

A WILDERNESS CODE OF ETHICS



British Columbia's wilderness areas are a popular destination for both BC residents and visitors. Popularity has its drawbacks though. Over-use and improper travelling and camping practices in the back country have led to damage to the natural environment and unfulfilled wilderness recreation experiences. It will not be long before many of BC's wilderness areas suffer irreparable harm.

To retain the high quality of our wilderness experiences, we all must accept responsibility for minimizing our impact.

Adopting the guidelines outlined in this brochure will help decrease the damage to the natural environment and ensure that wilderness areas are available for enjoyable recreation experiences.

WILDERNESS



How can you travel in wilderness areas and leave as little impact as possible? The simple answer is that care and planning will minimize disturbance to other visitors and the environment. The goal of every wilderness visitor should be to leave no trace so that others who come after are not aware that anyone was there before them.

PREPARE CAREFULLY

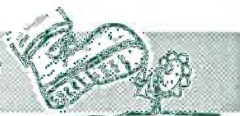


Leaving no trace in the back country takes planning and preparation. The size of your party should be considered carefully. You want it to be large enough to deal with an emergency situation but small enough to minimize the impact on the natural environment and on other wilderness travellers. Groups of four to six members are ideal.

Choose a trip that the entire group is capable of. The limitations of the weakest member of the group should be your guide. Accidents can be avoided if people aren't pushed beyond their skills and abilities. All members of the group should be familiar with basic back country travel skills. Everyone should carry survival and first aid materials and know how to use them, especially their map and compass. Plan to carry a stove and adequate fuel as fires will not be appropriate or allowed in all areas.

Before you leave plot your route and leave a route plan with estimated time of arrival with friends or family. A form for this purpose has been developed by the BC Provincial Emergency Program and is available from outdoor recreation organizations and outdoor equipment stores.

TREAD LIGHTLY



If there is an existing trail, use it. Travel single file and resist the temptation to detour around muddy sections. Detouring will break down the trail edge and widen the path. This can also lead to multiple trails which scar some of the prettiest meadows. Also, resist the temptation to cut across switchbacks as this leads to erosion and damage to vegetation, and ultimately could destroy the trail.

Where there are no trails select a route over the most durable terrain such as gravelly creek beds, sand or rocky areas. Try to avoid steep and loose slopes and wet areas. When not on a hardened surface spread out rather than follow the same route so as to avoid stepping repeatedly on the same area, especially in sensitive alpine meadows. Many plants die if stepped on more than a few times, and unstable soils start eroding even with light trampling.

Bring along a pair of sneakers to change into when you stop and make camp. This is especially important in fragile or heavy use areas. For hikers, boots with good grip and shallow treads are less damaging to trails and meadows than boots with deep penetrating lugs.

CHOOSE A SUITABLE CAMPSITE



Choosing a campsite is probably the most critical choice you will make on your wilderness trip. Choose a campsite that will be least damaged by your stay, and won't impact the wilderness experience of others. Generally, the site should be:

- ◆ at least 60 metres away from water,
- ◆ well away from the trail,
- ◆ durable enough to withstand the impacts of camping,
- ◆ away from other campers. Campsite solitude is very important to a wilderness experience.

The best places to camp are:

1. high use sites that have already received so much damage that further use will result in little additional deterioration, or
2. pristine sites that are durable and show no signs of previous use.

Use the following guidelines when selecting a campsite.

In an area that receives a lot of use:

- ◆ choose an established campsite rather than create another campsite,
- ◆ avoid sites with obvious soil erosion and root exposure,
- ◆ avoid sites that have been overused and resemble large campgrounds, and
- ◆ avoid highly visible sites on the edges of meadows and forests.

In an area which receives very little use:

- your best choice for a camp is on a site that shows no sign of previous use or impact,
- surfaces without vegetation or soil are ideal - rock outcrops, gravel bars, sandy beaches, snow, and ice are durable surfaces,
- if you have to choose a vegetated site, look first for dense patches of dry grass, and
- avoid forest floors and sites with low growing shrubs.

While in camp try to minimize the number of times the site is trampled. Wear sneakers or other soft soled shoes around camp to reduce soil compaction. Minimize activity in kitchen areas and take alternative routes to water.

Avoid multiple trips by filling a large collapsible water container. Watch where you walk to avoid crushing vegetation, especially small trees.

Under no circumstances should trees be cut to provide firewood, furniture legs, or boughs for beds. When you leave, cover any scuffed areas with duff or other native materials. If you camped in a dry grass meadow use your fingers or a branch to rake the areas that have been compressed by tents.

USE A CAMP STOVE



Fires are not advisable or even permitted in many back country areas. Some of the reasons are increasing numbers of back country travellers, diminishing firewood supply, changing the ecosystem when dead trees and branches are removed, and the chance of an escaped wild fire.

Camp stoves should always be used:

- ◆ in areas where fires are prohibited,
- ◆ where a fire hazard exists, and
- ◆ where there is little available dead wood.

Even in areas where fires are allowed a stove is preferable because blackened circles of rocks and other campfire related debris significantly diminish a wilderness experience.

If you must have a fire, use an existing fire ring. If there is more than one eliminate the others. Build fires on rocky or sandy soil away from overhanging trees, dry vegetation, or root systems. Sites below high waterline along watercourses are appropriate. Use only dry dead wood and collect only what you need, taking it from different locations. Do not burn food scraps or plastic.

Burn wood down to ash before extinguishing your fire. Then stir and pour water on the site until you feel no hot spots with your bare hand. Collect any refuse, then scatter the ashes and blackened rocks over a wide area so that no sign of your fire will be noticeable. Disperse any wood that is left before you leave camp.

PROTECT WATER QUALITY



Being very careful not to contaminate water supplies in wilderness areas is important as many intestinal diseases are transmitted through water. Of particular concern in BC is giardiasis. This internal infection is caused by the parasite *Giardia lamblia* and is transmitted through water that has been contaminated by the feces of infected animals (including dogs) and people.

All water should be considered to be contaminated, and should always be treated before drinking it. Three common methods are boiling, water filters, and adding iodine. See the Outdoor Recreation Council's Back Country Sanitation brochure for more information on treating water.

To help prevent the spread of *Giardia* and other infections never urinate or defecate directly into water, either in camp or when travelling. If available, use a toilet facility.

There are three objectives in disposing of human waste:

1. Minimize the chance of water pollution.
2. Minimize the chance of anyone or anything finding the waste.
3. Maximize the rate of decomposition.

Disposing of urine is generally not a problem in wilderness areas but it attracts wildlife that will dig it up for the salt. Urinate on rocks or in non-vegetated areas at least 100 metres from water to avoid this problem.

Disposing of solid waste is a different matter. There are several methods and each method has its drawbacks. The method chosen depends on the level of use of the site, availability of disposal sites, and the number of people and length of stay of the party. Decomposition occurs fastest if the waste is not buried but chances of others (or animals) finding it or water contamination are highest. When waste must be buried the two most common methods are digging a cat-hole or latrine. A cat-hole is used once or, in some cases, a few times by one person, while a latrine is used by a group staying for a longer time at one site.

Toilet paper should only be used if absolutely necessary. Dispose of toilet paper and feminine hygiene products by packing them out.

The two books listed in the Recommended Reading section of this brochure contain detailed instructions for the disposal of human waste in the back country. Reading these books is highly advisable before heading out on your wilderness trip.

IF YOU PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT



One of the most distressing things to come across in the back country is other peoples' garbage. If you can pack it in, you can pack it out. If you come across the garbage of others, pack it out too. Never bury your garbage or scatter food waste as animals will find it and dig it up. Resist the temptation to burn your garbage as it seldom burns completely, resulting in garbage left behind which attracts animals and leaves a mess.

You should always pack out what you pack in but a little forethought can reduce the garbage that you need to pack out. You can eliminate most trash by proportioning and then packing food in plastic bags instead of cans, foil and bottles. Careful meal planning means fewer leftovers. If you do have leftovers put them in a plastic bag and take them with you.

RESPECT WILDLIFE



Opportunities to view wildlife are often the high point of a wilderness trip. By giving animals ample space and distance and by remaining quiet and still, you will prolong your viewing opportunities and minimize the animals' stress.

Remember that you are entering the animals' home and you want to respect their needs and minimize the intrusion on their lives. Avoid setting up camp where there are signs of wildlife use. Nesting, denning, feeding, and rutting sites are just a few examples.

Don't do anything that will cause animals to lose their wildness. Don't feed animals or birds as their food is not the same as yours. Human food does not provide proper nutrition for wild animals, and eating your food may lead to their eventual starvation.

Watch animals from a distance. If they are watching you then you are probably too close. Learn all you can about the animals that live in the area you will be travelling in. Find out the places (nesting, feeding) and times of year (birth) that disturbances are most critical. With this knowledge you can make informed decisions about where to travel and camp.

LEAVE PETS AT HOME



Wilderness users should leave their pets at home. Dogs, even well trained ones, scare wildlife, defecate in or near water sources, and harass other users. If you must take a pet along, keep it under control at all times.

RECOMMENDED READING



Books:

- ◆ Soft Paths. Hampton, Bruce and Cole, David. Stackpole Books, 1988.
- ◆ How To Shit In The Woods. Meyer, Kathleen. Ten Speed Press, 1989.

To order more copies of this and other brochures:

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Equipment Information:

 MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT CO-OP
1-800-663-2667

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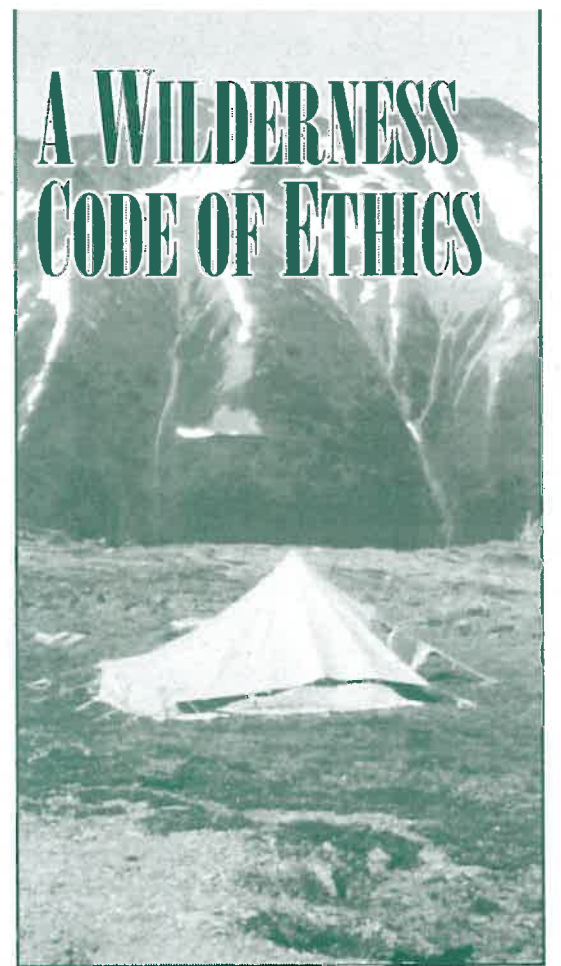
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Minimizing your impact on the natural environment and other wilderness users

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