

Procedure for introduction to, management on and removal of cattle from Rushymeade.

By Paddy Schofield for the Rushymeade Management Group, PPC.

This note outlines the routine agreed by the Rushymeade Management Group, acting for Pulloxhill Parish Council (PPC), and by David Self, who is the owner of the cattle and who is ultimately responsible for their supply, wellbeing and removal.

It covers the methods agreed for routine introduction of cattle to Rushymeade, usually at the beginning of May; management and wellbeing of these cattle during their stay, and their removal, usually during September, at the end of the summer grazing season. It also covers how cattle will be removed should an emergency occur, such as occurrence of health problems with one or more cows or behavioural problems which may be considered as presenting a risk to the public.

David Self provides cattle for the essential summer grazing of Rushymeade. David has provided the cattle for Rushymeade since the land was acquired by the Village in 2001. He farms between 70 and 80 beef cattle, most of which are summer grazed on a variety of private and public land areas. David is aware of the requirements for animals suitable for grazing on land with public access and rights of way.

Grazing of Rushymeade by cattle has been accepted by the Rushymeade Management Group and by the PPC as the only option for maintaining the land in its present status, that being historically important unimproved grazing land. As such, it is necessary to introduce between 9 and 12 cattle to the land for the summer pasture season, which covers up to 5 months from May to September. Some seasonal weather extremes may alter the start and finish dates each year.

1. Introduction of cattle to Rushymeade

At least 7 days in advance, a date for bringing the cattle onto Rushymeade will be agreed between a Rushymeade Management Group member and the owner of the cattle. This date is weather and land condition dependant so cannot be fixed – such is the way with farming. At this time, notices will be put up at each of the 6 pedestrian access points onto Rushymeade. Examples of the 2 signs used in 2015 are shown below:



It is agreed that the cows will be held in the corral paddock adjacent to the Barton Road entrance for 2 days whilst being dog checked, prior to release onto the main area. There are no public paths through the corral. If there is no negative reaction to the dog or handler, by any of the cattle they will be released onto Rushymeade. If possible, all cattle will be brought into the corral, dog tested and released as a single group. If this is not possible, the first group brought will be tested as above, then for additional cattle, the dog testing of may take place on the farmer's land, prior to delivery and immediate release. This is because it is not good husbandry practice to separate a group of cattle into adjacent paddocks.

As an example, this is how the procedure worked for the 2015 season. David Self delivered 6 cows into the corral next to Barton Road and secured them inside at approximately 18:30 on the 29th May. At approximately 19:15 Liz Molineux and David Self walked an unleashed dog close to the cattle, and did not observe any signs of defence or aggression from any of the cattle. One did cautiously and in an inquisitive manner approach the dog at one point. The dog wandered off and the cow simply returned to the others. Note that this was within one hour of the cattle being transported in a trailer and released onto fresh pasture, so they were probably still not settled. At 11:00 am the next day, Paddy Schofield and Liz Molyneux met on Rushymeade and repeated the walk around the cattle with the dog, with similar results. The cattle were inquisitive but not threatening, largely ignoring both dog and humans. At 17:00 Paddy and Laurie Arnold walked a small Shiatsu bitch, on a lead, around the cattle. They walked within 5 meters of the cattle, without any incident or sign of aggression. As they approached, all of the cattle were lying down. Three of the cattle stood when the dog got within about 10 meters, but simply watched as the dog and handlers walked in a circle round them. In conclusion, following the three separate proximity tests the decision was made that these cows did not show any unfavourable behaviour towards humans or dogs, and that it would be acceptable to release the cattle onto Rushymeade.

Note that the cattle were released at 21:00. This timing plan aimed to give the cattle time to settle over-night whilst there were no walkers on the land.

These procedures meet, and indeed exceed, the recommendations given by the HSE in their guidance notes (Ref. 1).

2. Management and wellbeing of cattle whilst on Rushymeade

The cattle, fence lines and signage will be inspected most days, either by David Self or by a member of the Rushymeade Management Group. In addition, the cattle will, in effect, be monitored by the passing members of the public, multiple times each day. Any problems with any of the cattle, or with the perimeter fences or signs, will be resolved as quickly as is reasonably possible, reported to and recorded by the Management Group.

The primary objective here is to ensure that the health and welfare of each animal is maintained. The first point of contact, if a problem is suspected, will be to the farmer, David Self. If he is not available, veterinary help may be required.

3 Responsibility for safeguarding the public when using Rushymeade

Part of the observation process is to look for changes in animal behaviour, as indicators of health problems or possibly due to the animal getting close to giving birth.

As the cattle will predominantly be breeding females, it is quite possible that one or more will give birth whilst on Rushymeade. The due dates of these cattle are seldom closely known, as they run with a bull when not on Rushymeade, so their insemination date is seldom observed. Over previous years, several calves have been born and no problems have been encountered or reported. However, general guidance suggests that mothers are likely to show protective behaviour towards their calves, and as such could present an increased risk, especially towards dogs, for a few days post calving.

Notices will be kept by the Management Group in readiness to be put on entrance gates to warn walkers, particularly those with dogs, to keep well clear of any animal with a calf, for 2 weeks post birth. (References 1 and 2).

There is an abundance of literature available giving recommendations to the public with regard to use of footpaths in areas where cattle are grazing. The general guidance rules are clearly set out in Ref. 3, a document published jointly by the National Farmers Union and the Ramblers Association in 2009. An extract recommends:

Do

- Stop, look and listen on entering a field. Look out for any animals and watch how they are behaving, particularly bulls or cows with calves
- Try to avoid getting between cows and their calves
- Be prepared for cattle to react to your presence, especially if you have a dog with you
- Move quickly and quietly, and if possible walk around the herd
- Keep your dog close, on a short lead, and under effective control
- Remember to close gates behind you when walking through fields containing livestock
- Report any frightening incidents or attacks to the landowner, the highway authority, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), and also the police if it's of a serious nature
- Keep us informed of any problems you experience

Don't

- Don't hang onto your dog if you are threatened by cattle - let it go as the cattle will chase the dog and not you
- Don't put yourself at risk by walking close to cattle
- Don't panic or run – most cattle will stop before they reach you; if they follow just walk on quietly

Cattle on your path

So what do you do when cattle are obstructing the path? Find another way, by going around the cattle. If cattle are blocking a path through a field, you're well within your rights to find a safe way, away from the path to avoid them. You should then re-join the footpath as soon as possible – and when you consider it safe to do so.

It's always good practice (and a legal requirement on 'Open Access' land) to keep your dog on a lead around farm animals and horses, for your own safety and for the welfare of the animals. A farmer may shoot a dog which is attacking or chasing farm animals without being liable to compensate the dog's owner.

However, if cattle or horses chase you and your dog, it is safer to let your dog off the lead – don't risk getting hurt by trying to protect it. Your dog will be much safer if you let it run away from a farm animal in these circumstances and so will you.

Similar guidance is given in Ref 4.

A summary of this guidance, along with advanced warning that the cattle will be coming to Rushymeade soon will be published each year in the Pulloxhill Village News.

4. Removal of cattle from Rushymeade

4.1 Routine removal of cattle

The process for removing cattle from 18 acres of land is not as simple as many may perhaps assume. The cattle will not be used to being herded, and may not co-operate if they object to going into the corral area next to Barton Road. However, as the removal usually takes place at the end of the grazing season, they are usually getting hungry as the grass is in short supply, and less nutritious. They can be encouraged to enter the pen for food, by leaving the corral closed to them for a couple of weeks prior to removal, then opening the gate and letting them enter by themselves. Once in the corral, the gates and race can be used to load them into the trailer and the cattle can be removed. This process, managed by David Self, has worked well for several years, following fencing off of the corral area.

4.2 Emergency removal of cattle

Should it be necessary to remove one or more animals mid-season, a number of attempts may be required to get the cattle into the corral, as they are not often herded into this area so can be quite reluctant. Electric stock fencing is sometimes used by David Self to improve the corral security and additional equipment brought in to help with loading the cattle into the livestock trailer used to transport them to and from Rushymeade.

If the reason for removing the cattle is based on a public safety issue, it may be necessary to close all access to Rushymeade until the cattle are contained in the corral, or removed. The Management Group will act immediately to close all access, should they judge this to be necessary, regardless of any legality issues. We will put the safety of the public as our first priority.

References

- 1 **Cattle and public access in England and Wales. Advice to farmers, landowners and other livestock keepers. HSE Agricultural Information Sheet No. 17EW (rev. 1). August 2012**
- 2 **Open access land: management and responsibilities. Natural England. <https://www.gov.uk/outdoor-access-recreation>. 27 March 2015**
3. **NFU and Ramblers team up to provide advice and new signs for dog walkers. http://www.grazinganimalsproject.org.uk/news/nfu_and_ramblers_team_up_to_produce_advice_and_new_signs_for_dog_walkers.html. 31 August 2009**
4. **Keep dogs under effective control. The Countryside Code – Online version. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code/the-countryside-code>. 23 October 2014**