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Minimal impact bushwalking in the Australian Alps National Parks

Australian Alps Liaison Committee

Minimal impact bushwalking

Increasing numbers of visitors using national parks, wilderness areas and other reserves are causing serious damage to the natural environment. Escapes from campers' fires, expansion of campsites, trampling and cutting off vegetation, outbreaks of gastroenteritis and the rapid deterioration of walking tracks have all become more commonplace.

Fortunately many visitors have adopted a new ethic, **minimal impact recreation**. Without it we run the very real danger of "loving our natural areas to death". By learning to **tread softly**, we can minimise the damage to the natural environment and reduce the need for track and campsite closures and restrictions on visitor numbers.

This page contains suggestions for safe and enjoyable river trips with minimal impact on the environment and on other visitors. Some requirements (such as those to do with fire) carry the weight of the law. All must be used if we want to continue to enjoy the Alps.

On the right track

In some areas, walking tracks are being upgraded to minimise the impact of increasing foot traffic; boardwalks are necessary in some places with large numbers of visitors. You can help minimise the damage in the following ways.

Stay on the track even if it's rough and muddy. Walking on the track edges and cutting corners on steep 'zigzag' tracks increase damage, erosion and visual scarring, as well as causing confusion about which is the right track.

Spread out in open country where there are no tracks. Spreading out (rather than following in each other's footsteps) disperses impact. A plant stepped on only once has more chance of survival than if trampled by the whole party.

Avoid sensitive vegetation. Sphagnum bogs, cushion plants and other sensitive vegetation are easily destroyed by trampling. Stay on rocks and hard ground whenever possible.

Keep the wilderness wild. Cutting new tracks is illegal and marking tracks with cairns, tape or other materials is unsightly and can confuse other walkers.

Walk softly. Choose appropriate footwear for the terrain. Solid but lightweight walking boots are best. Sandshoes can be used on most tracks on the mainland in summer. Wear sandshoes around campsites.

Choose a different route each time you visit a trackless area, and camp at different sites whenever possible.

Planning your trip

Let someone know before you go bushwalking. Tell them about your party, your route, when you plan to return



and the equipment the party is carrying. Remember to contact them when you return.

Keep your party small. Large parties (of more than eight people) have more environmental impact and can adversely affect the experience of other visitors.

Go off peak. Where possible avoid the peak times of the year (December to February). You will miss the crowds and spread the impact, giving the environment a chance to recover.

Mountain weather changes very rapidly. Don't be fooled; it can snow in summer too. So be prepared.

Plan your route so that you can camp at recognised campsites. If possible do not create a new site.

Minimise your impact by taking the following items:

- i Fuel stove and fuel for cooking
- i Good quality tent
- i Hand trowel for burying toilet wastes.

See also:

- i [Care for the Alps—leave no trace](#), 2003
- i [River Users Code](#)
- i [Car-based Camping Code](#)
- i [Snow Camping Code](#)
- i [Cycling Code](#)
- i Bushwalking Code
- i [Huts code](#), 2005
- i [Horseriding Code](#)