

### Minimal impact bushwalking

Increasing numbers of bushwalkers visiting parks & forests are causing serious damage to the natural environment. Escapes from bushwalkers' campfires, expansion of campsites, trampling and cutting of vegetation, outbreaks of gastroenteritis and the rapid deterioration of walking tracks have all become more commonplace.

Fortunately many walkers have adopted a new bushwalking ethic, **Minimal impact bushwalking**. Without it we run the very real danger of 'loving our natural areas to death'. By learning to 'walk softly', we can minimise the damage to the natural environment and reduce the need for restrictions on walker numbers and track closures.

This leaflet explains minimal impact bushwalking techniques. Some – in particular those to do with fire – carry the weight of law. All must be used if we want to continue to enjoy the great Australian outdoors.

### On the right track

In some areas, walking tracks are being upgraded to minimise the impact of increasing foot traffic; boardwalks are necessary in some places with large numbers of visitors. You can help minimise damage in the following ways.

- ♦ **Stay on the track** even if it's rough and muddy. Walking on the track edges and cutting corners on steep 'zigzag' tracks, increase damage, erosion and visual scarring, as well as causing confusion about which is the right track.
- ♦ **Avoid sensitive vegetation.** Ferns, mosses and other sensitive vegetation are easily destroyed by trampling. Stay on rocks and hard ground wherever possible.
- ♦ **Walk softly.** Choose appropriate footwear for the terrain. Solid but lightweight walking boots are best. Sandshoes can be used on most tracks on the mainland in summer. Wear sandshoes around campsites.

### Bushfires, campfires and billies

Bushfires starting from walkers' campfires cause extensive damage. Many trees are killed by hot fires and replacement of mature trees may take hundreds of years.

- ♦ **Please don't light a fire** if you are in any doubt about the safety of lighting it. Fire restrictions apply in all parks and forests, and open fires and fuel stores may not be used on days of Total Fire Ban. Do not light open fires during hot windy weather.

- ♦ **Observe the fire lighting regulations.** Regulations governing the lighting and use of fires vary from State to State. You should check local variations if you're planning to walk and use open fires.
- ♦ **Keep the fire small** (under one metre square). Don't put rocks around it – these just create another visual scar. Use a safe existing fireplace rather than make a new one.
- ♦ **Use only dead fallen wood.** Dead standing trees are a home for wildlife and are a valued part of the scenery. Leave axes and machetes at home.
- ♦ **Be absolutely sure the fire is out.** Before you leave, feel the ground underneath the coals. If it is still warm, the fire is not out. Put it out with water, not soil.

### How to avoid 'gastro'

We think the increasing cases of gastroenteritis (diarrhoea and vomiting) in some high-use areas are caused by exposed human faecal waste. *Giardia*, a human bacterial parasite is also of concern.

*Giardia* lives in mountain streams contaminated by faecal waste, and causes chronic diarrhoea and an array of other nasties. It has been found in the USA and New Zealand, and is in some alpine areas of Australia. Avoid 'gastro' and help ensure that *Giardia* does not spread to new areas by observing these guidelines.

- ♦ **Where there is a toilet, please use it.**
- ♦ **In areas without toilets, bury your faecal waste.** Choose a spot at least 100 metres away from campsites and watercourses.



Dig a hole 15 cm (6 inches) deep (take a hand trowel for this purpose). Bury all faecal waste and paper, mixing it with soil to help decomposition and discourage animals. Carry out sanitary pads, tampons and condoms.

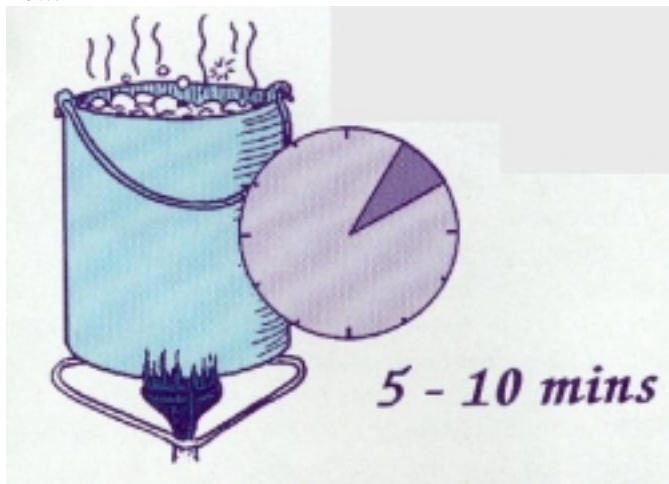
♦ **In snow, dig down into the soil.** Burying human waste is only temporary until the snow melts!



♦ **In high-use areas, river valleys without toilets and snow areas,** you should consider carrying out human wastes to a suitable sewage system.

♦ **Flies and small animals love faecal waste and food.** Cover all food. Avoid putting it on hut tables, furniture and other places used by flies and animals.

♦ **Boil water for at least five and preferably ten minutes** before drinking in high-use areas or areas with low water flow.



### Pack it in, pack it out

- ♦ **Pack to minimise rubbish.** Don't take potential rubbish such as bottles, cans and excess wrapping.
- ♦ **Don't burn or bury rubbish.** Rubbish is likely to be dug up and scattered by possums and other animals and may injure them. Digging disturbs the soil and encourages weeds and erosion.
- ♦ **If you've carried it in, carry it out.** Carry out all your rubbish, including those easy-to-forget items like silver paper, plastic wrappers and orange peel which won't easily decompose.
- ♦ **Other people's rubbish.** If you have the misfortune to come across other people's rubbish, do the bush a favour and pick that up too.
- ♦ **Don't feed animals, especially around huts and campsites.** Feeding causes unnaturally high and unbalanced animal populations dependent on walkers' food. Some animals become a nuisance and can develop diseases such as 'lumpy jaw' from eating refined foods.

### Washing

♦ **Don't wash in streams and lakes.** Detergents, tooth paste and soap (even biodegradable types) harm fish and waterlife.



Wash 50 metres away from streams and lakes, and scatter the washwater here so that it filters through the soil before returning to the stream. Use gritty sand and a scourer instead of soap to clean dishes. Don't throw food scraps into streams or lakes.

### 'No-trace' camping

- ♦ **Look for low impact campsites.** Sandy or hard surfaces are better than boggy or grassed areas. Camp at an existing campsite rather than a new one, and keep at least 20 metres away from watercourses and the track. Spend only one or two nights at each campsite.
- ♦ **Use modern camping equipment.** Use waterproof tents (with floors and tent poles) and foam sleeping-mats to minimise damage to camping areas. Digging trenches around tents is damaging, and unnecessary if the tents are sited properly.
- ♦ **Leave campsites better than you found them** by removing rubbish and dismantling unnecessary or unsafe fireplaces.
- ♦ **Always carry a fuel stove when camping.** If you carry warm clothing and a fuel stove, fires will not be needed for warmth or cooking. Compared with campfires, fuel stoves are faster, cleaner, easier to use in wet weather and they don't scar the landscape.

### Planning your trip

♦ **Let someone know** before you go bushwalking. Tell them about your party, your route, when you plan to return and the equipment the party is carrying. Remember to contact them when you get back.

♦ **Keep your party small** (4-8 people). Large parties have more environmental impact, affect the experience of others and are socially unwieldy.

♦ **Go off peak.** If possible avoid the peak times of the year (December to February) and the more popular areas. You will miss the crowds and spread the impact, giving the environment a chance to recover.

♦ **Plan your route** so that you can camp at recognised campsites. If possible do not create a new site.

♦ **Minimise your impact** by taking the following items:

- fuel stove and fuel for cooking
- good quality tent (with sewn-in floor and poles)
- hand trowel for burying toilet wastes

### For more information

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible for managing Victoria's State Forest. For further information and maps about where to go in State forest, contact DSE's Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

### Parks Victoria Contacts

For further information about where to go in national parks and reserves, contact the Parks Victoria hotline on ☎ 131 963.

### Visit DSE's website

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>  
then select "Forestry".

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