



NORWEGIAN
ENVIRONMENT
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The Norwegian right to roam the countryside





Photo: Bård Bredesen, Naturarkivet.no

The Norwegian right to roam the countryside

Outdoor recreation is an important part of Norwegian cultural heritage. For centuries we have been free to roam the countryside, in woodlands and meadows, on rivers and lakes, amidst coastal islets and mountain summits – no matter who owns the land. While we are free to forage for salt-water fish, berries, mushrooms or flowers, we come away not only with the fruits of nature but with our own memories and experiences.

The main principles of the right to roam are legally enshrined in the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1957. This right to roam comes with a set of obligations. Whenever you exercise your right of access, you are obliged to do so with due care and consideration.

To fully understand the public right to roam the countryside, it is important to appreciate

the difference between ‘cultivated land’ and ‘uncultivated land’. In simple terms, cultivated land is land such as farm yards, residential and domestic sites, gardens, industrial estates, tilled fields and similar areas where public access would inconvenience the landowner. Uncultivated land is all land which is not cultivated, and includes most woods and forests, mountains, marshlands and beaches.

The public right of access applies to uncultivated land. This entitles you to:

- roam freely around the countryside on foot or on skis
- picnic or camp
- ride a horse or a bicycle on tracks and roads
- go swimming, kayaking, rowing and sailing
- forage for berries, mushroom and flowers
- fish in the seas

Walkers and skiers...

...have the right to roam on uncultivated land in the countryside, whatever the season, on footpaths, tracks, roads or prepared ski tracks as well as off-road or off-piste. In the winter, you are also free to cross frozen or snow-covered fields and meadows. Passage is also allowed on footpaths, tracks and roads that take you across cultivated land, at any time of the year, but please keep your distance from farmyards and private houses and cabins.

If you bring a dog, you are required by law to keep it on a lead at all times in the period from 1 April to 20 August inclusive.

You are free to stop for a rest or a picnic wherever you want on uncultivated land, but refrain from doing so in close proximity to houses or cabins where people are in residence, and please show due consideration for other picnickers.

You may light a campfire, but not in woodlands or on other uncultivated land in the period 15 April–15 September. Campfires are nevertheless acceptable throughout this period if it is obvious that there is no fire risk.

If you are walking or picnicking in the countryside, please make sure to:

- respect the access rules that apply to recreational and nature conservation areas
- check and comply with local restrictions with regard to dogs and campfires
- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site
- never cause damage to trees when gathering firewood – pick dry twigs from the ground instead
- never light a campfire on bare bedrock as the rock may crack
- never take a shortcut across cultivated fields, through farmyards or past houses and cabins with people in residence
- never intrude on birds and animals, especially in the breeding and nesting season
- never cause harm to vegetation, especially endangered and vulnerable species
- never intrude on grazing livestock, and close all gates behind you
- respect other people's wish for solitude and silence



Photo: Bente Rønning/Miljødirektoratet

Cyclists...

...can ride on roads and tracks on uncultivated land in lowland countryside, and without any restrictions in mountainous upland areas. You can also cycle on roads and designated tracks across cultivated land in order to gain access to uncultivated land, but this entitlement does not apply to organised outings such as cycle races.

The rules for electric bicycles are the same as for pushbikes, unless the landowner has imposed a specific ban on e-bikes.

Some wildlife areas, recreational areas and nature conservation areas may be subject to a cycling ban or other restrictions affecting pushbikes and/or e-bikes. Please check whether special rules apply in your area or if there are specially designated cycle routes.

If you are cycling in the countryside, please make sure to:

- keep in mind that mountainous upland areas are particularly vulnerable to wear, and that you should refrain from cycling in vulnerable terrain (marshland, craggy outcrops etc.)

- keep in mind that not all tracks are suitable for cycling – stick to robust tracks that can take the load of a bicycle
- never intrude on game or livestock
- cycle at an appropriate speed that will not cause inconvenience to walkers
- cycle on lesser-used hiking trails to avoid conflict with walkers
- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site

Horse-riders...

...can ride on roads and tracks on uncultivated land in lowland countryside, and without any restrictions in mountainous upland areas.

You are also free to ride on roads and specially designated tracks across cultivated land in order to gain access to uncultivated land, but this entitlement does not apply to organised outings, such as riding school treks.



Photo: Sigve Reiso, Naturarkivet.no

Please keep in mind that the road, track or terrain you use for riding must be able to withstand the load of a horse and rider. Some wildlife areas, recreational areas and nature conservation areas may be subject to a horse-riding ban or other restrictions. Please check if special restrictions apply or if there are specially designated bridal paths.

Any extensive and organised use of uncultivated land in connection with riding schools etc. should only take place with the landowner's consent. Please also note that access by horse-drawn vehicle is at the landowner's discretion on any private road.

If you are riding in the countryside, please make sure to:

- keep in mind that mountainous upland areas are particularly vulnerable to wear, and that you should refrain from riding in vulnerable terrain (marshland, craggy outcrops etc.)
- keep in mind that not all tracks are suitable for horse-riding, so stick to roads and robust tracks that can take the load
- avoid riding along ski trails and forestry road ski tracks in winter
- never intrude on animals and birds, especially during the breeding and nesting season
- ride calmly past hikers
- show due consideration for walkers and cyclists so that nobody is frightened, alarmed or injured
- never bathe your horse at a bathing place or in water used for drinking
- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site



Photo: Kim Abel, Naturarkivet.no

Campers...

...are free to keep their tent or hammock on the same site for up to two consecutive nights on uncultivated land in lowland areas. In mountainous upland areas, and where there are long distances between residential properties, you may keep your tent pitched on the same site for more than two consecutive nights.

Unless otherwise stipulated in local regulations, you should never pitch your tent on a site closer than 150 metres to any house or cabin with people in residence, and you need to take care not to pitch your tent in a way that is harmful to young forest. You are not permitted to put up a tent on cultivated land without the landowner's permission.

You can light a campfire, but not in woodland areas or on other uncultivated land between 15 April and 15 September. Campfires are nevertheless acceptable if it is obvious that there is no fire risk.

Camping may be prohibited or subject to special rules in some wildlife areas, recreational areas and nature conservation areas. Please check whether special rules or restrictions apply in the area where you intend to camp.

If you are putting up a tent in the countryside, please make sure to:

- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site
- never cause damage to trees when gathering firewood – pick dry twigs from the ground instead
- never light a campfire on bare bedrock – the rock may crack
- put your tent up on a site where you will not intrude on animals or birds, especially during the breeding and nesting season
- never leave a permanent trace in the vegetation or landscape
- never intrude on grazing livestock
- respect other users' wish for silence and a good distance to neighbouring tents

Canoeists, kayakers, rowers and sailers...

...can travel without restriction in the sea and on lakes and rivers. This is generally free of charge, but fees may be payable for canals and locks. Motorised craft are permitted in the sea, on rivers that form part of a navigable watercourse, and on lakes larger than 2 km².



Photo: Kim Abel, Naturarkivet.no

You can pull your boat or other vessel ashore on uncultivated land for a short period of time. If you wish to moor at a private pier or jetty, you will need to ask permission from the owner or user. You can use mooring rings and cleats etc. on uncultivated land for a short period of time provided the owner or user is not significantly inconvenienced.

Check whether local or landowner-imposed rules apply that prohibit or restrict motorised travel on lakes and watercourses before you set out.

If you go boating, kayaking or canoeing, please make sure to:

- thoroughly familiarise yourself with the safety aspects of your chosen watercourse
- wear a life jacket at all times

- dry your boat, oars and boots before you transfer to another watercourse so as to prevent the spread of living organisms and any fish diseases
- disinfect your fishing tackle, boat, oars and boots if used in a watercourse affected by a contagious fish disease
- never intrude on animals and birds, especially during the breeding and nesting season
- show due consideration for anglers and other users on the banks of lakes and rivers
- never interfere with fishing nets or other fishing gear
- travel quietly without making undue noise,
- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site



Photo: Kristin Sundal

Anglers...

...can fish with a rod or reel in the sea all year, from a boat or from land. On-shore rod fishing for salmon, trout and Arctic char is permitted in the sea all year, but local restrictions may apply. During the closed season, fishing is not permitted less than 100 metres from an estuary (the mouth of a river).

If you want to go fishing for salmon, trout and Arctic char in rivers and watercourses, you need to pay a fishing fee to the Norwegian government and you will normally also have to buy a fishing permit from the local landowner. If you are under 16 years of age, you can fish for free between 1 January and 20 August in river systems where there are no salmon, trout or Arctic char. However, you will not be able to catch crawfish for free, nor fish in artificial fishing ponds. Some lakes and watercourses may also be exempt from the rule, in which case there will be signage to that effect on site. Familiarise yourself with the fishing rules before you go fishing.

Fishing for cod is prohibited in the Oslofjord. Should you nevertheless catch a cod while fishing, please unhook the fish with care and release it back into the sea. Certain spawning grounds between Lindesnes and the Swedish border, along the Skagerrak coastline and in the Oslofjord, are subject to a general fishing ban from 1 January to 30 April inclusive.

If you are fishing in the countryside, please make sure to:

- carry a fishing permit, or ID to verify that you are under 16 years of age
- never use live fish for bait
- never transfer live fish to a different river system
- dry your fishing tackle, boots and waders before moving to a different lake, in order to prevent the spread of living organisms and any fish disease
- disinfect all fishing tackle used in a river system affected by a contagious fish disease
- gut and clean all fish in the water you caught it in
- never intrude on other anglers and users
- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site



Photo: Elisabeth Sæthre

Foraging...

...is permitted on uncultivated land, and you are welcome to gather what you want of berries, mushrooms, flowers and the roots of wild herbs. You can take this produce back home with you.

Other types of natural material should only be gathered sparingly, such as rocks, minerals, turf, moss and lichen. You need the landowner's permission to gather holly, burrs, tree roots and bark.

Please note that special rules apply for picking cloudberries in Nordland, Troms and Finnmark. Landowners in these three counties can impose a ban on cloudberry-picking. Nevertheless, even if a ban has been imposed, members of the public are entitled to pick cloudberries for eating on site. Cloudberry-picking is permitted for private consumption on Finnmark Estate, but only people who live in Finnmark county can pick for resale.

If you are foraging in the countryside, please make sure to:

- familiarise yourself with the protection and preservation regulations in advance if you intend to travel in a nature conservation area (some areas are subject to restrictions on picking flowers, mushrooms, conks/polypores and lichen)
- never pick berries in an area immediately adjacent to a farmyard or a house where people are in residence
- familiarise yourself with protected and endangered plant species so as not pick them
- never intrude on game or livestock



Photo: Kim Abel, Naturarkivet.no

- show due consideration for other users/ foragers
- use established sites for picnicking and camping wherever possible
- show due caution if lighting a campfire, and extinguish it completely before you leave the site

For further information:

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The Norwegian Environment Agency is working for a clean and rich environment. Our primary tasks are to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, manage Norwegian nature, and prevent pollution.

We are a government agency under the Ministry of Climate and Environment and have 700 employees at our two offices in Trondheim and Oslo and at the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate's more than sixty local offices. We implement and provide advice on the development of climate and environmental policy. We are professionally independent. This means that we take independent decisions in individual cases.

Our principal functions include monitoring the state of the environment, conveying environment-related information, exercising authority, overseeing and guiding regional and municipal authorities, providing expert advice, and assisting in international environmental work.