

Mountain biking and access in the outdoors

Riding responsibly: advice from the experts

Chris Arbuckle, Regional Field Advisor for the New Zealand Walking Access Commission and keen biker says, "Mountain biking is a recreation that can be enjoyed by everyone regardless of age and ability. That's why it is so popular."

"We are lucky in New Zealand to have access to a variety of off-road tracks close to our cities and towns and wide bikeable open spaces. But we have to remember that in many cases we are sharing these places with others, horses, walkers, trampers and joggers. We have to ride safely and respect others' right to enjoy their pursuits too."

Chris advises the best way to make the most of your adventure is to know your abilities and respect the Mountain Bikers Code. Basically, there are three things to remember.

Respect others, respect the rules, respect the track.

Here are some of the highlights;

- Ride mountain bike and multi-use tracks only.
- On multiuse tracks give way to walkers or horses. Even on mountain bike-specific tracks, respecting others will foster a positive attitude towards bikers.
- Pass with care. Let others know of your presence well in advance, clearly calling what side you plan to pass on. Being startled will upset even the most tolerant walker.
- Get permission. Check if permission is required from landowners before heading out. When asking, use the word 'bicycle' rather than 'mountain bike' to avoid confusion with motorbikes. Access to private land is a privilege, not a right. The local mountain bike club, regional council, or DOC will probably know who owns land in their area. Don't run livestock. Give animals a chance to get out of your way.

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- Always leave farm gates as you find them. If you're riding in a strung-out group, don't assume that riders following you will know to close a gate that you left open for them.
- Steer clear of farmland during lambing - August to October.
- Take only photographs, leave only tyre prints.
- Avoid skidding, it lessens your control and damages the track surface
- Don't litter. If you have room, improve mountain bikers' image by picking up someone else's rubbish.

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission has more guidelines for responsible care and behaviour in the outdoors in the New Zealand Outdoor Access Code published on its website.

“When we respect other track users, we ensure mountain biking can continue to grow as a popular past time, and we have tracks to ride off into the future on,” says Chris.



Photo credit: Department of Conservation