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Tread Softly

Victoria's wild bushland areas are one of our State's most valuable and sensitive recreational resources. Each year more Victorians are enjoying the experience of walking, ski-touring, camping, climbing, canoeing and rafting, caving, bicycling, or just going bush. Yet this growth in popularity has its sobering side. It is revealing that our bush is fragile and finite.

Our remote areas are a resource, not to abuse but to protect and nurture for our own future enjoyment and for the enjoyment of future generations. We have a responsibility to encourage these attitudes amongst others.

Tread softly, protect our wild bushland areas. The bush belongs to everybody

Make all parties small parties

By keeping the numbers in your party small you will reduce the impact on the area you are visiting. The trip with a small party will be easier to organise, there will be less pressure on accommodation at the camp sites and you will get to know more about your group. Wherever practicable use existing campsites or look for existing clearings with firm and level ground.

Keep to the track

Minimise damage by keeping to established routes and tracks, where possible. Don't cut corners or create new tracks. Avoid walking over easily damaged areas, for example, alpine bogs. However in open untracked country, spread out to disperse any damage to the terrain and vegetation. Obtain permission before crossing farmland and leave gates as you find them. Cross fences preferably at gates or strain posts, never stand on the wire. Choose light boots or runners for shorter and less demanding walks. Heavily lugged boots are not necessary in Victoria.

Protect water resources

We need to conserve water resources in the bush. In summer and autumn they are often scarce and in heavily used areas water quality is sometimes degraded by careless practices. You should boil water for at least 3 minutes prior to consumption if you are using water from a grazing area, if there is low water flow, or if there are a large number of campers. Always wash up at least 50 metres away from streams or lakes and scatter the used washing water so that it will be filtered on its way back into the watercourse. Avoid using soap to wash dishes, billies, etc. Sand, grass or a commercial scourer are ideal to help clean the problem utensils.

Take care of huts

Bush huts are precious, look after them. Leave them clean and tidy for the next group. As they attract many visitors they tend to highlight the need for the minimum impact practices described here. See the Federation's Hut Etiquette brochure for further information.

Use a stove to cook

Firewood has become very scarce due to the popularity of bushwalking and camping. This is evident wherever we go and in many places campfires are completely banned. Undoubtedly this

trend will grow. Bushwalkers nowadays carry stoves for cooking as a part of their equipment. Modern stoves are efficient, quick and easy to operate, lightweight, clean to use and controllable. They are good for wet weather and safer than fires at times of high fire danger.

Camp fires

A small social fire is acceptable in less sensitive areas. However the temptation to light a fire in the Alps or desert areas should be resisted. Dead wood makes an important contribution to our natural ecosystems which we are trying to protect, hence do not waste any timber. Bush camps are enjoyable even without a fire. Locate your fire in an existing fire-place and make yourself familiar with the Victorian fire regulations current in the area and be sure to follow them. Take particular care in the danger period from December to March. When you leave camp, be absolutely sure that the fire is out. Use water when available, not soil, to extinguish the flames and test that the fire is really out by putting your hand in the ashes. Scatter the ashes before you leave the campsite.

Bury toilet wastes

Where there is a toilet, please use it. In areas without toilets, or if toilets are full, you should bury your faecal waste and toilet paper at least 100 metres from campsites, water sources and tracks. Dig a hole about 15 cm deep within the soil's organic layer. In snow, try to find a place where you can dig through to the soil. Carry out sanitary pads or tampons as they are unlikely to degrade.

Carry out all rubbish

First of all plan your trip to minimise rubbish generation. Where possible avoid excessive packaging, bottles, tins and aluminium foil. Carry out all of your own rubbish. Don't leave behind plastic wrappers, aluminium foil, tea bags, orange peel, cans or bottles. And, if you can, clean up the waste left behind by other inconsiderate bush visitors.

It is no longer a desirable practice to "burn, bash and bury". These days what you carry in you carry out.

Respect flora and fauna

Minimise any damage to plants during your walk and especially at campsites. Use clothing or mats to sit on, never make a mattress out of vegetation. Share your wilderness experience with the wildlife, observe and enjoy the birds and other animals. There is much to discover.

Respect the enjoyment of others

When moving along tracks or camping overnight, be considerate of others in your party and particularly of other groups. They too have come to enjoy the bush and its many qualities in peace and quiet.

Leave campsites tidy

You should aim to leave campsites the same as when you arrived, or in better condition, if that is possible.