

Minimal impact mountain bike riding

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, **minimal impact recreation**. Without it we run the very real danger of 'loving our natural areas to death'. By learning to '**ride lightly**', we can minimise the damage to the natural environment and reduce the need for track and campsite closures and restrictions on visitor numbers.

This leaflet explains minimal impact camping techniques for mountain bike riders. Some requirements (some as those to do with fire) carry the weight of law. All must be used if we want to enjoy the great Australian outdoors.



Cycle right

Mountain bike riding has increased at a very rapid rate in recent years. The pleasure and exhilaration of cycling in natural areas has resulted in people of all ages taking to their bikes for day and overnight trips.

Enjoy the pleasure of riding in relatively undisturbed areas and minimise your impact on the environment by follow the mountain bike code.

♦ **Ride on roads and management vehicle tracks only.** Even roads and tracks are particularly susceptible to damage when wet. They cannot be used when they are seasonally closed. Walking tracks are managed for walkers

and are not available for use by bicycles unless specifically signposted otherwise.

- ♦ **Respect the rights of others.** Other visitors have the same rights as you, so let them go about their activities without interference. Keep speeds down to avoid frightening other visitors.
- ♦ **If you meet walkers,** announce your presence, slow down and give them right of way as you pass.
- ♦ **If you meet horse riders,** always give horses right of way. Some horses are easily frightened by bicycles and a spooked horse can be dangerous to you and its rider. Announce your presence by voice, dismount and talk as the horse and rider pass to reassure the animal. If necessary, move off the track to give the horse plenty of room. Be alert for signs of horses (hoof prints or droppings) and watch for them on bends or crests.
- ♦ **Avoid skidding.** Skidding damages tracks by removing the harder surface layer. This can then lead to erosion. Cutting corners also causes erosion. Don't cut corners, stay on the track.
- ♦ **Stay away from wet, muddy areas.** Muddy areas are very prone to damage. The tracks you leave behind channel the water when it rains and this leads to erosion.
- ♦ **Check before you leave.** It is a good idea to check with local land managers to find out about area specific track closures, fire regulations, limits on camping or other general information

Campfires

Bushfires starting from visitors' campfires cause extensive damage. Hot fires kill many trees and replacement of mature trees may take hundreds of years.

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.

♦ **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 your party members have warm clothing and good tents so fires won't be needed for warmth.

If you feel you must light a fire:

- ♦ **Please don't light a fire** if you are in any doubt about the safety of lighting it.
- ♦ **Observe the fire lighting regulations.** Regulations governing the lighting and use of fires vary from State to State, but fire restrictions apply in all national parks, State

forests and other reserves. Open fires and fuel stores may not be used on days of Total Fire Ban; do not light open fires during hot windy weather. 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.

- ◆ **Firewood is in short supply in many areas.** Fallen branches house and feed many small mammal, 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.

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.



How to avoid 'gastro'

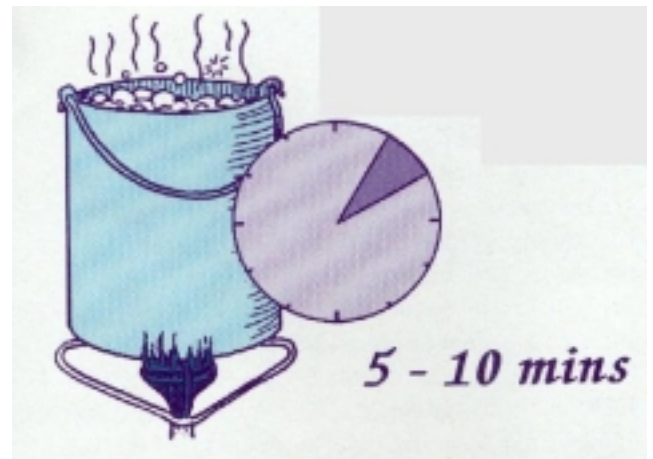
We think the increasing cases of gastroenteritis (diarrhoea and vomiting) in some high-use areas are caused by exposed human faecal waste. *Giardia*, a human bacterial parasite is also of concern.

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.

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



- ◆ **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.

'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

♦ **Let someone know before you go** mountain bike riding. Tell them where you are going, 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 and can adversely affect the experience of other visitors.

♦ **Go off peak.** If possible avoid the peak times of the year (December to February, Easter) and the more popular areas. This way 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.

♦ **Wear your helmet** whenever you are cycling. It is required by law even on fire tracks.

♦ **Minimise your impact** by taking the following items on your overnight trips:

Fuel stove and fuel for cooking

Good quality tent

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 the DSE 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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