

SCOTTISH CANOE ASSOCIATION

WILD CAMPING ADVICE FOR CANOEISTS

Camping wild is one of the best ways to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of Scotland's countryside, and when done responsibly it has minimal impact on the environment and other people.

The Scottish Canoe Association's aim is to provide advice on how to keep impacts to a minimum, as well as setting out the legal position and describing the advice given in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

This advice is primarily aimed at canoeists and kayakers who regard wild camping as an essential part of multi-day journeys, but it is also relevant to paddlers for whom camping is a means of sleeping close to the water either before or after a single day out.

Touring paddlers seek to camp wild alongside rivers, lochs, canals and coasts as well as using commercial campsites. This guidance is aimed at both inland and sea touring paddlers.

Wherever you camp and whatever your branch of canoeing; there is no substitute for knowledge and forward planning. So commit yourself by following this guidance and encourage your friends to do likewise. If in doubt about any of your actions, make an effort to find out what is right. Don't carry on wondering whether your present practice is right or wrong.



End of a perfect day's paddling on the Wester Ross coast.

CHOOSING A SITE

- Develop your own skills in finding a discreet place to camp rather than resorting to popular congregational spots that tend to be overused.
- Camp as unobtrusively as possible.
- The size of your group should be a key consideration when choosing a wild camp spot. The larger your group the fewer options you are likely to have.
- Plan ahead. For some areas it may mean limiting the group size for responsible wild camping.
- Camping begins to harm vegetation after a few hours, so aim to move frequently and do not stay for any longer than 3 nights in the same place.
- Consider not only your own impact, but repeated impact by others. Some sites even though small are already suffering from over use.
- When camping with school and youth groups it is highly recommended that you plan your camp spots and make any necessary arrangements in advance of your trip.
- Remember that people have to make their living from the land. You should not camp in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals.
- In emergencies some compromises may have to be made, but good planning and constant awareness should minimise such situations.
- Always aim to protect our country's outstanding scenery and wildlife, as well as the wilderness experience, by enjoying the freedom of wild camping whilst leaving no trace of your passage.

WATER

- It should be the aim of every wild camper to protect the quality of fresh water in burns, rivers, canals and lochs.
- Bear in mind that a burn could be the water supply for a remote house.
- Take drinking and cooking water from a point upstream of your tent.
- Walk downstream to wash your hands and face.
- Take water in a container and clean your dishes and brush your teeth a few metres away from the source of your water.



Remote camping spot on an island off the north coast of Scotland.

MINIMISE DISTURBANCE TO WILDLIFE

- Watercourses and loch sides are important sites for birds and animals.
- Most birds breed in the springtime months (April to June) so remain alert to their presence and avoid camping where you feel you might cause disturbance to them.
- Be prepared to move if you become aware that you are disturbing nesting birds or animals.
- Remember that noise travels from tents and over water, disturbing wildlife as well as humans.
- Food scraps (even when buried) attract scavenging birds and animals, some of which prey on more vulnerable nesting birds. Carry all scraps of food out with you.

FIRES

- It is not advisable to light a fire at an inland wild camp spot.
- It is acceptable to light a fire on a tidal beach as long as you have your fire below the normal high water mark and are absolutely certain there is no risk of setting fire to any nearby trees or vegetation.
- Lighting a fire in the inter-tidal zone means the next high tide will clear away the evidence of your fire and ensure that it is put out.
- Lighting fires poses a high fire risk on peaty soils and close to tinder dry grass. A high risk of fire can exist at any time of year, and not just in times of drought.
- Dead wood is an important habitat for insects and many small animals and on

some parts of Scotland's coastline wood is not in plentiful supply so don't have a fire bigger or for longer than you need.

- Avoid the temptation to burn metal cans or plastic wrappers and containers. Carry them home. The next high tide may wash away the evidence, but the residue can be hazardous to marine life.
- Foil BBQs should be placed on stones and taken off site for recycling.



Sheltered camping spot on the Isle of Lewis.

TOILET HYGIENE

- Always find a spot at least 30 metres from fresh/running water when going to the toilet.
- When camping by the sea it is advisable to urinate and defecate below the high water line so that the incoming tide will flush away your human waste. Care and discretion need to be used and the skills developed to ensure you don't cause health hazards for others or pollute sensitive areas.
- In inland areas bury excrement in a small hole (not under boulders). A trowel can be used to lift a flap of turf.
- In areas of sensitive vegetation, such as west coast machair, vegetation takes a long time to recover, so holes should not be dug at all. Make the effort to seek out a more suitable place.
- Do not bury toilet paper. Either burn it if there is absolutely no risk of fire, or pack it out in a plastic bag.
- Be particularly careful to bury excrement properly when the ground is frozen or covered in snow.
- Toilet hygiene when camping is not a taboo subject. Discuss it with your fellow paddlers.
- Burying tampons and sanitary towels doesn't work as animals dig them up. Please carry them out. Placing them in a container with a tea bag helps to absorb odours.

- Follow the more specific guidance on Human Sanitation in the SCA Human Sanitation Guidelines.

LEAVE CAMP AS YOU FOUND IT

- Remove all litter (even other peoples!) Think ahead and only carry in what you are prepared to carry out. Do not bury or hide litter under stones as it can harm wildlife and offends those who visit after you.
- Choose a dry site to pitch on rather than resorting to digging drainage ditches and removing vegetation. It is acceptable to move rocks and small boulders, but always return them to the same place, the same way up.

ROADSIDE CAMPING

- Although camping beside a road is not wild camping, it does take place and can be lawful. However, whenever practicable use an official campsite with sanitation facilities.
- If you are just looking for a place for a few hours sleep, then as a last resort - pitch late, leave early and be unobtrusive.
- Ask nearby residents before pitching if you wish to camp near houses.
- Vehicles have a great impact on vegetation. Park on hard ground or on a safe metalled area. Don't park in passing places or drive down a private road.
- Take particular care with toilet hygiene and use public toilet facilities if there are any nearby.
- Avoid sites that are at risk of being overused. Congregational roadside camping causes significant problems and is a genuine cause of concern to local communities around Scotland.
- Unofficial roadside sites used by people with large tents, often for several nights at a time, have become a serious problem and are facing a crack down. Avoid these places and do not add to the problem.

CAMPING AND THE LAW

- The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and Scottish Outdoor Access Code came into force in 2005. The Act establishes a statutory right of access to most land and inland water. This includes the right to camp and the Code describes the responsibilities and best practice guidance that should be followed when exercising your right to camp wild.
- A section in the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865, which contained an offence of camping on land without the consent of the owner or occupier, has been repealed. The 2003 Act confirms that camping is a lawful activity when done

- responsibly by a person who is exercising their access rights.
- The Scottish Outdoor Access Code contains guidance on the responsibilities that accompany the access rights in the Act. The Code provides specific advice on wild camping and recommends that in order to avoid causing problems you should not camp in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals. The full version of the Code can be found at: www.outdooraccess-scotland.com.

This guidance has been adapted from the leaflet "Wild Camping, A Guide to Good Practice" first published by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland in 1996, and last updated in 2005.