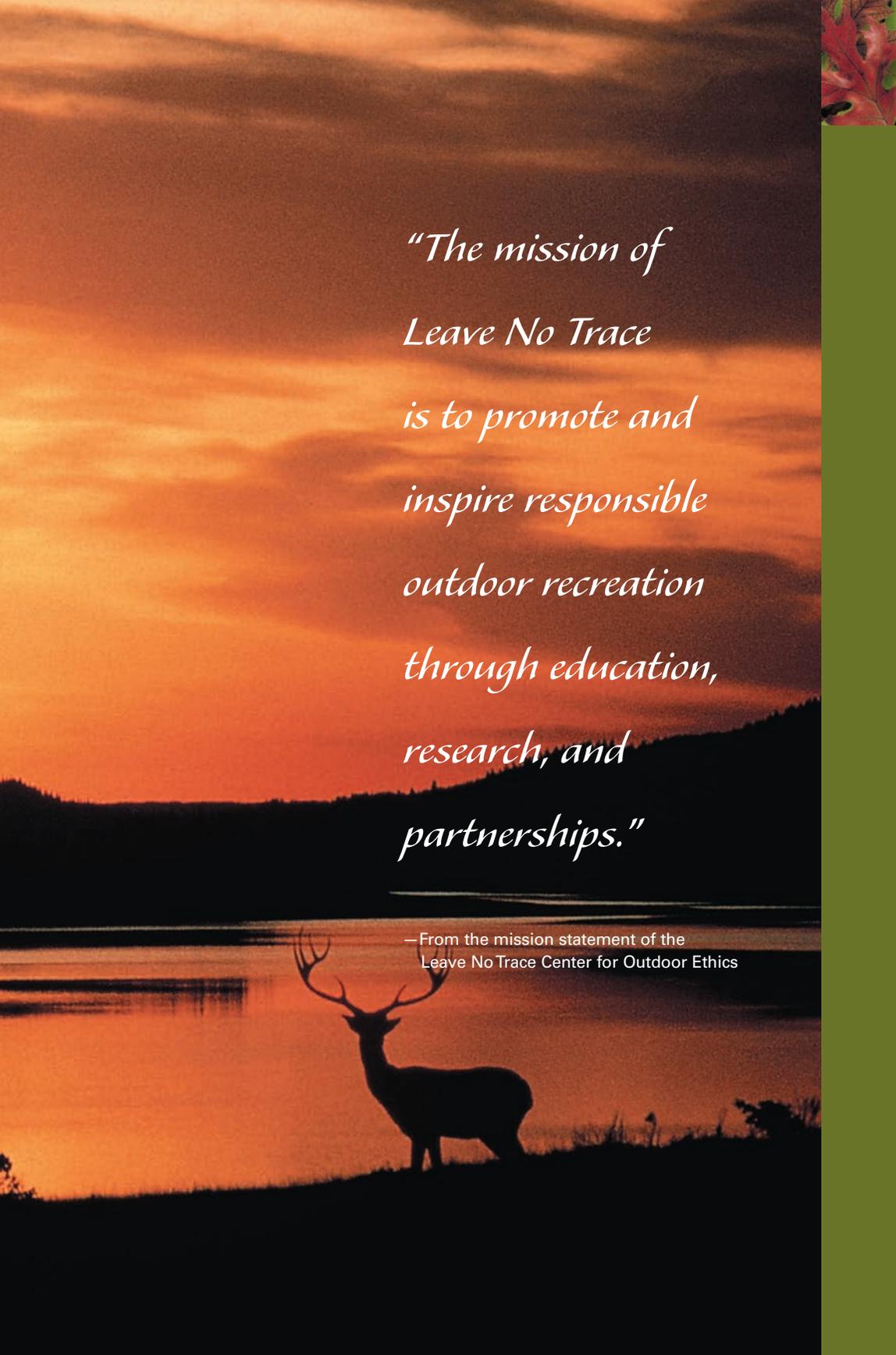


Leaving No Trace

A scenic sunset over a lake with a silhouette of a deer in the foreground. The sky is filled with warm, orange and yellow hues, transitioning to a darker orange near the horizon. The lake reflects the colors of the sky. In the foreground, a silhouette of a deer with large antlers stands on a grassy bank. The background shows a dark silhouette of a forested hillside.

*“The mission of
Leave No Trace
is to promote and
inspire responsible
outdoor recreation
through education,
research, and
partnerships.”*

—From the mission statement of the
Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics



CHAPTER

7



Implementing Leave No Trace

“We should all realize that every right implies a responsibility, every opportunity an obligation, every position a duty, and that the most effective sermon is expressed in deeds instead of words.”

—Waite Phillips (1883–1964), whose gift of property to the BSA became Philmont Scout Ranch



Until a few hundred years ago, nearly all of North America was wilderness. Human impact on the land was relatively minor. To start with, there weren't very many people. Their lifestyles tended to be compatible with their surroundings. Even when those early Americans did scar the land with fire or overuse, often the environment recovered soon after their activities ceased.

By about 1900, though, so much of the North American landscape had been settled and developed that many believed the era of the frontier was over, that wilderness was no longer in unlimited supply.

North Americans also began to realize the importance of wild lands as ecosystems for wildlife and vegetation. Watersheds provided clean water. Forests purified the air and provided food and shelter for many animals. Open territory allowed wild animals the space and resources they needed to survive.

Urban dwellers started looking to the backcountry as an escape from the demands of life in the cities. They gradually came to realize that mountains, forests, prairies, waterways, and deserts had recreational value. The outdoors attracted people of all walks of life. In canoes, kayaks, and rafts, they set off on lakes and rivers. They swung packs on their shoulders and headed up the trails. They climbed mountains, explored caves, and snowshoed and skied across landscapes buried in snow.



Just as backcountry travelers know that a few basic essentials carried in their packs and pockets can enhance their safety (a pocketknife, a water bottle, rain gear, etc.), outdoors enthusiasts can carry in their heads and hearts the principles of Leave No Trace to help ensure the well-being of the land.

With so many visitors, the environment began to suffer. Campsites were beaten down and trails eroded. Pressure on wildlife caused species to abandon areas that had long been important places for finding food and raising young. In short, the outdoors was in danger of being loved to death.

Today, caring for the environment has become a key aspect of enjoying the outdoors. The ability to travel and camp without leaving any sign of one's passing is among the most admired skills of outdoors experts. The principles of Leave No Trace can help you to attain that level of skill and to enjoy your adventures even more fully by knowing that, in every way possible, you are doing what's best for the environment.

Leave No Trace

Protecting the environment is a cooperative effort involving those who use the outdoors and those who manage it. Members of Scout units bring with them a clear understanding of responsible behavior. They want to take good care of the areas where they travel and camp, and will gladly do so if they know how that can be done.

Those who manage public and private lands try to balance the needs of the environment with the wishes of its users. To that end, agencies and landowners develop management plans identifying how and when various areas may be used. Their intent is to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors in ways that have little negative impact upon the land.

Leave No Trace principles provide a common base for users and managers of public and private lands to work with one another toward the goal of enjoying and protecting the land. The reward for everyone is a healthy environment that can be enjoyed today and by generations to come.

Innovations in outdoor equipment have helped change many camping habits. Efficient backpacking stoves allow wilderness travelers to cook without campfires. Secure tents with waterproof floors make lean-tos and ditching unnecessary and allow hikers to camp on durable surfaces where they will not harm vegetation. Lightweight cooking gear and group equipment allow backpackers to travel in groups that are small and compatible with a wilderness experience.

Frontcountry outings—car camping, camporees, jamborees, and the like—also can be conducted in ways that are environmentally sound while still affording a maximum of enjoyment. A goal of Leave No Trace is that *every outdoor activity*, from an afternoon gathering in a city park to a monthlong expedition in a remote wilderness, is planned and carried out in ways that provide the greatest satisfaction for participants and the highest level of protection for the environment. The guidelines for making that happen are the principles of Leave No Trace.

Everybody's Leaving No Trace

Leave No Trace—it's what the experts do. Mountaineers climbing the highest peaks in the world nearly always plan to bring down with them more pounds of trash than they create. River guides make it their business to help people camp comfortably with little impact on fragile shorelines. Long-distance hikers, desert travelers, professional trail maintenance crews, and others who live for long periods of time in the backcountry take pride in their skill at protecting the environment.

Scouts today have the knowledge and the equipment to pack light, wander far, and leave no sign of themselves as they go. Outdoors enthusiasts everywhere are embracing this as the new standard for enjoying the backcountry. They thrive on



the challenge and accept the responsibility of mastering forms of outdoor recreation that leave no trace upon the land.

Leave No Trace is a national education program designed to promote practical skills and an outdoor code of ethics that preserves the integrity of protected lands and high-quality recreational experiences. The Boy Scouts of America has adopted Leave No Trace as an important tool for guiding its members in appropriate ways to enjoy and protect the outdoors.

For more information, see the *Fieldbook* Web site links to Leave No Trace. 



Leave No Trace

Plan Ahead and Prepare



- *Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit.*
- *Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.*
- *Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.*
- *Visit in small groups.*
- *Repackage food to minimize waste.*
- *Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of rock cairns, flagging, or marking paint.*

You would almost never set out on an adventure without first figuring out the gear you would need and the food you would carry. As part of your preparations, it should be just as automatic to plan the most effective means for conducting your outdoor activities without leaving a trace.

Thinking through the Leave No Trace principles is a good way to start. As you begin organizing an outdoor trip, ask yourself how you can apply each of the principles. Will you need any equipment? Should you alter the size of your group or change your activities to match the area you will visit? Is there a less popular time to go when you can have the area more to yourselves?

Well before your departure, contact the land management personnel of the area you intend to visit. Explain the journey you have in mind and ask how you can best implement Leave No Trace. Many agency staffers are familiar with the principles and can advise you how to use them to make the most of your time in the outdoors.

For more about planning ahead and preparing, see the chapters titled "Organizing for Adventures," "Planning a Trek," and "Outdoor Menus."

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces



- *Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow.*
- *Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.*
- *Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.*

In popular areas:

- *Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.*
- *Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when it is wet or muddy.*
- *Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.*

In pristine areas:

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

Some surfaces are better able than others to withstand human impact. Trails and designated campsites can increase your pleasure in the outdoors by making it easier for you to go from one place to another and to find convenient places to pitch your tents at the end of the day. When you stay on existing pathways and campsites, the surrounding landscapes will be protected from being trampled, eroded, and compacted.

Disperse use in pristine areas. When traveling off-trail, use durable surfaces such as rock, gravel, sand, bare soil, ice, snow, and dry grass. Hike abreast rather than in single file to avoid creating a new trail. When camping in pristine areas, locate your kitchen and concentrate your activities on durable surfaces. Vary your route to get water and to go to the bathroom to prevent new trails from being formed. When leaving, help return a pristine site to its natural condition by replacing any rocks that were moved and scattering leaf litter or pine needles to make the site look as natural as possible. Be sure to consult local land managers before planning to travel and camp in pristine areas.

For more about traveling and camping on durable surfaces, see the chapters titled “Planning a Trek” and “Traveling and Camping in Special Environments,” and the “Trek Adventures” section of this book.





Dispose of Waste Properly



- *Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food, and litter.*
- *Deposit human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.*
- *Pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.*
- *Carry water for washing dishes or for bathing 200 feet away from the source; use only small amounts of biodegradable soap. Strain dishwater, then scatter the water when you are finished.*

“Pack it in, pack it out” is a tried-and-true guideline for responsible outdoor travel. That’s easiest to do when you limit the amount of potential trash you take with you and refine your food lists so that you will eat most of your provisions during your trip.

Even more important are the ways you dispose of human waste and washwater. You can do that effectively even in fragile environments if you have learned ahead of time what to do.

For guidelines on properly disposing of waste, see the chapters titled “Hygiene and Waste Disposal” and “Traveling and Camping in Special Environments,” and the “Trek Adventures” section of this book.

Leave What You Find



- *Preserve the past: Observe but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artifacts.*
- *Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them.*
- *Avoid introducing or transporting nonnative species.*
- *Do not build structures or furniture, or dig trenches.*

A cluster of flowers beside an alpine trail. A few bricks from a historic farmstead. A bird nest on the low branch of a tree. A rack of elk antlers in a meadow. Petrified wood in a desert. The discoveries you can experience in the outdoors are rich and varied. Every journey will bring with it something new for you to see and enjoy. With every discovery, you can make the choice of leaving what you find. Here are some reasons why:

- Future outdoor visitors will have the excitement of discovering for themselves what you have found.
- Plant communities and wildlife environments will not be negatively impacted.
- Researchers can make the most of archaeological and biological sites.
- Archaeological, cultural, and historic artifacts preserve a record of our country's past. Some artifacts and locations are sacred to American Indians; others might contain clues to the past that anthropologists and archaeologists can help us interpret.

For more on ways to enjoy what you see and leave what you find, see the "Appreciating Our Environment" section of this book.



A disturbed artifact has been taken out of context, and this can remove chapters from important stories. So important is this concern that on public lands these resources are protected by law.

See the *Fieldbook* Web site for links to more information about resources like the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 and the National Historic Protection Act of 1966. 

Minimize Campfire Impacts



- *Campfires can cause lasting impacts on the land. Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a candle lantern for light.*
- *Where fire is permitted use an established fire ring, a fire pan, or a mound fire lay.*
- *Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.*
- *Remove partially burned garbage, including that left by others.*
- *Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.*

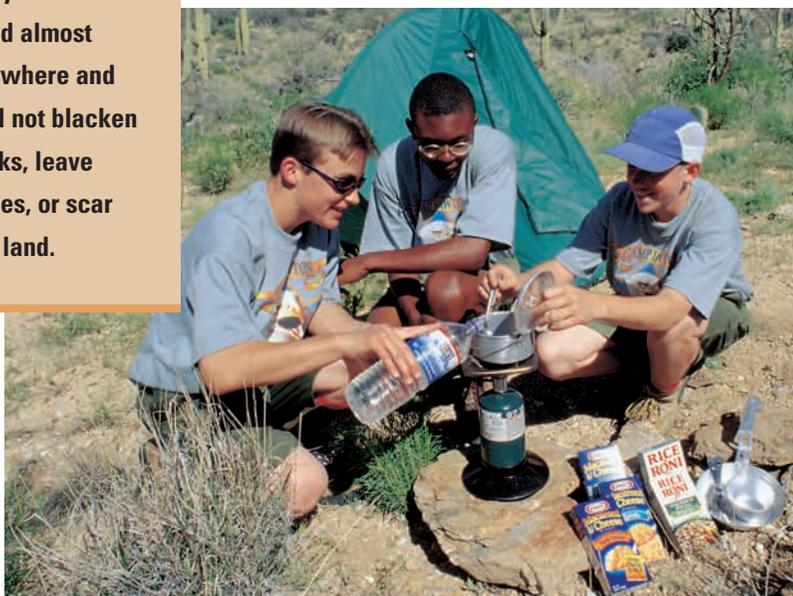
Today's outdoor travelers have a wide range of options for cooking without an open fire and for staying warm and creating a focus of evening activities.

They also have a much greater understanding of when a campfire can be kindled and when a fire could have a lasting impact on the land.

Choices concerning campfires are among the most important made in both the frontcountry and the backcountry. Where open fires are appropriate, Leave No Trace guidelines offer clear direction for the best ways to collect firewood, establish fire lays, and manage open flames.

For more on minimizing campfire impacts, see the chapter titled "Using Stoves and Campfires."

Camp stoves enable outdoor travelers to heat water and cook meals quickly and efficiently. They can be used almost anywhere and will not blacken rocks, leave ashes, or scar the land.





Respect Wildlife



- *Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach wild animals.*
- *Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters their natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.*
- *Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely.*
- *Leave pets at home.*
- *Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or wintertime.*

Among the great pleasures of Scout adventures is sharing the environment with wildlife. In fact, it goes beyond sharing. We are the visitors in most outdoor settings, while wild animals are the real residents. We are, in effect, visiting their homes.

An important aspect of Leave No Trace is to reduce the impact we might have on wildlife. Travel quietly and give animals the space they need to feel secure. Avoid nesting areas, calving sites, and other areas critical to wildlife. Picking up wild animals, chasing them, or otherwise altering their normal activities can be stressful and could compromise their ability to survive. You are too close if an animal changes its activities because of your actions or presence.

Bears, moose, raccoons, and other animals can become aggressive and dangerous if they feel provoked or threatened by people. Failure to protect your food supplies might attract bears and other animals to your camp in search of a meal, and that, in turn, can lead to their destruction.

Respect wildlife. Photograph, observe, and enjoy from a distance the permanent residents of the backcountry, and do your part to help keep wild animals wild.

For more on respecting wildlife, see the “Appreciating Our Environment” section of this book. For guidelines on traveling and camping in bear habitat, see the chapter titled “Traveling and Camping in Special Environments.”

Be Considerate of Other Visitors



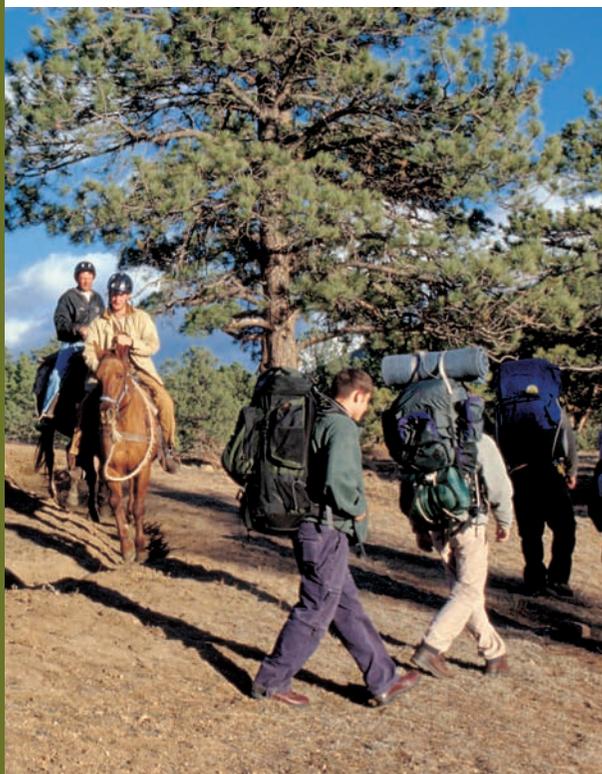
- *Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.*
- *Be courteous. Yield to others on the trail.*
- *Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering horseback riders or pack animals.*
- *Take breaks and set up camp away from trails and other visitors.*
- *Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises. Respect other visitors who might be seeking solitude.*

Extending courtesy to other hikers and campers is a natural inclination of outdoor travelers. Remember, though, that everyone in camp and on the trail is seeking a certain balance of socialization and solitude. Enjoy the company of those you encounter on the trail and at campsites near yours, but respect their desires for quiet and space.

Leave portable radios and sound systems at home. You will find it much easier to appreciate the outdoors, and you are far less likely to disturb other outdoor travelers and wildlife. A cellular telephone may be carried as

a means of emergency communication, but stow it deep in a pack until it is really needed. If you must make calls, do so out of the sight and sound of others.

For more on being considerate of other visitors, see the “Leadership and Trek Preparation” section of this book.





Erasing the Traces That Exist

The principles of Leave No Trace are intended to help people enjoy the outdoors in ways that leave no sign of their passing. Using these principles is a tremendous way to show your concern for the health of the environment and your dedication to visiting the outdoors in ways that are appropriate for you and for the land.

With the freedom to use the outdoors for recreational purposes come the responsibilities and opportunities to roll up your sleeves and help repair damage done by others. You can do a lot to help repair damage and to shield the environment from further harm. In cooperation with land management agencies, Scouts can take on projects to repair trails and campsites and to restore wildlife habitats. Effective projects require thorough planning and guidance from knowledgeable experts.

For more on caring for the environment, see the “Appreciating Our Environment” section of this book.



LEAVE NO TRACE AWARENESS AWARD

Youth and adults who master and practice responsible outdoor ethics may be eligible to receive the BSA's Leave No Trace Awareness Award. Visit the *Fieldbook* Web site for more information and applications for this award. ↗