

LEAVE NO TRACE - Principles of Outdoor Ethics

Leave no Trace is an Outdoor Ethics Education Programme designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships. An ethic can be defined as knowing what the right thing to do is, and doing it, even if there is no one about to see you do it. Leave no Trace depends more on attitude and awareness than on rules and regulations.

Why Leave no Trace?

As increasing numbers of people seek the beauty and exhilaration of outdoor recreation, our collective mark on the environment and its natural processes increases. Litter, disturbance to vegetation, water pollution, wildlife, livestock and other people are all indicators of the need to develop a national ethic that protects both natural and cultural heritage. Techniques designed to minimise the social and environmental impacts to these areas are incorporated into the Leave no Trace Outdoor Ethics Education Programme as seven Principles.

Principles

1. Plan ahead and Prepare

- * Before you go check, where possible, if access is allowed and your activity is permitted in the area you wish to visit.
- * Respect any signs, regulations, policies and special concerns for the area that you wish to visit. Permits may sometimes be needed for activities on public lands.
- * Where possible travel by public transport or share cars; consider the availability of parking.
- * Ensure you have the skills and equipment needed for your activity and to cope with emergencies that could arise
- * Check the weather forecast and always be prepared for changing weather conditions.
- * For environmental and safety reasons, and to minimise your impact on other users, keep group numbers small; split larger parties into smaller groups

2. Be considerate of others

- * Respect the people who live and work in the countryside.
- * Park appropriately – avoid blocking gateways, forest entrances or narrow roads. Remember that farm machinery, local residents and the emergency services may need access at all times.
- * Take care not to damage property, especially walls, fences and crops.
- * Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- * Let nature's sounds prevail. Keep noise to a minimum.

3. Respect farm animals and wildlife

- * Dogs should be kept under close control and should only be brought onto hills or farmland with the landowner's permission.
- * Observe wild animals and birds from a distance. Avoid disturbing them, particularly at sensitive times: mating, nesting and raising young (mostly between spring and early summer).
- * Keep wildlife wild, don't feed wild animals or birds - our foods damage their health and leave them vulnerable to predators.
- * Farm animals are not pets; remain at a safe distance.

4. Travel and camp on durable ground

- * Durable ground includes established tracks and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.

In popular areas:

- * Concentrate use on existing tracks and campsites.
- * To avoid further erosion, travel in single file in the middle of the track even when wet or muddy.

In more remote areas:

- * Disperse use to prevent the creation of new tracks and campsites.
- * Avoid places where impacts are just beginning to show.

If camping:

- * Protect water quality by camping at least 30m from lakes and streams.
- * Keep campsites small and discreet
- * Aim to leave your campsite as you found it, or better.

5. Leave what you find

- * Respect property. For example, farming or forestry machinery, fences, stone walls etc. Leave gates as you find them (open or closed).
- * Preserve the past: examine - without damaging - archaeological structures, old walls and heritage artefacts e.g. holy wells, mine workings, monuments.
- * Conserve the present: leave rocks, flowers, plants, animals and all natural habitats as you find them. Fallen trees are a valuable wildlife habitat; do not remove or use for firewood.
- * Avoid introducing non-native plants and animals e.g. zebra mussels in rivers and lakes.
- * Do not build rock cairns, structures or shelters.

6. Dispose of waste properly

- * “If You Bring It In, Take It Out” - take home all litter and leftover food (including tea bags, fruit peels and other biodegradable foods).
- * To dispose of solid human waste, dig a hole 10-12cms deep and at least 30m from water, campsites and tracks. Cover and disguise the hole when finished.
- * Bring home toilet paper and hygiene products.
- * Wash yourself or your dishes 30m away from streams or lakes and if necessary use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Bring home any solids and scatter strained dishwater.
- * For more information on sanitation in the outdoors read the “Where to go in the outdoors” leaflet (include website link)

7. Minimise the effects of fire

- * Fires can cause lasting impacts and be devastating to forests, natural habitats and farmland. Therefore when camping use a lightweight stove for cooking.

Where fires are permitted:

- * Use established fire rings, barbeques or create a mound fire.
- * Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand. Do not use growing vegetation for use as firewood.
- * Avoid burning plastics or other substances: which emit toxic fumes.
- * Burn all fires to ash, put out fires completely, and then scatter cool ashes.

Practising a Leave No Trace ethic is very simple: make it hard for others to see or hear you and LEAVE NO TRACE of your visit.

Leave No Trace Ireland

Leave No Trace Ireland is a network of organisations and individuals with an interest in promoting the responsible recreational use of the countryside and wild places.

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