



Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace is a set of principles designed by the Leave No Trace Centre for Outdoor Ethics. It is built on the ethos that educating people, is the most effective way to achieve land protection. These principles have been widely adopted and promoted by organisations and individuals around the World. Following them, will help to ensure you and your group are interacting with the outdoors safely and responsibly, and will help you to adhere to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Leave no trace principles:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimise campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors

In more depth:

Plan ahead and prepare

Planning ahead ensures that you are most likely to achieve the desired goals of your trip, in a safe and responsible way.

- Research the area you are going to, and have maps to hand
- Wear and pack the correct clothing and equipment
- Plan activities that match the groups' skills and experience
- Consider weather, terrain, regulations, and private land boundaries
- Plan how you will carry, prepare, and cook the group's meals
- Consider how your group will be able to function, in accordance with the Leave No Trace principles

Travel and camp on durable surfaces

In order to enjoy the outdoors, you have to move through it! However, there are some simple ways to minimise the impact you have on the environment while doing so.

- Stick to paths and trails where you can
- If in a large group – take breaks to stop and talk; avoid shouting to other group members, as this disturbs wildlife.
- Walking around a campsite or finding a private place to go to the toilet, are examples of off trail use – prioritise durable surfaces for this.
- Durable surfaces are those which are able to withstand a high level of use – rock, sand, gravel and snow are all good choices and cause minimal damage to the environment.
- Off trail travel across vegetation should be avoided – if needed, try to choose areas of dry grasses and split into small groups, taking different routes across it, so that a new “trail” is not made.
- When deciding on a campsite – consider the ability of the area to withstand the level of use and impact of your group.
- Avoid camping close to water and trails, and other campsites
- Try to re-use sites which have already been used and impacted – this minimises the creation of new damage.

Dispose of waste properly

It is easy to overlook the kind of waste a group might produce, even on a short trip. Some simple planning can help to prevent any damage being done.

- Litter – take a bag to put it in, and dispose of it in bins as you go (to keep your rucksack light!).
- For an overnight trip, factor the litter into meal planning – take items that have less packaging.
- Human waste – if you need to wee in the wild, find a private place off the path. Make sure it’s at least 75m from a water course.
- Faeces should be buried – so carry a trowel! Find a private place off the path. Dig a hole 15-25cm deep. Carry any used toilet roll out with you – place it in a zip lock bag. Cover the hole, and mark an “X” using twigs; this will stop anyone accidentally using the same spot!
- If you’re leading the group of young people, it’s a good idea to take a hygiene bag with items such as sanitary products, toilet roll, spare zip lock bags (for used products), and a trowel in it.
- Bring your water to the dishes and spare the fishes! In other words – collect water and take it to a wash site around 60m from the water source. Strain the wastewater using a mesh (bag up the waste food pieces and take it with you) and scatter the remaining water.
- Wash away from water. This might seem counter-productive, but all the products on your body (from deodorant to sun lotion) can contaminate water sources. Collect freshwater and go to a wash site at least 60m from the source. Wash yourself and try to avoid using soap where possible. Embrace your wild side and enjoy the time it saves you!

Leave what you find

This is easier said than done – but it’s a really important aim.

- Use natural features in sites for use, rather than creating structures (e.g, use an existing fallen branch as a seat, rather than moving items to make one).
- Encourage young people to take photos or sketches of living plants, rather than picking them.
- Using natural items for play, or taking them home, are often the first ways young people engage with nature. It’s therefore potentially counterproductive to enforce this principle too strictly. If you would like to allow collection of items – set a limit on how much each young person can take. Emphasize the need to take fallen materials where possible, and when taking living materials (for example for foraging) only take a couple of items from each individual plant.

Minimise campfire impacts

Fires can have a potentially large negative impact on the environment. Planning is key, as are suitable training and safety precautions.

- Where possible, use a stove rather than creating a campfire
- When creating a campfire, ensure it is a “leave no trace” fire (see accompanying campfire sheet for details).
- Consider if the area you are in has a suitable amount of wood
- Consider whether you will be able to “leave no trace”
- Remember to take or collect a large water supply – for dousing the fire.

Respect wildlife

It can be really easy, even for experienced wildlife watchers and nature users, to accidentally disturb wildlife. It’s important to teach young people how to enjoy wildlife watching responsibly, and to remind them throughout the session.

- If you interrupt an animal’s natural behaviour, you’ve disturbed it. Keep voices and footsteps quiet, to prevent animals from fleeing.
- Don’t keep getting closer – no matter how tempting for a photo! Keep your distance and use the zoom setting. If you’re quiet, the animal might get closer to you safely.
- Never approach or touch a wild animal – they could injure you or pass on disease (and you could do the same to them). Some young animals, such as leverets (baby hares), might be abandoned if they are covered in human scent.
- Don’t approach or touch an injured animal – if you are worried, call the SSPCA.
- Minimise the group’s impact on the environment – this is wildlife’s habitat.

Be considerate of other visitors

The outdoors is for everyone, and people want to gain different things from their time outdoors. It's important to be respectful and mindful of this.

- Give way to other users on trails.
- If enjoying music, consider headphones or keeping the volume low.
- Reduce the visual impact of your group and/or camp – try muted colours and breaking into smaller groups.
- Be courteous and polite (even if someone else's behaviour has annoyed you!)



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