

# COMMONSENSE

A guide to enjoying and caring for our common land

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site



### What is common land?

The concept of common land goes back centuries, when individuals were given the right by the lord of the manor to collect firewood, fish, graze animals, cut peat, gather bracken and other rights subject to local need. In 1965 an Act of Parliament formalised these traditions.

### Who owns common land?

All common land has an owner. The majority is owned by private individuals and organisations. Where there is no known owner, the relevant local authority has the right to protect the common from deterioration or misuse.

### Who are commoners?

Commoners are usually farmers who possess the right to graze livestock (Registered rights of common). However, this right relates mainly to the property and not the individual which is why most rights of common are tied to farms lying close to the common land. The number and type of livestock each commoner is allowed to graze is set out in a legally binding commons register. This allocation, or stintage, states the maximum number of cattle, sheep, ponies or other livestock that can be grazed by each commoner. Only registered commoners have grazing rights, no one else is allowed to put stock onto the common.



### Is common land open to the public?

Historically, most areas of common land in Wales have been open for public access with the consent of the landowner. The Countryside & Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 established registered common land, mountain, moor, heath and down as 'access land'. The right of access introduced by the CROW Act is for open-air recreation on foot. These areas are clearly marked on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps. Horse riding and cycling remain confined to bridleways. For more information visit: [www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk) [www.ccw.gov.uk/enjoying-the-country/outdoor-wales-online/open-access-land/open-access-maps](http://www.ccw.gov.uk/enjoying-the-country/outdoor-wales-online/open-access-land/open-access-maps)



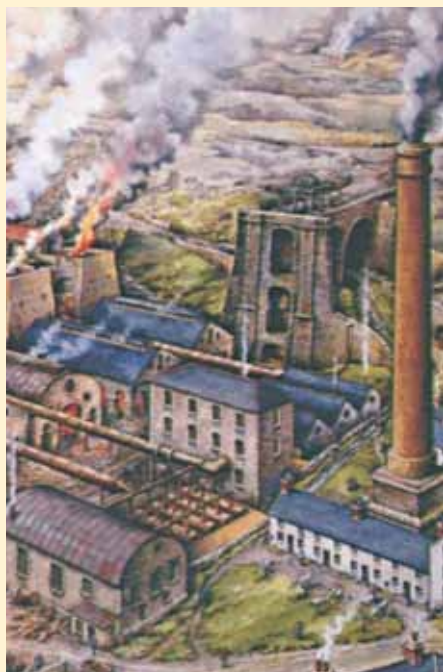
### Keeping the commons in good condition

Most of the common land around Blaenavon is precious semi-natural moorland habitat which has been managed by people for thousands of years. Grazing and annual management, including bracken control, cutting and controlled burning, are all important elements in keeping moorlands healthy.

### Blaenavon World Heritage Site

Much of the common land surrounding Blaenavon was designated as a World Heritage Site in 2000. The landscape is a testament to the industrial heritage of the South Wales valleys and the endeavours of the people who shaped them.

For more information see:  
[www.visitblavenavon.co.uk](http://www.visitblavenavon.co.uk)



### Threats to common land

#### Dogs and the common

Dogs must be kept under close control at all times. To ensure that grazing animals and wildlife are not injured or disturbed, dogs must be kept on a short lead between 1st March and 31st July and at all other times when near animals. **It is an offence to allow a dog to attack or chase livestock.** If you cannot rely on your dog's obedience keep it on a lead at all times! Dog mess can cause infections to people and animals so clean it up and dispose of it responsibly.

### Off road vehicles

It is illegal to use a motorised vehicle on common land without the land owners consent — an offence which may result in a fine and/or the confiscation and destruction of the vehicle. Off roading causes erosion and regularly disturbs or causes injury to grazing animals and wildlife.



### Roads

In many areas the commons are not fenced and grazing animals and wildlife roam free. This has led to number of serious accidents so be vigilant at all times and **drive slowly**.

### Fly tipping and litter

Fly tipping is illegal and is a serious criminal offence which carries a fine of up to £50,000. Also, litter and rubbish on common land is a threat to wildlife, destroys the visual beauty of the landscape and is a hazard to people. Please take your litter home with you.



### Controlled burning and illegal fires

Burning is a traditional management method still in use on Welsh commons. Burning removes much of the old dead grasses and woody plants. The ash created returns nutrients to the soil. This encourages a fresh new growth of vegetation which the livestock can then graze. Burning is legally controlled in Wales through the Heather and Grass Burning (Wales) Regulations (2008). Controlled burning is undertaken by skilled people under carefully controlled conditions and the Fire Service is always informed. Deliberate fires, on the other hand, can get out of control very quickly and destroy vast areas of moorland and wildlife. In Wales the Fire Service spends £14,000,000 a year in tackling grass fires. Starting illegal fires can attract fines of up to £20,000.



The UK holds some of the most important upland heath anywhere in the world which means we have a responsibility to look after this important habitat. In fact the 'heath' on the Blorenge is so important it has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The local heathland provides a home to rare animals too, these include: red grouse, hare, lapwing and the unique Silurian moth – which has been found nowhere else in the world.

### Upland Heath and Wildlife

The area's common land is composed mainly of upland heath. This man made habitat contains large amounts of heather and wimberry but also a number of rare plants such as crowberry and cowberry.



### Managing the commons – a partnership

Because it is man made, the heathland habitat requires constant attention to maintain it. Traditionally game keepers and commoners managed the heath for grouse shooting and farming

livestock. This is no longer the case, the game keepers having long gone.

With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Welsh Government the Forgotten Landscapes Project is encouraging a partnership approach to managing the heritage landscape. Commoners and an ever growing number of volunteers are working together to restore the commons to their former glory. This includes bracken control, heathland restoration and dealing with the damage caused by illegal off roading, fly tipping and arson.

For more information on Forgotten Landscapes visit the website at:  
[www.visitblanenavon.co.uk](http://www.visitblanenavon.co.uk)



## Volunteering

If you would like to help conserve the commons and the area's unique

industrial archaeology please contact the World Heritage Centre.

Tel: 01495 742333

Email [blanenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:blanenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk)

[www.visitblanenavon.co.uk/en/ForgottenLandscapes/](http://www.visitblanenavon.co.uk/en/ForgottenLandscapes/)

[VolunteerandJuniorRangers/Home.aspx](#)

## Who to contact

### Tourist Information

Blaenavon Tourist Information Centre:

Tel: 01495 742333

Email: [blanenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:blanenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk)

### Fires

Dial 999 and ask for the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

### Fly tipping/abandoned vehicles

Torfaen Call Centre: 01495 762200

Email: [blanenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:blanenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk)

### Injured or distressed stock

World Heritage Centre.

Tel: 01495 742333

Torfaen Call Centre: 01495 762200

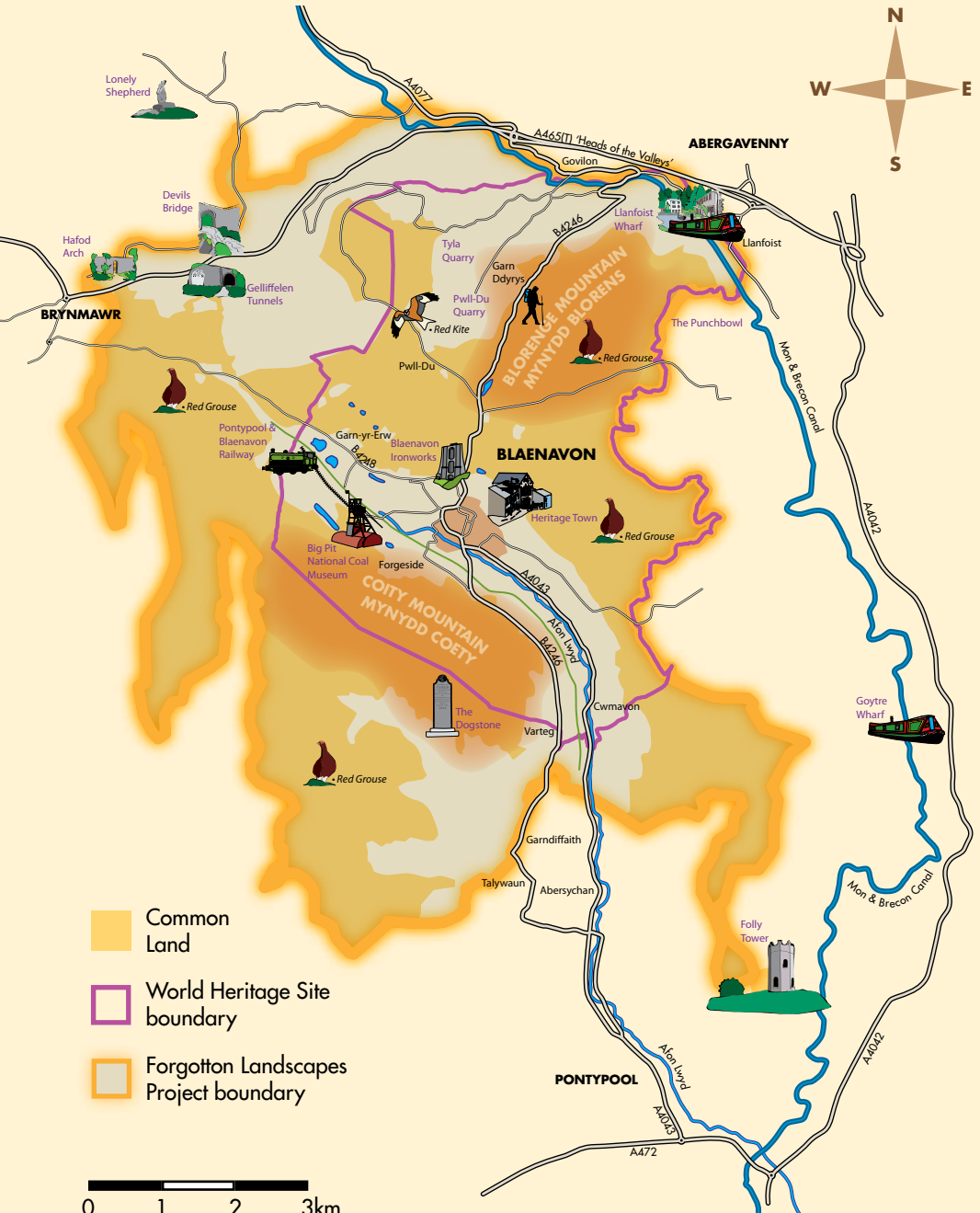
RSPCA Call Centre: 0300 123 8977

### Off-roading/wildlife crime/nuisance behaviour/dogs

Contact Gwent Police on 101

In all instances try to identify a landmark or place name so that the emergency services can establish where you are.

# A guide to enjoying and caring for our common land



## The 10 point Code of Conduct

- 1** Slow down on Commons roads and look out for wandering livestock, wildlife, walkers and cyclists
- 2** Please don't feed the animals on commons as this encourages them to the roadside and puts you and them in danger. Don't interfere with, or try to help, animals even if you think they are in distress - call 01495 742333
- 3** Avoid driving or parking on the commons in front of gates and stiles or in the by-pass areas of cattle grids and narrow lanes. Driving on commons is illegal.
- 4** Don't disturb or remove wild plants and animals from the commons. Many of the habitats of common land are rare, fragile and protected by law.
- 5** Garden waste, including grass cuttings, may be harmful to livestock and can introduce unwanted plants onto the commons. Please compost your waste at home or contact the local authority about municipal composting schemes.
- 6** Leave gates as you find them, unless signed otherwise. Commoners may leave gates open to allow animals to move between field and common.
- 7** Consider the landscape, people and wildlife. Take your litter home.
- 8** Always keep dogs on leads around stock and under close control at all other times. If you cannot ensure your dog will return when called, keep it on a lead at all times.
- 9** If you see a fire on a common with no one in attendance call 999 immediately
- 10** Commons are not campsites. For information on campsites in the area contact the Blaenavon Tourist Information Centre

**To find out more about the Blaenavon World Heritage Site and how to enjoy this globally important landscape please contact the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre**  
**Tel: 01495 743333**  
**Email: [blaenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:blaenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk)**  
**[www.visitblaenavon.co.uk](http://www.visitblaenavon.co.uk)**