

Minimal impact bushwalking policy

The Victorian National Parks Association's objectives emphasise principles of conservation and education. This policy provides for the conduct of walks held as part of our Bushwalking Program and as a guide to emphasise acceptable standards to minimise the impact of activities in the bush.

Bushwalking is defined as walks in native bushland not developed for high-level visitor use.

Party Size

Party size will be based on the following considerations:

- Location of activity including terrain, land type and conservation status of the land
- Type of activity – Walk Talk & Gawk, easy walk, overnight or extended
- Condition of, and likely impact of walking on, tracks
- Seasonal and weather considerations
- Local knowledge (personal, ranger).

Recommended maximum group sizes are as follows:

- Sensitive areas e.g. alpine areas above 1200m, rainforest, unstable areas in arid and coastal zones and some flora and fauna reserves - maximum 12
- Stable areas in land with a primary purpose for conservation e.g. national and state parks - maximum 20
- Stable areas in land with a primary purpose for recreation e.g. metropolitan parks and gardens - maximum 30.

Route selection

Some routes are excluded from the public for reasons of legislation, regulation, by-laws etc. These include cultural sites of Indigenous people, Reference Areas, and some water catchments.

Route selection should ensure avoidance of areas such as:

- Sites of significance for nature conservation
- Sphagnum bogs
- Creek gullies susceptible to damage
- Revegetation areas
- Reference areas

- Private property without permission.

Route selection should also consider the appropriateness of walking in and around historical and cultural sites, and should respect the values of these sites. In some cases these sites must be avoided and information to determine their status should be obtained.

Parties must stay on the track and not cut corners even where others have done so. In open untracked country it is advisable to spread out to disperse impact on the terrain and vegetation.

Vegetation and soils

- Do not interfere with plants and minimise trampling of vegetation and soil.
- Avoid known areas of dieback from Phytophthora, particularly during wet periods or when soils are damp, and minimise the risk of spreading infestation by cleaning shoes, walking poles etc. immediately on completion of your bush activity.
- Think about where you put your feet, hands and equipment. Flat soled and lighter footwear lessen damage and are less likely to carry soil containing Phytophthora.
- Avoid sensitive and soft environments and stay on rocks and hard ground.

Human waste

- All participants must have access to a trowel. Faecal waste and toilet paper must be buried at least 150mm deep and 100m away from water sources and campsites. In snow be sure to dig into the soil, not just the snow.
- Consider the effect of ground seepage and potential water runoff into watercourses.
- Particular attention is required if the participant is ill.
- Use unbleached, undyed toilet paper that breaks down more quickly than those containing dyes.
- Tampons, sanitary pads and nappies should be carried out in press-seal plastic bags.

Detergents and soap

- Detergents and soaps are often unnecessary – except for a small cake for hand washing after toilet and before cooking.

- Get someone to pour water over your hands to rinse, well away from water sources.
- Plates etc. can be washed with sand and gravel or a scourer.
- Avoid greasy food to minimise washing.
- Don't put food wastes, wash-up water or toothpaste spit into water sources, but dispose of them on soil at least 50m from water.

Fires

- Stoves are encouraged on all trips. A number of places are 'fuel stove only' areas
- Before visiting an area, check with local departments whether campfires are allowed.
- If a fire is to be lit and is not required for emergency purposes, use only existing fireplaces in areas where appropriate wood can be obtained.
- Remember that fallen and decayed wood is significant to the ecosystem as it is an important habitat and provides nutrients back into the soil.
- When camping in recognised camping areas that have constructed fireplaces, keep the fire small and in the fireplace provided.
- Consider carefully the lighting of a fire on days of high temperatures and/or strong winds.
- Note fire ban days and be aware of which Fire District you are visiting.
- Ensure your fire is out before you leave or go to bed.
- Where possible restore soil on any inappropriate fireplace scars you come across.

Rubbish

- If you can carry it in, carry it out. This includes orange peel, apple cores and eggshells; they all take a long time to degrade or may seed and produce fruit.
- Don't burn plastic, foil or plastic-coated paper products. Consider the most appropriate type of food packaging when preparing food for the trip.
- Carry out any rubbish you come across, if possible.
- Consider carrying a spare plastic bag for collecting rubbish dropped by previous walkers.

Campsites

- Camp on hard or sandy ground. It will cause less damage than camping on boggy or lushly vegetated ground.
- Where possible use an existing campsite.

- Party size must reflect campsite availability and suitability. Camp away from animal pathways.
- Trenches are unnecessary and should never be dug, nor should vegetation be cut for tent poles or for bedding. Sleeping mats or spare clothing make a more comfortable mattress.
- Always leave your campsites in better condition than you found them, even if this involves removing existing rubbish.

Pets

Pets must not be brought on VNPA trips. As a general rule, regulations do not allow domestic animals in most national and state parks.

Noise

As a courtesy to other walkers and to wildlife, keep noise to a minimum.

Don't feed animals

Do not offer or leave food for animals. It is bad for the health of the animals and may result in situations where aggressive animals attack visitors in the park.

Most of all

- TAKE NOTHING BUT PHOTOS
- LEAVE NOTHING BUT FOOTPRINTS
- No object is to be removed from its environment unless you have a relevant licence. This includes flowers, seeds, shells, skeletal remains, feathers, rocks, leaves, driftwood and cultural and historical artefacts.