

THE MOST ACCESSIBLE LATCHED GATES FOR THE WIDEST RANGE OF USERS

Disabled ramblers with limited mobility are a unique group of people who face significant barriers to accessing the countryside.

While able bodied people may barely interrupt their stride to negotiate a gate, someone on a mobility scooter must expend far greater time and effort. People with limited mobility find many existing gates very difficult, or impossible, to negotiate.

Stiles should always be replaced by a gap or accessible gate, rather than being repaired. It is not just mobility scooters whose way is barred by a stile – many less agile people find them very difficult, and sometimes impossible. A gap is always preferred, but there are times when an accessible gate is necessary, especially when needed to contain livestock.

People with limited mobility may use wheelchairs or mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs. They may ramble on short routes on tarmac, or for miles on natural surfaces. They visit wild countryside, parks, nature reserves, farmland and urban areas. Wherever a gate is necessary it should be the least restrictive option and be as accessible as possible.

This advice refers specifically to the needs of riders of mobility scooters. However, it is also relevant to meeting the needs of those who use wheelchairs and powered chairs, as well as walkers with limited upper body strength and those with pushchairs. Riders of mobility scooters face significant challenges negotiating gates due to the size of their vehicles and the need to reach over the front of the mobility scooter to open a gate. **Gates should be operable by one hand, and from a seated position on a mobility scooter (or mounted on a horse)**

Some walkers may have limited strength to open a gate. Others may be pushing children in pushchairs. If a gate is not accessible to an individual, it becomes a barrier, denying further access to a route. **Everyone should be able to go out and about, alone if they wish, and be able to open gates by themselves.**

The most accessible latched gate for the widest range of users:

- ✓ is secured open when not required to control livestock
- ✓ opens to provide a minimum 1.5 metre clear gap
- ✓ is fastened to a metal H frame
- ✓ is two-way opening
- ✓ is self-closing with a minimum closing time of 8 seconds
- ✓ has a 'D' bolt
- ✓ can be opened in two ways:
 - with a two-way 'easy latch' with dimples or loops which can be lifted with a stick or grabber, or by hand
 - with a trombone handle

- ✓ is carefully sited to ensure sufficient manoeuvring space around it
- ✓ stands on flat ground with no hollows or bumps and in-line with the path
- ✓ is regularly checked, and maintenance issues are dealt with promptly



A good example of a latched gate that has many accessible features. The pictured gate is a two-way Denstone bridle gate from Centrewire fitted with a trombone handle and a yellow 'easy latch'. An alternative gate is Bison's (formerly Secure-a-field) two-way Rutland bridle gate hung on a metal H frame. An all-metal alternative is Centrewire's two-way Chiltern bridle gate.

SECURING GATES OPEN

A gap is less restrictive than a gate, so **a gate should be fastened open whenever possible** unless there is a justifiable reason to be shut e.g. livestock in a field. Well-meaning people often close an open gate, so it should be chained back and secured with a shackle or lock and accompanied with a sign explaining why it is open, or advising to leave the gate as it was found

GATE WIDTHS

Gates should have a clear gap of 1.5m

British Standard 5709 Gaps, Gates and Stiles specifies that pedestrian gates should have a clear gap of 1.1m, but Disabled Ramblers considers this is not wide enough and recommends 1.5m should be the minimum width of the clear gap.

1.5m allows easier access to those less able to steer a precise line, those accompanied by other people, by assistance or pet dogs, and to allow riders to adjust their line to avoid any compounding difficulties such as encroaching vegetation or bumps and hollows that may develop. On a bridleway the clear gap must be at least 1.525m.

The clear width of the gap through the gate should be maintained vertically to at least 2.4m to allow for bodywork, canopies, walking sticks in holders etc. (3.7m is required on bridleways). Attention should be paid to the height of overhanging vegetation and signs so they do not impinge on the available clear height.

Simple, narrow gates such as this may be a cheap replacement to a stile or older gate but they are too narrow to provide access for those using mobility scooters or those with large pushchairs. These gates last a long time, so for an equally long time these people are prevented from accessing and enjoying the same routes and areas that others are able to. This is counter to the spirit and intention of the Equality Act 2010.



Large gates (commonly 1.8m wide or more) are too difficult and heavy for those with limited mobility, and for many walkers too. **Where a large gate is needed for vehicle use or livestock movement, there should be an adjacent bypass gate which is as accessible as possible.**



This self-closing bypass gate is hung on wooden posts and has a straight handle so could be more accessible, but it is about 1.5m wide with adequate manoeuvring space around it. It is two-way opening and has an 'easy latch'.

If there is not space for two separate gates, a 2-in-1 combination gate encompassing a pedestrian gate which is as accessible as possible should be installed.



The pedestrian section of this 2-in-1 gate would be more accessible it had a trombone handle, but it is self-closing, and is two-way opening with an 'easy latch' and benefits from ample manoeuvring space around it.

POSTS AND H FRAMES

Metal gates hung from metal H frames which are part buried underground are the most durable gates and least likely to incur unwanted movement. Next best are wooden gates hung on a metal H frame; these should be less prone to dropping than those hung on wooden posts.

Gates hung on wooden posts are problematic and require significantly more maintenance. Over time they move out of alignment, no longer opening and closing as they should, resulting in less accessible, or completely inaccessible, gates.

WHY TWO-WAY OPENING?

Self-closing pedestrian gates and bridle gates which do not adjoin roads or ownership boundaries shall be two-way.

British Standard 5709:2018 Gaps, Gates and Stiles

Two-way gates are significantly more accessible than one-way gates. The ability to open a gate in a forwards movement, from both directions of approach, is particularly helpful to riders of mobility vehicles as it avoids any awkward manoeuvring. It is also beneficial to those people with impaired balance or with a cycle or pushchair.

One-way gates are very difficult, and often impossible, for someone on a mobility scooter to use. They must somehow hold the gate and draw it towards themselves while also manoeuvring their scooter, in reverse, out of the way. The difficulties can be better understood by using the links to see the videos in the Kissing Gates section below.

SELF-CLOSING MECHANISMS

Self-closing gates are significantly more accessible for mobility scooter riders. They save time and effort as no reversing or manoeuvring should be necessary after passing through the gate. They contribute considerably to ensuring gates are closed after use.

Self-closing gates should have a minimum closing time of 8 seconds; this should apply to all self-closing gates including those on footpaths.

Adjustable, purpose-made off-set hinges should be used for self-closing gates. They are more reliable than hydraulic or pneumatic closures which require significantly more maintenance and tend to fail.

Springs without speed control and torsion springs used as tension springs should not be used. Weights on chains or cables should not be used as the closing speed cannot be controlled.

Poor installation and lack of maintenance can interfere with self-closing mechanisms:

- they may fail to close, requiring extra manoeuvring from mobility scooter riders who must backtrack to close them
- they can close with too much force, and too quickly, rebounding on riders and their mobility scooters and horses and their riders. This can be dangerous and cause damage and injury.

BOLTS

Bolts may be fixed, slid into place, or sprung. When sprung they should always be attached to a latched handle.

Damage can occur from protruding spring bolts when gates rebound against a mobility scooter or its rider, or a horse and its rider. **D bolts, especially retracting ones, are preferred as they are safer than projecting bolts** and there is less chance of damage. Welded D-loops that shield a straight bolt are also available.



LATCHES AND HANDLES

Most gates currently in the countryside are far from being as accessible as they should be. They may have handles and latches that are difficult or impossible to operate by people with limited reach, dexterity or strength. Many constitute a complete barrier to access for some people. Less accessible gates may have

- no handles, or handles which have no leverage on the bolt
- latched handle mechanisms which are stiff to pull
- latches which are not 'easy latches' and cannot be lifted with a walking stick or grabber stick from a mobility scooter, or by hand by a walker with limited upper body strength.

Latches

- *shall only be fitted if needed and shall be visible and accessible*
- *shall be smoothly and easily operable with one hand from both sides of the gate by all path users, included mounted horse riders. These latches shall also be operable by a stick, by persons in mobility scooters*

British Standard 5709:2018 Gaps, Gates and Stiles

For gates to be as accessible as possible to the widest range of users, **each gate should be fitted with two opening mechanisms**, either of which can be used to release the bolt to open the gate.

The two opening mechanisms should be:

- A. an accessible 'easy latch'** at mid-height up the gate which can both be seen and operated from both sides of the gate. The 'easy latch' should be easily seen and have yellow dimples or loops which can be lifted by a mobility scooter rider using a walking pole or grabber stick, or by hand by a walker. This requires a degree of dexterity.
- B. a trombone handle** protruding above the top rail combined with a mechanism to lever open the bolt. A trombone handle requires greater reach but less dexterity and, if properly installed and maintained, should require little strength to pull.

Walkers and mobility scooter riders may find one method easier than the other and will choose the most appropriate mechanism for them as an individual. A walker who has limited reach may choose the 'easy latch'. Someone with poor dexterity may choose the handle.

The abilities and limitations of the individual riding a mobility scooter, together with the type of scooter they are riding, will determine which of the two mechanisms is the best option for them to use to open the gate.

A mobility scooter rider

- will choose if the handle or the latch works best for them. This will depend on the type of gate, the siting of it, and their own abilities and limitations. They will develop techniques for using different latches and handles.
- learn to go equipped with 'tools' such as walking sticks or poles and grabber sticks. Some people also go equipped with ropes and RADAR keys and even WD40 and screwdrivers to try to get through some difficult and not very accessible gates, but despite this some gates will remain a barrier and bar further progress along a route.



Using a walking stick as a 'tool' to lever open a gate using the trombone handle.

A video of a mobility scooter rider lifting an 'easy latch' with a walking pole to open a gate can be found at this link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YYY4jNMuSM&list=PLIIG5RoBQRr1--Y-yOd_5u2TZHaxJq9wF&index=7&pp=iAQB



'Easy latches'

The development of the 'easy latch' has revolutionised the accessibility of gates for riders of mobility scooters, opening up access to the countryside to many more people. **An 'easy latch' can be seen and used from both sides of the gate; the loops or dimples can be lifted by a mobility scooter rider from their scooter using a walking pole or grabber stick.**

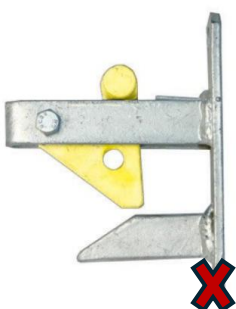
First developed for two-way gates to assist mobility scooters to open gates, manufacturers and retailers may call them an 'easy access latch' or 'two-way catch' or other such name. Users call them an 'easy latch'.



Different versions have been developed for wooden and steel gates and frames and there are one-way versions available too. What they have in common is a dimple or loop that can be grasped by hand or lifted with a walking pole or grabber stick making it much easier to unlatch the bolt. The dimple or loop should be painted yellow so it can be more easily seen.

Note on auto latches (which should be avoided)

Auto latches, with or without an extended lifting handle, should be avoided because they are considerably less accessible than 'easy latches'. They are difficult to see, to reach and to use, and many people riding mobility scooters find them impossible. These are examples of auto latches:



MANOEUVRING SPACE

Substantial manoeuvring space is necessary, on both sides of a gate – much more than is often assumed.

For mobility scooter riders this should ideally be 4.3m square, on both sides of the gate, to reduce any need for repeated manoeuvres, but at least a minimum of 2.2m square on footways. On bridleways this should be a minimum 4m square. This measurement should include a minimum space beyond the latch in line with the gate for the front of mobility scooters (800mm) or horse' heads and necks (1.2m).

Manoeuvring space must be allowed for

- one-way gates opening towards a mobility scooter rider
- gates without 'easy latches' or trombone handles
- gates that require closing
- poorly maintained latches that do not operate properly
- poorly maintained gates that don't self-close properly
- mobility scooter riders who cannot reach far either forwards or upwards
- mobility scooter riders who cannot use tools
- mobility scooter riders who have no tools with them
- mobility scooter riders who need to position their scooter parallel or obliquely to the gate to reach the latch to open it
- some riders of three-wheel scooter riders who may find it easier to open a gate from this angle.

One-way gates require significantly more manoeuvring space than two-way gates because riders must reverse while opening the gate towards themselves, always a difficult manoeuvre, and impossible for many.

Non-self-closing gates require significantly more manoeuvring space than self-closing gates because the rider must make a 180° turn to go back to close the gate after having passed through it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTENANCE

Regular inspection and maintenance of gates and their fittings is essential to keep gates operating as they should and as accessible as possible.

Lack of maintenance leads to less accessible gates when elements of the hardware cease to function properly.

Poorly maintained gates can become difficult or impossible to operate by all users. Eventually they break or become an obstruction; at this point they should be replaced with the least restrictive option (which may be a gap).

Vegetation and path surfaces around gates should be well maintained too.

Radar locks

Disabled Ramblers does not advocate use of RADAR locks. The locks tend to seize up and they require significant maintenance. Additionally, there are problems caused by incompatibility with some of the various makes of 'RADAR' keys available on the market.

Newly authorised gates should not have RADAR locks. Kissing gates, including those types that use RADAR locks should not be authorised either.

Where there are existing RADAR locks it is essential they are frequently checked and well maintained. If it is possible, they should be removed.

KISSING GATES

The authorisation and installation of new kissing gates of any description should be avoided as they are among the least accessible structures for those who use mobility vehicles and completely inaccessible to many people including families with large pushchairs. Unfortunately, some kissing gates are still marketed as being accessible.

The most common designs are

- mobility kissing gates with a hoop– the large mobility versions include a gate that can be unlocked with a RADAR key then opened as a standard one-way gate to allow a large mobility scooter to pass through it.



- kissing gates based on a boxed enclosure – usually wooden, but there are metal versions too.



Kissing gates with RADAR locks can take as much as 5 minutes to open and close from a mobility scooter compared to 10 seconds for a walker. That is 27 times longer!

RADAR locks frequently seize resulting in an impassible gate. One experienced mobility scooter rider comes equipped with WD40 and a pair of pliers to add leverage to the key in the hope that these locks will not bring his ramble to an abrupt end!

Not every disabled person carries a RADAR key and most families with large pushchairs are not entitled to use a RADAR key, so coming across a RADAR lock would prevent them from going any further.

Kissing gates with a box enclosure are often too short for mobility scooters; the larger ones designed for use by mobility scooters require precision manoeuvring and skill to use. Many scooter riders cannot use them.

Videos demonstrating the challenges that can be met when passing through large kissing gates incorporating RADAR locks and one-way gates

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDHtvQ1elvo&list=PLIIG5RoBQRr1--Y-yOd_5u2TZHaxJq9wF&index=14&pp=iAQB
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVy3aWRtS5Y&list=PLIIG5RoBQRr1--Y-yOd_5u2TZHaxJq9wF&index=6&pp=iAQB

Existing kissing gates should be removed as soon as possible, and if a barrier is still necessary it should be replaced with the least restrictive alternative.

Whenever possible existing RADAR kissing gates should be unlocked so the one-way gate element can be securely fastened open leaving a simple gap.



KEY POINTS

- Gates should be operable by one hand, and from a seated position on a mobility scooter (or mounted on a horse)
- A gap is always less restrictive than a gate
- Gates (including large hooped RADAR kissing gates) should be secured open when not required to control livestock
- Disabled Ramblers strongly recommends a gate with a clear gap of 1.5m (1.525m on bridleways)
- Metal gates hung from metal H frames are the most durable and least likely to incur unwanted movement.
- Two-way gates are significantly more accessible than one-way gates.
- One-way gates are very difficult for most scooter riders, and impossible for many
- One-way gates require significantly more manoeuvring space than two-way gates
- Gates should be self-closing with a minimum closing time of 8 seconds;
- Non-self-closing gates require significantly more manoeuvring space than self-closing gates
- D bolts, especially retracting ones, are safer than projecting bolts
- each gate should be fitted with two opening mechanisms - an 'easy latch' and a trombone handle
- Auto latches should be avoided because they are considerably less accessible than 'easy latches'
- Substantial manoeuvring space is needed on both sides of a gate, ideally 4.3m square, with a minimum space of 800mm beyond the latch in line with the gate for the front of mobility scooters
- Gates should be carefully sited on smooth, flat ground
- Regular inspection and maintenance of gates and their fittings is essential to keep gates operating as they should and as accessible as possible.
- Newly authorised gates should not have RADAR locks
- The authorisation and installation of new kissing gates of any description should be avoided
- Existing kissing gates should be removed as soon as possible

FURTHER INFORMATION

Please also see Disabled Ramblers guide [Man-Made Barriers & Least Restrictive Access – Disabled Ramblers](#) for information on various types of structures found in the countryside and useful links to further information on access.

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