

Minimal impact camping

Increasing numbers of visitors to 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 visitors have adopted a new ethic about their use of natural areas. By learning to **'tread lightly'** in the bush, we can minimise the damage to the natural environment and reduce the need for restrictions on visitor numbers, and track or campsite closures. Without this ethic, we run the very real danger of **'loving our natural areas to death'**.

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

Doing the right thing

♦ **Choose campsites carefully.** Use campsites where they are provided. In some areas, bush or dispersed camping is also permitted.

In all other areas, camps must be at least 20 metres from any stream, lake or full supply level of a reservoir.

- ♦ **Ensure fires are safe;** and that they are completely extinguished when you leave.
- ♦ **Take rubbish home** or place in bins if provided.
- ♦ **Where there is a toilet please use it.** In areas without toilets, bury waste at least 100 metres away from campsites and watercourses.



- ♦ **All native plants and animals are protected.** Do not cut down or damage standing trees or vegetation.
- ♦ **Dogs and cats are prohibited in National and most State Parks.** In other places they must be on a lead and under control at all times.

♦ **Firearms are prohibited** in most National Parks, State Parks and Special Reserves. Check local Parks Victoria/DSE offices if unsure. If firearms are permitted, then shooters must be licensed and firearms must be registered. Take care with firearms – many people use bush areas.

♦ **Drive on the track.** Drive your vehicle only on roads that are open to the public, avoid using muddy tracks and remove fallen trees across tracks rather than driving around them.

Campfires

Wood fires may be lit in fireplaces for cooking and warmth in most parks, forests and public land, but a number of restrictions apply to ensure that fires do not escape and fireplaces are safely constructed.

On days of **TOTAL FIRE BAN** the following are **PROHIBITED**:

- all fires in the open air (including campfires and portable gas or liquid fuelled stoves),
- all gas or liquid fuelled appliances in tents, tent type trailers and vehicles.

There are five fire ban districts in Victoria and it is your responsibility to know if a total fire ban is declared. Contact local DSE or CFA offices. If in any doubt about the safety of lighting a fire, **please don't light it.**

♦ **Use only dead fallen wood.** Standing trees, even dead ones are a home for wildlife and a part of the scenery. Do not cut down or damage standing trees or vegetation.

♦ **Firewood is in short supply in many areas.** Fallen branches house and feed many small mammals, invertebrate and other species. These habitat branches may only be replaced slowly, particularly in alpine and coastal areas. Gather firewood well away from your camp and use it sparingly, or better still, bring your own.

♦ **Observe the relevant fire lighting regulations:**

- in National and State Parks and most other Reserves, fires must be in a properly constructed fireplace.
- elsewhere, a built-up fireplace of stone, metal or concrete, or a trench at least 30 cm deep is satisfactory. Previously used sites are preferred.
- the fire must be no bigger than 1 square metre.
- 3 metres around the fire must be clear (1.5 metres for generators and gas or liquid fuelled appliances used in the open).

- the fire must not be left unattended.



♦ **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.

♦ **Always try to use a fuel stove when camping.** Compared with campfires, fuel stoves are cleaner, a lot easier to use in wet weather, they cook faster and don't scar the landscape. Ensure that every member of your family or friends camping with you has warm clothing and good tents, so fires won't be needed for warmth.

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.

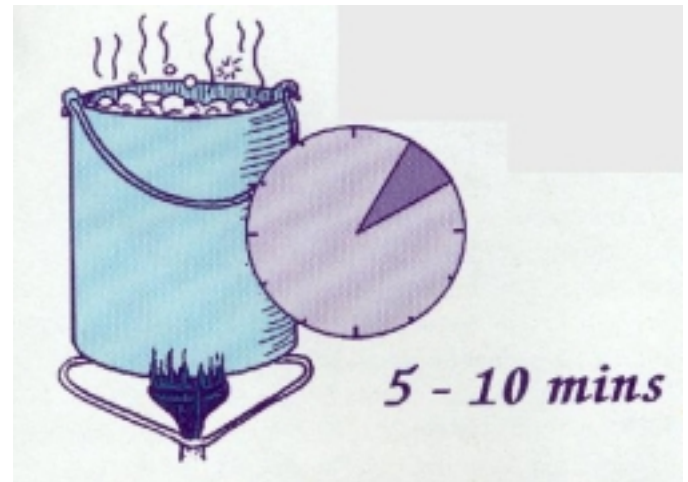
Giardia lives in mountain streams contaminated by faecal waste, and causes chronic diarrhoea and an array of other nasties. It has been found in the USA and New Zealand, and is in some alpine areas of Australia. Avoid 'gastro' and help ensure that *Giardia* does not spread to new areas by observing these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



Rubbish, it's your responsibility

- ♦ **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.
- ♦ **Don't burn or bury rubbish.** Rubbish is likely to be dug up and scattered by possums and other animals and may injure them. Repeated digging by campers disturbs soil and encourages weeds and erosion. Bring bags so you can take your rubbish out with you
- ♦ **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

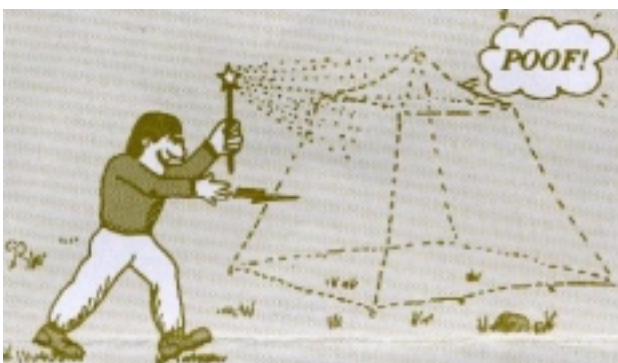
- ♦ **Don't wash in streams and lakes.** Detergents, tooth paste and soap (even biodegradable types) harm fish and waterlife.
- Wash 50 metres away from streams and lakes, and scatter the washwater here so that it filters through the soil before returning to the stream. Use gritty sand and a scourer instead of soap to clean dishes. Don't throw food scraps into streams or lakes.



'No-trace' camping

With modern camping equipment, you can leave a campsite looking as if you had never been there.

- ♦ **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 erected on a well-drained or raised site.



- ♦ **Leave campsites better than you found them** by removing rubbish and dismantling unnecessary or unsafe fireplaces.

Planning your trip

- ♦ **Keep your party small.** Large parties (or more than eight people) have more environmental impact and can adversely affect the experience of other visitors.
- ♦ **Go off peak.** Where possible avoid the peak times of the year (December to February) and the more popular areas.

This way you will miss the crowds and spread the impact, giving the environment a chance to recover.

- ♦ **Protect yourself and your family** against cold, wind and rain. Take warm clothing (jumper, gloves, cap) and raincoat, and wear strong shoes.
- ♦ **Sunlight burns** even on cold or cloudy days. Protect your skin and always wear a hat and sunscreen.
- ♦ **Let someone know before you go.** Tell them where you are going and when you plan to return. Remember to contact them when you get back.

Vehicles and motorbikes

- ♦ **May only be driven on formed roads** and vehicle tracks. Management tracks are closed to private vehicles to ensure sensitive areas are not damaged and to enable other visitors to enjoy their recreation without the intrusion of vehicles.
- ♦ **Are prohibited "off-road"** (including beaches), and on closed roads.
- ♦ **Must be registered and roadworthy.**
- ♦ **Drivers and riders must be licensed.**

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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