

# UK Knife Legislation

## Bringing Sharp or Bladed Instruments into the UK

The Home Office cannot advise on the importing of specific items.

The final decision on whether the import is allowed lies with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) when they have an opportunity to see the item.

## Carrying Sharp or Bladed Instruments in the UK

The main UK legislation regarding the possession of knives and other sharply pointed/bladed objects is the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

### **Criminal Justice Act 1988, Part XI, Section 139**

*“It is an offence for any person, without lawful authority or good reason, to have with him in a public place, any article which has a blade or is sharply pointed except for a folding pocket-knife which has a cutting edge to its blade not exceeding 3 inches.” [CJA 1988 section 139(1)]*

A lock knife is **not** a folding pocket knife and its possession in a public place without good reason is an offence and it is for the person to prove on the balance of probabilities that they had good reason for possession.

It will have to be a genuine reason for possession, for example, someone back packing across the Lake District may reasonably be expected to have a knife for the preparation of meals. It will be far more difficult to justify on the streets of a city or town, but there will be occasions when someone is genuinely going to a martial arts sport or scout meeting (which is easily checked).

Although a campsite may technically be private property, even if owned by a district or a county, it's considered as public property and knife law applies to these areas law. The South of England Event Centre is privately owned belonging to the South of England Agricultural Society

## What can I carry?

The broadest answer is a folding blade, without a locking mechanism 3inches/7.62cm blade or less. Though it is not necessarily illegal to carry this as a knife, you could still be accused of carrying an offensive weapon. The crucial part here is *“without lawful authority or good reason”*.

What constitutes a 'good reason' is very subjective, and can depend on everything from how you act and behave with that item in public to how a member of the public perceives it. It is also not limited to knives, but hatchets, folding saws, ice axes and other sharp/bladed articles that an outdoor enthusiast may use.

Whilst it is impossible to give cast-iron guarantees and advice on what knife or other item you may carry, and how you can carry it, there are some generic situations where it is common for knives to be carried in public space:

- A small, folding lock knife with a serrated blade on the harness of a climber or canoe/kayaker for the purpose of cutting through rope, webbing or line in an emergency
- A fixed-blade bushcraft knife being used by somebody camping on land where they have legal permission to do so, and ensuring it is being used safely and responsibly
- A multitool with a locking blade in the toolkit of a mountain-biker at a trail centre
- A long filleting knife in the tacklebox of an angler on a pier where the public has access

All of those are common scenarios, and there is a very good chance that a police officer, the Crown Prosecution Service and potentially a judge agreeing that it is a 'good reason' for that item to be carried or used in public, in that way, at that time.

**But what if:**

- The climber still has that knife in their pocket when they later go to eat at a Cafe later that day?
- The bush-crafter forgets their knife is on their belt when they pop into Tesco on the way home?
- The mountain-biker get into an argument with a stranger whilst adjusting their wheels and threaten the stranger with the knife on the multitool?
- The angler drops into the pub when walking home, dropping their tacklebox under the table?

The short answer is that they are much more likely to have committed an offence. By making poor decisions, not paying attention to how they are handling the potentially illegal item in their kit and being complacent or just foolishly moving outside of their (potential) legal defence.

You also need to ask yourself if you REALLY do need to carry that item. Is there a 'good reason' for carrying a machete-like survival tool on a simple hike on Snowdon?

Importantly, you should also be aware of how your behaviour and actions could be seen by another person. You know that you are a safe, responsible person who wants to try out your new knife and axe in the wilderness – but has the person walking their dog just seen a threatening-looking scruffy person heading into the woods with camouflage gear and a Rambo-knife?

**Summary of Best Advice**

The best advice (provided jointly by a former police officer and bushcraft outdoor instructor) is to make sure that the knife, axe, saw or whatever you are carrying is:

- appropriate to the activity you are conducting, or about to/have been conducting and there is no other practical way to transport that item
- not being used or carried in a manner which can cause distress or alarm to a member of the public
- not likely to be accidentally carried from your place of lawful use and activity to a public place (on the belt of your trousers etc)
- not an item otherwise prohibited from being carried or owned (including flick knives, butterfly knives etc)
- transported and stored in a way that cannot be misconstrued as being a weapon (i.e. in a rucksack in the boot of a vehicle, not in the cupholder next to you)

Compiled from References by Ken Burt (BUC) 16<sup>th</sup> April 2019

**REFERENCES USED**

<https://originaloutdoors.co.uk/blog/uk-knife-law-explained/>

Criminal Justice Act 1988, Part XI, Section 139

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/forums/europe-uk-ireland/topics/any-trouble-with-bringing-pocket-knife-into-uk>

<https://gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives>