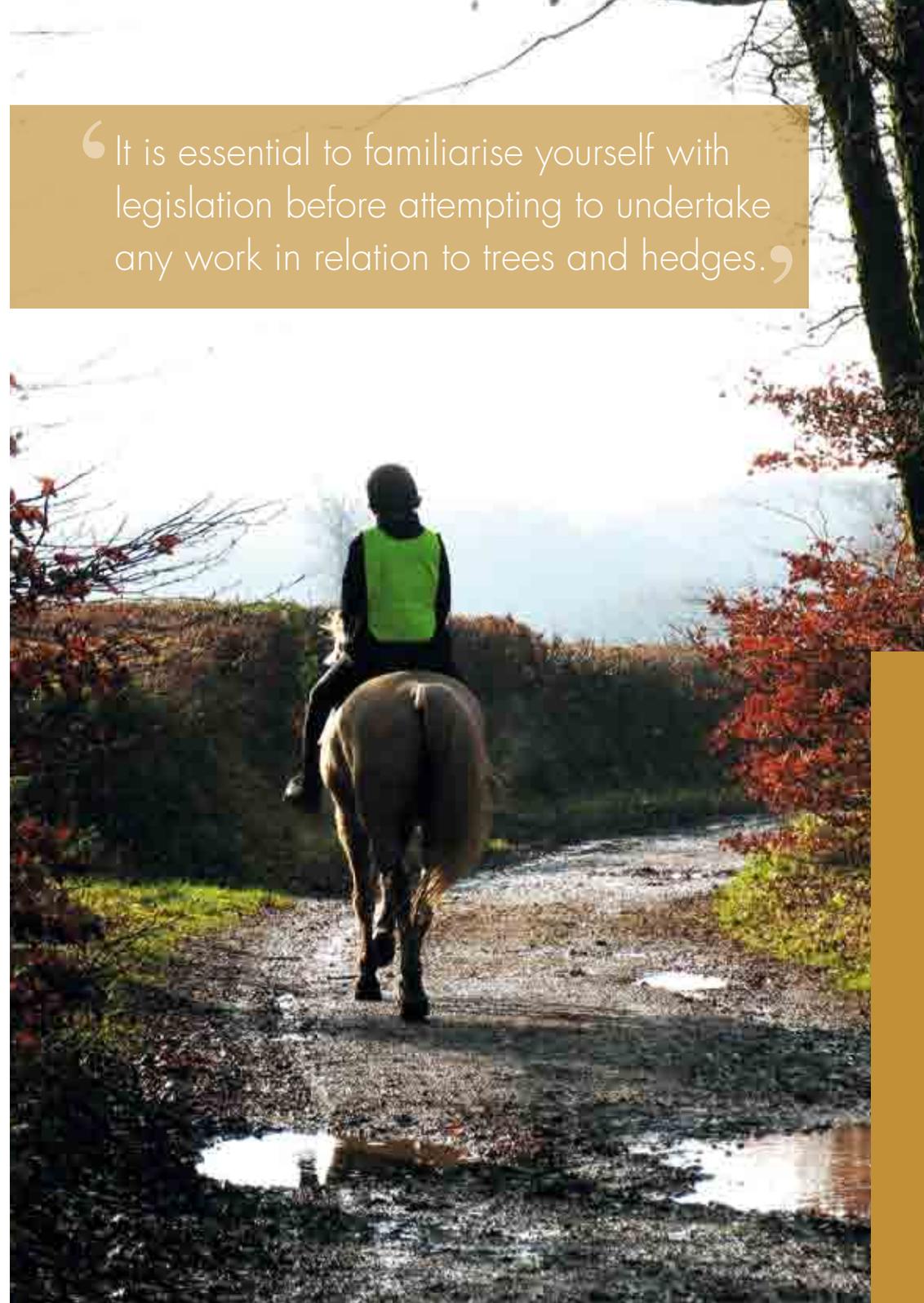
National/ Local Hedging Associations

Forestry Commission

Natural England (for boundary management grants)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group,

“It is essential to familiarise yourself with legislation before attempting to undertake any work in relation to trees and hedges.”





“ Large and badly kept muck heaps not only look unsightly but run-off can cause pollution . . . ”

#### *Trees and hedges are important landscape features:*

- Providing valuable shelter for your horse in the hot summer months and against the elements in the winter,
- Providing habitats, wildlife corridors rich in food for a whole host of animals and birds,
- Regulations prevent the removal of all or part of countryside hedgerows without first submitting a hedgerow removal notice to the Local Planning Authority, and
- Trees covered by Preservation Orders and in Conservation Areas are protected and any works need authorisation from the Local Planning Authority.

## **Managing Waste**

Keeping a horse will undoubtedly produce waste. As a horse owner you have a ‘duty of care’ that requires all waste to be stored and disposed of responsibly. Large or badly kept muck heaps are not only unsightly but can have a detrimental effect if runoff is allowed to pollute the ground or a water course.

If waste is to be taken from your holding it must be handled or dealt with by individuals or companies that are appropriately authorised and a record kept of all wastes transferred through a system of waste management notices.

### Top tips for waste management:

- Make sure you plan ahead – Muck does pile up. What are you going to do with your horse manure?
- Consider the type of bedding you use for your horse. With compostable materials it is recommended they are well rotted before being used for spreading on land. Seek advice on spreading bedding materials from the Environment Agency to ensure you stay legal,
- The use of rubber matting in stables can reduce the need for large quantities of bedding and thereby cut down the amount of waste produced,
- If you plan to have a lot of horses consider creating a sealed base and underground tank to collect water run-off from your muck heap,
- Make sure that temporary heaps are not located over field drains and that any run off cannot seep into water courses,
- Ensure that all feed bags, twine, plastics and packaging are disposed of correctly. Burning or burying plastics on land is illegal. Store in a secure place and ensure it is collected by a authorised contractor and recycled where possible, and
- Regularly removing dung from paddocks removes harmful parasites (worms) excreted in manure, encourages horse to graze more evenly using the whole field and reduces the establishment of weeds and rank grass.

#### **More Information:**

National Guidance on Horse Pasture Management, available Spring 2010 from South West Protected Landscape Forum [website](#)  
[Environment Agency Pollution](#)

#### **Helpful contacts:**

Local Environment Agency office  
FWAG run recycling schemes in Devon, Dorset and Somerset





## Development - buildings and other structures

Even the smallest scale of horse keeping will probably require development of some kind and it is rare for equestrian development not to need planning permission. If you are at all unsure whether you need permission, ask.

Regardless of the type of development proposed – be it a simple field shelter, stabling or new access and tracks - consideration will need to be given to a number of factors including siting, scale, design, materials, colour and landscaping. New buildings, shelters, or arenas are best located within existing farmsteads or groups of buildings, rather than isolated in open countryside.

Light pollution is a growing concern. External lighting can make a site appear very prominent in the landscape and affect the valued sense of rurality. Any planning applications should set out clearly whether artificial lighting is proposed, and if so how light pollution will be minimised.

Riding arenas or maneges are increasingly being created to allow schooling of horses and ponies, dressage and jumping as well as safe off road riding. If well sited and designed, arenas can have a relatively small impact on the landscape and natural environment.



Think landscape.  
“ Consider carefully where any buildings will be sited and what materials they will be constructed from to minimise impacts on local surroundings. ”

### Top tips for buildings and other infrastructure:

- It is your responsibility to ascertain whether planning permission is required for any development. Contact your Local Planning Authority for pre-application advice before submitting a formal application,
- Think landscape - Consider carefully where any developments will be sited and what materials they will be constructed from to minimise impacts on the surroundings,
- Consider your neighbours – aim to minimise impacts,
- New tracks should follow contours of the land – darker, porous surfacing materials are best,
- Choosing the right natural materials and colour of roof can be enormously effective in helping to blend your new building into the surrounding landscape,
- Keep lighting to the minimum for working and security purposes. Always minimise light spill by angling lighting to the ground and using night sky friendly lamps,
- Consider making space for wildlife in stabling buildings – barn owl boxes, swallow or house martin ledges or bat bricks will be valuable additions,
- Choose a relatively level site and avoid excessive cut and fill. Avoid artificial mounding of soil,
- Group developments with existing features in the landscape such as farm buildings – avoid open fields or remote corners, and
- Surface dressing should blend with the surrounding landscape, ideally as close to the colour of the local soil as possible. Materials such as sustainably sourced wood chip, sand, or sand mixed with natural fibres are recommended. Avoid the use of synthetic materials.



### More information:

National Guidance on Horse Pasture Management, available Spring 2010 from South West Protected Landscape Forum [website](#)  
National Park and AONB management plans and design guides  
Local Councils for planning policies and other guidance

### Helpful Contacts:

National Park Authority & AONB Offices  
Local Authority Planning Dept



## Will I need Planning Permission?

**In most cases yes.** Planning permission is normally required to use land for keeping horses for non-agricultural purposes and development. This includes stable blocks, hard standing and exercise arenas, hay barns, feed stores, tack rooms, new gateways, tracks or access points on to highways, permanent jumps, lighting and engineering works such as earth moving.

Sub-dividing agricultural land into paddocks with shelters provided for horses is likely to be regarded as a material change to recreation use, and as such requires planning permission.

In a limited number of cases proposals may be considered 'permitted development' under planning regulations, which, subject to certain criteria, do not require the submission of a planning application. The 'grazing' of horses is deemed to be an agricultural use and does not require planning permission.

## What is the difference between 'grazing' and the 'keeping' horses?

The use of land for grazing horses or ponies does not require planning permission so long as the majority of the animal's food is obtained from the land being grazed. However, if the grazing is part of a commercial activity, such as livery or if other activities take place on the land, this **will** require planning permission.

There is current legal precedent - 'The Sykes Test' – that helps to illustrate this finer point. The Sykes Test suggests that if the predominant purpose is for the horses to survive off the land from the grass (which could include feeding hay made on the holding), this equates to 'grazing'. However if the predominant purpose is simply to provide a location for horses to live and they receive supplementary feeding from elsewhere outside the holding, then that is regarded as the 'keeping' of horses on the land.

## Should I seek advice on planning matters?

As planning policies, case law and regulations change from time to time it is always advisable to contact your Local Planning Authority to discuss what you have in mind. As well as providing valuable advice, it may well save you time and money. Local Planning Authorities can, and do, order unauthorised developments to be dismantled.

National Parks and AONBs have the **highest status** of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and this will be given great weight in local planning policies and decisions on planning applications in these areas.



**This summary covers the basics landscape impacts of keeping horses – Other important considerations include:**

- Public rights of way criss-cross our countryside. Landowners should be aware of their responsibility and ensure that activities do not compromise these routes.
- Your landholding may contain features of historic or archaeological interest. Some sites may already be recognised and given protection through designation as a Scheduled Monument or as a Site of Special Scientific Interest – In these cases consent must be obtained for any works that might affect them.
- If in doubt, seek advice.

**Helpful contacts:**

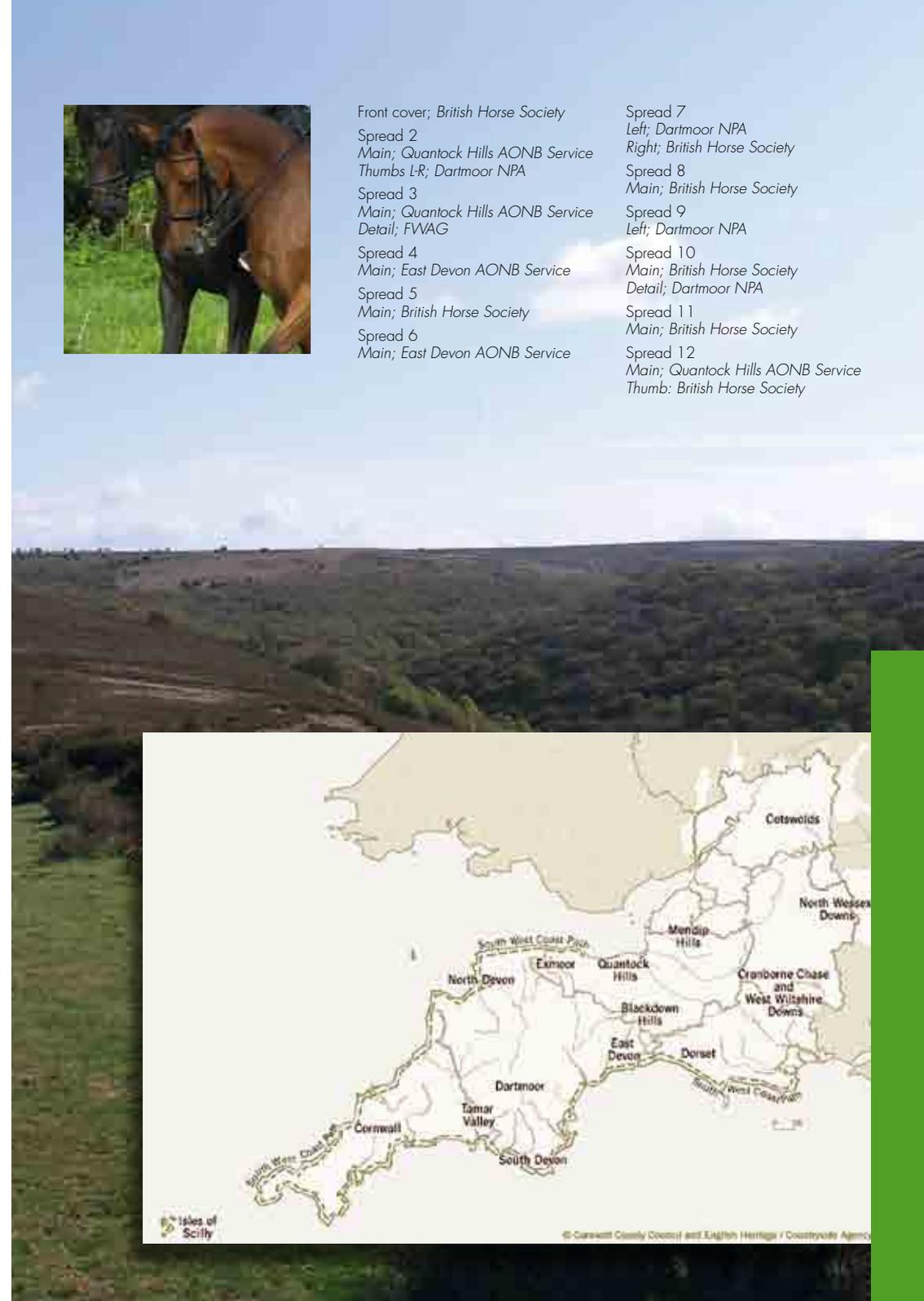
Natural England - Environmental Stewardship teams  
 National Park Authorities and AONB Offices  
 Local Council Rights of Way departments  
 Local Council Historic Environment teams

**Protected Landscapes**

- Blackdown Hills AONB
- Cornwall AONB
- Cotswolds AONB
- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
- Dartmoor National Park
- Dorset AONB
- East Devon AONB
- Exmoor National Park
- Isles of Scilly AONB
- Mendip Hills AONB
- North Devon AONB
- North Wessex Downs AONB
- Quantock Hills AONB
- South Devon AONB
- Tamar Valley AONB



Front cover; *British Horse Society*  
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SWPLF Equestrian Guide  
[www.southwestlandscapes.org.uk](http://www.southwestlandscapes.org.uk)