

Low-Impact Camping

In recent years, outdoorsmen have begun to realize that if our wilderness is to remain unspoiled and beautiful for the next generation, they must learn to leave as little impact as possible on it. So, many backcountry hikers now take pride in their ability to pass through an area leaving very little effect on the environment. It's called low-impact, minimum-impact, or no-trace camping.

Most Scout hiking and camping is done in council camps, state parks, and other heavily-used sites that are not true wilderness areas. However, it's a good idea to teach the Scouts, particularly the older Scouts, the purpose and principles of low-impact camping. For one thing, it will reinforce the idea of good conservation. For another, they will be prepared to hike and camp in true wilderness areas.

As a practical matter, a whole troop cannot do this kind of trekking. It should only be done by small groups of experienced outdoorsmen. The types of activities that are suitable for normal Scout camping are not suitable in wilderness areas because they destroy much vegetation and often create a lot of noise.

Essentially, the idea of low-impact camping is to blend in with the environment so that hikers passing your camp would scarcely realize you are there. Here are some tips for low-impact camping.

- Have no more than 12 in the party.
- Use tents made of material that blends with the environment. Do not ditch tents.
- Pack food in burnable or pack-out containers; take and use trash bags.
- While hiking, stay on trails and do not cut across switchbacks. Select hard ground for cross-country travel; do not use muddy trails if you have a choice.
- Select campsites away from delicate plants, and camp no more than 4 days in one spot. Camp out of sight of trails, streams, and lakes.
- For fires, use lightweight backpacking stoves. However, in a heavily-used area, you can use an old fire circle, burning only small downed wood. Or dig a low-impact fire pit, as shown in the *Fieldbook*.
- Wash yourself, clothes, and cooking gear some distance from streams and lakes. Pour dishwater and wash water into a hole. Save the turf and recover the hole.
- Dig latrines 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from camp and water. Save turf and recover the hole.
- Pack out all nonburnable trash.
- Avoid noisy games and activities.
- Avoid trampling vegetation.