

Be self-reliant

Carry appropriate gear for your comfort and safety in expected weather conditions. Pack a lightweight tent or flysheet, or use a cave or rock overhang. However, do not camp in an overhang with Indigenous rock art, as the art can be damaged by dust, smoke and fumes. If you use a hut leave it clean and tidy.

Tread softly

Use existing tracks; don't create new ones. Don't cut corners on zigzag paths, as this creates damage that leads to erosion. In trackless country, spread your party out; don't walk in one another's footsteps. Avoid easily damaged places such as peat bogs, cushion moss, swamps and fragile rock formations. Wade through waterlogged sections of tracks; don't create a skein of new tracks around them. Learn bush navigation. Don't build cairns, blaze trees, place tags, break off twigs, or tie knots in clumps of grass to mark your route. Placing signposts and track markers is the responsibility of the relevant land manager (such as the NPWS). Keep group size to a maximum of 8 in remote, sensitive or untracked areas, and to a manageable size in other areas.

Keep your gear clean

Before you go bushwalking check and clean your footwear and gear so you don't transfer unwanted pests or diseases. Similarly, clean your clothing and equipment once you're finished, to prevent the spread of pests and diseases between environments. If you think you've seen a new pest, disease or weed, note the location and appearance (take a photo if possible), and report it to the relevant land manager on your return. Early identification and reporting of new incursions is vital and greatly increases the chances of eradication.

Pack it in, pack it out

Don't carry glass bottles and jars, cans, drink cartons lined with aluminium foil or excess packaging. Carry a plastic bag to pack out all rubbish. Burning rubbish creates pollution, while burying it disturbs the soil and causes erosion. Buried rubbish may be dug up and scattered by animals. Demonstrate your concern for the environment by removing litter left by irresponsible people along the track or around a campsite. Do not strap sleep mats or items in plastic bags outside your pack, as this catches in branches, creating foam and plastic litter.

Respect

Indigenous sites have spiritual or cultural significance for our Indigenous communities and should be treated with consideration and respect. Obtain permission from traditional landowners or the relevant land manager to visit sensitive areas. Leave Indigenous relics as you find them. Don't touch paintings or rock engravings. Be courteous to others by not playing music etc. on electronic devices. Ensure your behaviour and activities don't disturb or offend others. Leave gates and slip rails as you find them – make sure the last person through a gate knows whether it should be left open or closed. Respect the rights of landholders and land managers by not entering private property without permission. Follow national park regulations and the directions of park rangers. Offer what is required to help others in need. This could be your leader, who may be carrying group safety items, someone in the group who has injured themselves or forgotten some gear, or another group who may need assistance with emergency communications to summon medical aid. Recognise that some individuals may need your help but will never ask for it. Volunteer it.

Protect Plants and Animals

Do not disturb bushland or wildlife. Give snakes a wide berth and leave them alone. Don't feed birds and animals, or they may become pests. Unnatural food can be harmful to many species. Watch where you put your feet and walk around delicate plants. Protect and preserve the natural landscape for the enjoyment of future generations.

Hygiene

Ensure you are at least 50 metres from campsites, creeks and lakes, when going to the toilet. Do not defecate or urinate in sensitive areas such as caves and canyons. Bury all faeces and toilet paper at least 15cm deep. In snow, dig through the snow first, and then dig a hole in the ground. Carry a lightweight plastic or titanium trowel to make digging easier. Carry out things that won't easily decompose, such as used tampons, sanitary pads and condoms. Keep water pure. Avoid polluting water sources by washing cooking and eating utensils well back from the edge of lakes and creeks, where waste water will be absorbed by soil. When washing cooking utensils, don't use detergent or allow oils and food scraps to enter creeks or lakes. Prevent soap, detergent or toothpaste from entering natural water systems. Always swim downstream from where you get your drinking water.

Choose campsites carefully

Think twice about using a popular campsite to avoid overuse. If possible, vary your route slightly so you can find an alternative site in a less frequented area. Find an open space to erect your tent so that it is unnecessary to clear vegetation. In difficult overgrown areas, trample undergrowth flat rather than pull plants out of the ground. A trampled spot soon recovers. Do not dig drains or build walls around your tent. This damages the environment. If you need to remove branches or rocks to create a tent site, replace them before you leave. Leave your campsite as pristine as you found it.

When In camp

Camp as far away from other groups as conditions allow. Don't step over other people's uncovered food. Don't throw rubbish on a fire, carry it out with you. Ask before using another group's campfire. Do your share of collecting firewood and water. When breaking camp, remove the remains of your fire and clean up the site.

Fire safety

Light fires only when you are certain you can light them safely. A fuel stove is preferable for cooking, and thermal clothing will keep you warm. Always use a fuel stove in places where even a small fire may cause permanent damage. Avoid lighting fires in rainforest and alpine regions. Do not light fires in hot summer conditions or dry windy weather, in declared fuel-stove-only areas, or during a Total Fire Ban.

In popular campsites, rather than lighting your fire on fresh ground, light it on a bare patch left by previous fires, on soil or sand, well away from stumps, logs, living plants and river stones (which may explode when heated). Sweep away all leaves, grass and other flammable material for at least two metres around your fireplace. Use two parallel thick pieces of wood instead of stones to contain your fireplace. Dismantle stone rings wherever you find them.

Burn only dead wood that's fallen to the ground. Don't break limbs from trees or shrubs. For safety, keep your fire small. Don't use your campfire as a rubbish incinerator.

Before you leave

Douse your fire thoroughly with water, even if it appears to be already out. Don't try to smother a fire by covering it with soil or sand, as the coals will smoulder for days. Only water kills a fire with total certainty.

Carefully test the ground under the coals. If it is too hot to touch, the fire is not out. Douse it again. Scatter the cold charcoal and ashes well clear of your campsite, then rake soil and leaves over the spot where your fire was located. Remove all trace of your fire, particularly in remote or rarely used campsites.

Safety

Plan what you will do in an emergency and maintain a current first aid qualification so that you know how to handle illness and injuries.

Carry clothing and equipment to suit the worst possible conditions you are likely to encounter. If possible carry a satellite phone as it has global coverage and will allow you to inform emergency services of your needs. Otherwise, carry a mobile phone, but be aware that it may not have coverage in remote areas or national parks. As a courtesy to others, keep mobile phones switched off and use them only in an emergency.

Even if you have a GPS, carry a map and compass and Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Your PLB must be registered with AMSA and is essential in wilderness areas.

Emergency contact

Before heading off complete a Trip Intention Form and give it to a responsible person who will check that you have returned on time. Register your trip online at the joint NPWS and NSW Police Force TREK initiative <http://www.trek.nsw.gov.au> Alternatively, local police and/or NPWS office may take your Trip Intention Form. Inform your contact when your group has safely returned.

If in distress contact the emergency services on Triple Zero (000). If you are in distress and need assistance and have no other means of communication, set off your Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Remain near your PLB and be prepared with food and shelter to wait for a response. This may take several hours, or longer if conditions are not suitable for flying, or a ground team needs to reach you. Make yourself visible from the air with a brightly coloured sheet of fabric, or if safe make a smoky fire. Extinguish it entirely when the helicopter approaches as their downdraft is intense. Pack up and secure your gear against the downdraft so your gear is not lost and the rescue site is left as untouched as possible.

Walk safely, walk with a club

For a list of Bushwalking clubs in NSW see <http://www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au/clubs-location/>

Bushwalker's Code

Minimal Impact Bushwalking

Do nothing that shows where you have been

Take nothing but happy memories & photographs

Leave nothing but footprints

© Bushwalking NSW
www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au

(Revised March 2017)