

DRAFT POLICY ON WILDERNESS USE

Federation has been trying for some time to produce a policy on wilderness use. The initial draft was produced in 1976 by Ross Bradstock, but interest lapsed. The present draft has been completely rewritten, but still embodies the major concept of Ross' original policy. Assistance in compiling the policy presented here came from many people, particularly Ross Bradstock, Keith Morrell and Chris Cosgrove who received a preliminary draft containing Sections 1-7. Sections 8 & 9 were added later at their suggestion and have not yet been shown to anyone for comment.

The policy will be debated at the August Council meeting, and accepted unless major amendments are required.

1. Objectives

This policy differs from others of the Federation in that it is intended to provide guidance for the actions of individual walkers as well as for the Federation as a whole. Its main objective is to set out a code of behaviour for the use of wilderness areas by bushwalkers. Aspects of wilderness use which come under this policy include use and abuse of natural resources, waste disposal, navigational markers, artificial shelters, mapping and motor vehicle and roads.

Much of the policy simply reiterates simple attitudes and ethics which are well known and have been widely accepted by bushwalkers for many years. However familiarity is no reason for exclusion, especially as many such points are particularly relevant to wilderness areas.

A secondary objective, aimed more at Federation Council than individual walkers, is to produce an acceptable compromise between maintenance of wilderness quality, and modifications to natural areas for the convenience of walkers. It is to be hoped that such a compromise will satisfy both those who pursue the highest possible wilderness quality, and those who are prepared to sacrifice some degree of wilderness experience for the ease, or even the possibility, of obtaining that experience. Thus this second aim is largely to protect wilderness as much as possible from the implacable encroachment of man-made features without going to such an extreme as to seriously downgrade the artificial aids already existing in more developed walking areas.

2. Definitions

2.1 Wilderness. An idealised wilderness is a region of an extent such that an unaided person may not cross it in one day or less, in which evidence of man's activities is low or negligible, and in which survival of an individual or group depends on the natural resources of the region and no more equipment than that individual or group can personally carry. Specifically, areas nominated as such in the Helman study "Wilderness in Australia" are to be considered wilderness but not to the exclusion of other suitable areas.

2.2 Wilderness Quality. Wilderness quality may be defined as that atmosphere of isolation and self-dependence which is experienced in an idealised wilderness, and which can also be experienced in smaller regions which are still relatively untouched by man's works.

2.3 Waste. Any item or substance which is of no further use to a walker and which is to be disposed of as waste. Included in the definition are human excreta, food scraps, food containers, and damaged or unwanted equipment.

2.4 Navigational Markers. A navigational marker is any permanent or semi-permanent man-made structure, item or alteration of a natural feature which is intended to provide navigational guidance to walkers. Included in the definition are cairns, tapes, blazes, metal route markers, stakes, signs, snow poles and tracks.

2.5 Artificial Shelter. An artificial shelter is any permanent or semi-permanent man-made structure or modification of a natural feature which is intended to provide overnight sleeping accommodation for walkers. Included in the definition are huts, lean-tos and modified natural rock overhangs.

3. Values on which this Policy is Based

This Federation recognises and accepts the concept of wilderness as a guiding principle in matters of land conservation. It is further recognised that the experience of some degree of wilderness quality is an intrinsic part of bushwalking.

Thus all walkers seek, to a large or small degree, some kind of wilderness experience.

However the Federation also accepts that not all walkers seek the same high degree of wilderness quality. It is thus necessary for this policy to recognise that many walkers find their enjoyment of the bush enhanced by the same artificial aids which others find objectionable due to their impact on an area's wilderness quality.

Hence both wilderness quality, and the maintenance of some man-made aids to the enjoyment of wilderness, are valid values on which to base this policy.

A third value is that of self-reliance of the wilderness visitor, as implied in the definition of wilderness. Wilderness visitors should be dependent on natural resources and no more equipment than they can personally carry, and should not demand degradation of wilderness to the level of their own ability. A limited analogy can be drawn with rockclimbing ethics, in which a climber should not use artificial aid on a route which has been climbed without it, because to do so would deface the climb for those of greater ability who do not need aid. In other words, those who find that something is too difficult for them in its present condition should raise their own standards to comply with the challenge, rather than use artificial means which destroy the challenge for others.

4. Use and Abuse of Natural Resources and the Environment

The guiding principle in this and subsequent sections of this policy is that the environment in general must be disturbed as little as possible, so that it remains in its original state for the enjoyment of future visitors. Specifically:

4.1 Living vegetation should be untouched, and only dead timber used for firewood, tent-poles, etc. Aluminium tent poles should be carried in areas where suitable natural poles are scarce.

4.2 Rocks and soil should be untouched; great care should be taken of fragile rock formations, and throwing or rolling rocks is unnecessarily destructive.

4.3 Campsites should ideally show no trace of their use as such after departure, new campsites and fireplaces should not be created if existing sites are available.

4.4 Campfires should be located with care, completely extinguished after use, and disguised upon departure.

5. Waste Disposal

The guiding principle in waste disposal is again to produce zero effect on the environment. To this end the policy for garbage disposal is "Carry in, carry out". Burying garbage is no longer acceptable. In high use areas the waste is likely to be dug up by others looking for a burial spot. In low use areas the disturbance to the ground can and should be easily avoided by carrying the waste right out of the bush.

The one partial exception to this rule is that dry, combustible rubbish may be burnt if a campfire is available; fires should not be lit solely for incineration of rubbish. Plastic, or garbage with a high moisture content, often burns incompletely; it should be carried out unless total incineration in a hot campfire is certain. Otherwise all partially burnt, unburnt, and unburnable rubbish should be physically removed from campfires and from the bush. Unburnable rubbish includes not only cans, but foil, squeeze tubes, eggshells and anything metallic or glass. It is not too much to ask that in addition to one's own rubbish, litter left by others should also be carried out of the bush.

All washing should be carried out downstream of the water supply for both present and potential campsites. Soap is much more acceptable than strong detergents.

Human excreta should be disposed of well away from both present and potential campsites, and also well away from both watercourses and tracks. If faeces cannot be buried, they should at least be covered as much as possible, and toilet paper burnt (with due regard, however, for the bushfire danger).

6. Navigational Markers

Ideally there should be no navigational markers of any sort in a true wilderness. However it must be accepted that the most popular bushwalking areas contain a number of navigational markers, which furthermore, are expected to be found there by the majority of walkers.

HOW NOT TO DO IT

The past Summer and Autumn have been marked with heavy rains and sudden flooding of gentle streams. Perhaps we are in for a mild winter however it is worth considering the following points.

- Don't try and cross flooded streams, instead it is better to sit it out.
- A stream that is quick to rise is also quick to fall.
- Camp on the river bank that is on the side you wish to get out, or offers the quickest route out.
- Carry emergency food such as rice and apricots, light but fitting.
- Carry waterproof matches and fuel tablets.
- Warn parents of possibility of being trapped by floods.
- Smooth waters run deep.

An alternative to the first point is to walk upstream in an effort to keep active and to find a crossing place. Obviously if trapped by the Kowmung (for example) this would be a bit pointless.

This story was heard third-hand, and may not be entirely accurate, but it nevertheless serves its purpose well as a cautionary tale. On Anzac Day an unknown member of an unnamed club was in the vicinity of Carlon's Farm with a number of beginners (i.e. people even less experienced than himself?). The plan was to walk to the Cox and back via Galong Creek, expected to take "a couple of hours".

Having had lunch at the river the leader suggested a return via Breakfast Creek instead. "Not much extra distance" he claimed, but not having a map (!) he seemed unaware that it was really three times as far. Needless to say darkness overtook the party on the track up Breakfast Creek. It was a very dark night, and cold. No-one had a torch. No-one had matches. No-one had any food. The leader had only the T-shirt and shorts he wore, and most of the others had little more. It wasn't a very pleasant night. Fortunately no-one got hypothermia (but what if it had rained?) and all were back in Sydney by mid-morning the next day.

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The numerous mistakes made are too obvious to need further comment. Anyone can get benighted, but there are certain precautions that should be taken as a matter of course on any walk.

This sort of incident should be of great concern to Federation because members of its clubs, or at least leaders, are supposed to be competent and responsible. (It is on this basis, for example, that the Water Board grants access to the Warragamba Catchment Area). It is also detrimental to Federation and walkers as a whole if such incidents grow to something more serious and the news reaches the public. The story has all the characteristics of the "little boy lost" that the newspapers love, rather than the behaviour expected from members of a Federation club.

PETER T.

KAKADU NATIONAL PARK

If you haven't kept up with recent events on Kakadu N.P. these acquisitions at the Environment Centre Library may be of interest.

Australian & N.Z. Environment Report, a regular summary of events, in issue No. 3, 1978 reports that hearings have now proceeded before the Mining Warden, Darwin in respect of Peko/EZ applications for leases over significant new uranium mineralization within the proposed Kakadu National Park.

Other recent issues of the Report indicated that 50 comments were received by the Dept. of the Environment on the draft environment impact statement for Pancontinental's Jubiluka project, 18 on the Nabarlek Project which is outside the proposed park.

The draft environment impact statements for both Queensland Mines' Nabarlek Uranium Project and the Jubiluka Project are now in the library. We also have the Australian Government's publication on the Uranium Decision, the Fox Report and the Ranger Mines E.I.S. Please phone 233 5388.

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Name

Address

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