

## Low-Impact and No-Trace Camping & Hiking

Back-country areas are places to seek solitude and a "wilderness experience" away from crowds, noise, and the daily pressures of life. By using Leave No Trace skills, trail users can reduce their impact on the diverse, fragile, and spectacular areas in our country. The following are guidelines that will assist trail users in successfully enjoying the American wilderness. Leave only footprints, Take only memories

### Seven Keys to Low-Impact and No-Trace Camping

#### Pre-trip Plans

- Wear a uniform or other clothing that will blend into your surroundings.
- Obtain as much information as possible about your trek area before venturing out. This includes topographic maps, recreation maps, information sheets, and guidebooks.
- Know the regulations and concerns for the area you'll be hiking, backpacking, or camping in. Restrictions are based on any past abuse and the special conditions of an area.
- Check ahead to see if the area can accommodate and/or will allow your group size. Avoid popular areas during times of high use.
- Camp and travel in small groups. Plan for 12 or fewer in your group or patrol. They are quieter and do less damage.
- Leave a detailed itinerary with someone prior to venturing out.
- Learn how to properly store your food to protect it from bears and other animals.
- Repackage your food into re-usable containers like Ziploc bags, but don't forget the directions. Avoid tin or aluminum cans and glass. Reduce the amount of trash you bring into the woods by eliminating all unnecessary packaging like cardboard boxes, etc.
- Be prepared to filter, treat or boil all water during your trip.
- Take along trash bags and use them to pack out what you packed in.

#### Travel

- Stay on designated trails while hiking or backpacking. Walk single file in the center of the path. Leave only the lightest of footprints. Don't shortcut switchbacks.
- Stay on the trail if it is muddy or wet. Hike through it. If you walk around the mud the trail will widen and becomes even muddier in the future. Mud is part of the backcountry challenge. Wear waterproof boots and gaiters to protect your feet from mud and water. Stay on the trail!
- If traveling cross-country, hike on durable surfaces (rock, sand, gravel, snow, pine needles, or dry grasses) to prevent vegetation damage and erosion. Have your group spread out while hiking off-trail so that new trails aren't created.
- When encountering equestrians, step to the downhill side of the trail and remain quiet.
- To minimize trail damage, wear as light a boot as possible for the conditions. Heavy boots with deep treads compact the soil more and tend to tear up the trail. Wear camp shoes (sandals, sneakers, moccasins, etc.) to minimize impact while in camp.

#### Campsites

- Be sure to camp on durable surfaces too. Avoid fragile areas that will impact easily and take a long time to heal after you leave. Try to concentrate use into campsites that are already established. Give places just beginning to show impact a chance to heal themselves. Good campsites are found, not made.
- Select a campsite 200 feet or more from trails, lakes, streams, trails, and wet meadows.

- Hide your campsite from view, out of sight of trails, streams, and lakes.
- Stay as few nights as possible in one place. Before leaving the area, naturalize it as much as possible.
- Don't attempt to alter the campsite by clearing brush or to build something using nails, saws, etc... Avoid constructing structures or digging trenches.
- Stagger tents around the campsite instead of lining them up. Chased deer are known to clear the first tent but land into a second if lined up.
- Enjoy the wildlife but don't interfere with its habitat. Keep all food properly stored so animals are not tempted to go after it.

## **Fires**

- Don't build campfires! Instead, use a small backpacking stove or two. They will have you eating much quicker than a campfire and they don't leave unsightly charcoal scars or blackened rocks.
- There are different kinds of lightweight backpacking stoves. Some use alcohol, white gas, butane, propane or isobutane as fuel. There are also multi-fuel stoves available. There is even a small wood burning stove that will let you have a mini contained campfire without scaring the environment!
- If you must build a fire, make it as small as possible and use established fire rings. If there is no fire ring contain your fire in a fire pan or build a mound fire to protect the area from the eyesore of old coals and blackened rocks. Build fires only where appropriate, away from trees, rocks, shrubs, and meadows.
- Keep your fire small. Use small (wrist size or smaller) dead wood that is already on the ground. Break wood into smaller pieces as needed. Using small wood will ensure that it burns more completely. A nice fine ash that will blow away when the wind blows is ideal.
- Leave your saw and axe at home. Don't break or saw off branches from standing dead trees, or live trees. Use only wood that's on the ground. Don't burn green wood. Don't peel the bark off trees for use as fuel. It takes many years to heal and remains an eyesore in the meantime.
- Don't make a fire ring with rocks. Blackened rocks are very unsightly and stay that way for many years.
- Some areas don't allow fires or only allow fires in designated areas. Know the regulations for the area you will be visiting.
- During dry periods it can be dangerous or against regulations to build a fire. Make sure your fire is completely out before leaving an area.
- Make sure any fires are dead out. Remove all unburned trash from your fire ring. Contrary to popular belief aluminum foil and plastic bottles do not completely burn in fires. Scatter the ashes over a large area away from campsites and naturalize the area.

## **Sanitation**

- Bring reusable water bottles and refill from a safe water source if there is one, or a larger container of drinking water.
- Skip the paper plates and napkins and bring sturdy reusables instead. (Use a Bowl, Mug and Spork)
- Bring reusable containers for leftovers to reduce food waste.
- Pour a little of your drink into your empty bowl to loosen any loose food scraps prior to washing your bowl. Think of it this way, drink it now or carry it back with you. Combine it outside or inside, it's same nourishment and leaves the wash water cleaner.
- Set up a dishwashing, rinse and sanitize station to reduce water use.
- Food scraps will attract insects and animals. Strain or filter your dishwater and carry out your food scraps with the rest of your trash.
- Take all recyclables home with you (unless the camp site has a recycling station).

- Pack out your trash - If it wasn't there when you came then don't leave it there when you leave! You are responsible for anything you bring into the backcountry. Carry out all your trash.
- Make your site or travel route look like nobody was ever there. Leave no signs of human influence. Remove all evidence of your stay. Inspect your campsite for trash or misplaced gear before you leave.
- Use outhouses or stump latrines if available. Do not dump food stuffs, garbage or fish guts into any outhouses or latrines. Use a stick to sweep the hole for spiders before seating down. Be sure to close the cover afterwards.
- Bury human waste in catholes about 6-8" deep 200 feet from any water sources, campsites, or trails. It is good to carry out used toilet paper since animals often dig it up and spread it all over. Carry out all plastic or cotton feminine hygiene products. Do not bury them.
- Bury sump holes and latrines when you are through with them, and restore ground cover.
- Do not bury your trash. Animals will dig it up or it will become exposed later on for someone else to find. Contrary to popular belief tin foil and plastic bottles do not completely burn. Pack them out!
- Wash yourself and dishes 200 feet from any water sources and away from campsites.
- Use naturally-based, scent-free shampoo and other personal cleansing products.
- Don't use soap or shampoo. Keep chemicals out of the backcountry! So-called biodegradable soap still has an impact on the environment. If you absolutely must use soap use it 200 feet from any water sources and only use a little bit.
- If a bear beats your bear bag system and steals your food bag during the night, try and find the remains and properly dispose of them before you leave. The bear will be done eating in the morning and most likely had his feast a little ways from your campsite. I have found many that were very close to the respective campsites of victims. You are responsible for everything you bring into the backcountry. Carry out your trash!
- Practice "Negative Trace". Pick up trash that others may have missed or that were dropped by accident. Pick up trash you find along the trail. I put trash I find into my back pocket or into a side pocket of my pack. Educate the inconsiderate you may encounter about Leave No Trace and low impact skills and ethics.
- If you are on a horse you are responsible for its waste also. Would you take a dump in the middle of a hiking trail? Move your horse's waste off the trail. Though a horse doesn't much care where it goes, do what you can so it's not by any water sources or campsites.

## Courtesy

- Do not pick wildflowers. Enjoy them where they are, then leave them for others to see.
- Keep noise down when you are around other campers and hikers. Personal electronic audio/video devices other than cameras are a distraction, and violate the spirit of and reason for wilderness camping; leave them at home. (Exceptions: Radio to listen to weather reports and cell phone for emergencies in areas where reception may be possible.)
- Attempt to be as courteous to others as possible. Excessive noise, unleashed pets, and damaged surroundings distract from the quality experience in the backcountry.
- Please remember that visitors can help preserve these sites for future generations by not disturbing them in any way.
- Leave what you find - Take only pictures, leave only the lightest of footprints, and bring home only memories.
- Resist the temptation to take home souvenirs. Leave stones, feathers, artifacts, shells, petrified wood, etc. so that others may enjoy them.

- Leave the place you're visiting in a natural condition. You can't improve Nature. Do not alter a site in any way. Good campsites are found, not made. Don't pound nails into trees or damage live vegetation or trees.

### **Respect Wildlife**

- Respect wildlife - Treat the animals you encounter with respect. Remember that you are a visitor and are traveling and camping in their backyard. Observe wildlife from a distance.
- Do not feed the animals! You will create a nuisance because the animal will develop a taste for human food, associate humans with food, and then raid our campsites to steal our food. Cook and eat away from your campsite so you don't attract bears and critters.
- Learn how to properly store your food to protect it from bears and other animals.
- Don't camp near water. Camp at least 200 feet away from water sources. Animals come to water to drink and may be scared off. Areas near water are also more fragile and camping too close can lead to erosion.

### **Be Considerate of Other Visitors**

- Preserve the solitude. Respect other hikers by traveling and camping quietly. Keep radios at home. Camp as far away from other visitors as you can to avoid creating noise and visual "pollution".
- Pets are best left at home. If you do bring a pet keep them on a leash and under control at all times (this includes barking). Keep them away from water sources and clean up after them. They are your responsibility. Some areas don't allow pets.
- Uphill hikers have the right of way. When encountering equestrians, step to the downhill side of the trail and remain quiet.
- Choose hiking, backpacking, and camping gear and clothing that are natural earth tone colors like green, brown, tan, or black. Bright colors like white, blue, red and yellow do not blend in with the environment, can be seen from miles away and contribute to a crowded feeling.
- Base your backcountry decisions not only on how your actions will impact the environment but also how they may affect others as well.

### **Other Leave No Trace Considerations**

- Navigate with a map and compass to eliminate the need for ribbons, rock cairns, or tree blazes or batteries for a GPS.
- If you use a hammock, protect the trees with a bandana or a sock to prevent damage from the rope. Don't use nails.
- Take Leave No Trace ethics a step further. Practice Negative Trace hiking and camping. Take an extra trash bag with you when camping or backpacking. Pick up trash that others may have missed or that were dropped by accident. Pick up trash you find on the trail while hiking.
- Educate as many people as you can about Leave No Trace and minimum impact skills and ethics.
- Most negative human impacts occur at campsites which is why extra care is needed to preserve their natural state.

### **Use Alternative Energy**

- Leave solar powered lights and lamps out during the day to soak up some rays and provide you with the light you need at night.
- Invest in a hand cranked camping light or flashlight (these are great to keep in your basement for emergencies – so it's a smart investment).