



Minimal Impact Guidelines

For schools

Natural environments provide an excellent way for students to learn about themselves, the world they live in, and how humans and nature interact with each other. To help protect these natural areas it is important to make sure our activities have minimal impact on the environment.

The larger size of many school groups can have a significant impact on the environment. Minimal Impact Guidelines provides school groups with a code for practice which is designed to protect the environment by encouraging teachers and students to implement actions to ensure that their impacts are minimised and that their visit is in harmony with the natural values present.

All native plants, animals, geological features, historical and cultural remains are protected by law in parks. All visitors to parks should do their bit to ensure that they remain undisturbed.

Always register your excursion on www.parkconnect.com.au/education before you go.

Before you go

Parks Victoria has prepared [Excursion Handbooks](#) to assist teachers who are planning to visit parks. These contain information about:

Traditional Owners and Connections to Country

- Risk management
- Permit requirements
- Connecting with nature
- Giving back to parks

These can be found at www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/learning-in-nature/plan-your-visit/self-guided-education-visits

Cultural respect

National parks, reserves and marine protected areas form the core of Aboriginal cultural landscapes. They are rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage, holding social, spiritual, and ceremonial significance. All visitors should be mindful of historical and cultural landscapes and should take steps to minimise their impact while in parks. This includes:

- Awareness and respect for cultural values that exist within park areas should be discussed with students.

- Refrain from visiting culturally sensitive locations unless Parks Victoria has designated as a permissible site to do so. This would be indicated by interpretation signage.

Local Traditional Owner groups should be consulted in developing interpretation or education programs for Aboriginal cultural sites. Local Traditional Owner groups can be identified on the [ACHRIS Welcome Map](#) or by contacting [Aboriginal Victoria](#).

Tread lightly

Walking and bike tracks are carefully designed to allow people to visit natural environments while minimising the impact on the environment. Staying on the track reduces erosion, limits spreading of disease and weeds, and stops you from getting lost.

It is generally preferred that people should walk through any muddy sections of tracks rather than step off into the shrub. This minimises the widening of the track as well as trampling any vegetation.

In some areas where visitation is low, it may be the case that the track is hard to identify. In such places it is essential that people are prepared with navigation skills and a higher degree of self-sufficiency.

Wildlife conservation issues

Parks Victoria manages a diverse network of parks that are home to over 4,300 native plant species and 948 native animal species. These parks include some of Victoria's largest and most undisturbed ecosystems, such as the Alps, the mallee, grasslands and inland waters and wetlands. It covers Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries that protect a wide array of marine life. Find out more about conservation and science at Parks Victoria by visiting www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/conservation-and-science

Before you venture out on your camp or excursion, ensure you are aware of current conservation issues or threats in the park to take all steps to minimise your impact.

When researching park areas, you might consider:

- Identifying highly sensitive areas that should be avoided as a group, this may include saltmarshes, alpine bogs, beach bird nesting sites or fragile dune systems.
- Highlighting good conservation practices, such as boot washing when a wash station is present or leave no trace policy.
- Plan excursions to avoid visiting during critical moments for the ecosystems such as regeneration periods after a fire event. For planned burn information, visit www.plannedburns.ffm.vic.gov.au

Fauna and Flora

All fauna and flora within Parks Victoria national and marine national parks are protected and prohibited from removal.

Ensure students are informed about the best ways in which to minimise interactions with fauna so as not to disturb natural behaviours.

- All wildlife should be viewed from a safe distance. In particular, large wildlife should be viewed from a non-intruding distance for both the protection of students and wildlife.
- Encourage students to become silent and slow their movements, observing the animal 'in situ' to avoid disturbance.
- If you come across injured wildlife, contact 13 1963 to seek advice.

Encourage students to refrain from disturbing flora, rocks and soil during their visit to the park. Explain that all forms

of nature are essential components of functioning ecosystems.

- Habitat should always be left untouched. This includes leaving rocks and boulders in place, on both land and in water. Building rock towers or platforms removes essential coverage for small fish, mammals or insects.
- Venomous and poisonous animals often reside under rocks. Moving rocks can cause harmful interactions for both animals and students.
- Refrain from touching leaves, branches, wildflowers or seaweed, such as Neptune's necklace. Encourage students to take a moment to look closely, highlighting the beautiful details in Australian plants, fungi and algae.
- Encourage students to always leave biofacts such as shells, feathers or bones in nature, as they provide a critical role in the ecosystem.
- Always remain on formed tracks to prevent the spread of invasive fungi, weeds and diseases.
- Refrain from removing weeds you might identify, although seemingly helpful, this can cause seeds to spread or cause erosion from disturbed soil.
- When immersed in marine environments, ensure careful and precise footing in rockpools and awareness of fin damage to piers during snorkelling sessions.

For studies of plants or animals, including counting scat or water quality testing, a Parks Victoria research permit may be required. Find out more by visiting www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/conservation-and-science/science-and-research/research-permits

Waste management

Ensure you take all rubbish, waste and food scraps with you when you leave the park.

Rubbish can lead to pollution of native habitats, meaning that animals can no longer survive in the ecosystem.

Where rubbish flows into waterways it compromises quality for habitat, drinking and recreation.

Wildlife can mistake waste and food scraps as food, causing ingestion and human dependency problems for their way of life.

Students should always aim to implement a 'carry in carry out' approach to waste management in park areas. Supply and use your own rubbish bags or containers for disposal. A dry sack is a great alternative to a plastic bag. Once you have returned home and can access council recycling or composting services.

Additional information for remote or overnight visits

Parks Victoria manages a range of campsites which provide diverse experiences for school groups. These range from large campgrounds with toilet and shower facilities suitable for larger groups through to remote locations which may only be suitable for groups of up to six people.

Each campground has a cap on the number of people who can camp there. These limits vary for each site so you will need to discuss this with the local park office. The limits are set to ensure the natural values of the campground are maintained and to minimise impacts on the environment and other campers.

Dispersed or bush camping can be undertaken in some park areas where it is permitted and there are no such facilities available. To find out if this is permitted in a particular park, contact 13 1963 for the most up to date information.

Overnight camping or journeying, and visits to remote areas all necessitate additional minimal impact considerations.

Always register your camp on www.parkconnect.com.au/education.

Setting up camp

It is important that your campsite is well set up for a comfortable and sustainable stay. Abide by the following requirements:

- Camp in designated spaces only.
- Camp at least 20 metres from any waterway.
- Place tents on a sandy or hard surface for a well-drained site, preventing any drainage issues or damage to vegetation.
Keep noise levels down to a minimum, foreign noises can scare native animals.

Washing

Staying clean and hygienic is essential whilst camping in nature. Below are a few suggestions to help minimise the impact that we have on the natural environment, whilst staying healthy:

- Wash cooking utensils 50m away from any stream, lake or beach.
- Scatter the wastewater so that it filters through the soil.
- Practice sustainable washing practices by using natural resources like gritty sand and leaves, or a reusable sponge to clean dishes.
- Detergents, toothpaste and soap are harmful to all terrestrial, fresh water and marine wildlife. If you choose to use soap, ensure it is biodegradable and use as minimal amount as possible.
- Hand sanitiser is a great resource that allows hands to be hygienic before eating and after going to the toilet during your trip.

Food waste

Spend time planning for food waste prior to leaving home. What will your food waste amount to? Will it smell or leak? Will it be bulky?

- Keep your food waste in a secure leak-proof container. Dry sacks are a great alternative to a plastic bag which can be easily ripped open by curious wildlife.
- Be careful with uneaten food and food waste in tents. Wombats can tear through tent walls and some possums or birds can open zips.
- Ensure left over food waste is carried out of the park with you in your backpack. Don't throw food scraps into waterways or bury in the ground – this is harmful to all wildlife.

Human waste

In areas where there is no access to toilet facilities, consider bringing a portable toilet where possible – this is the best way to ensure minimal impact from human waste.

If this is not possible follow these steps:

- Take a hand trowel.
- Choose a spot at least 100m away from campsites and watercourses.
- Dig a hole 15cm deep. Bury all faecal waste and paper, mixing it with soil to help decomposition and to discourage curious animals.
- Use a different location each time to ensure your impact is reduced.

- Carry out all female hygiene items such as sanitary pads and tampons. Menstrual cups are a reusable and hygienic alternative to disposable sanitary items, requiring only freshwater rinses between use.

Fires

Do not rely on fires as your primary means of heating or cooking. Fires are only be permitted in parks where provision has been made.

Where permitted, there will still be varying regulations about fire use, such as the season you travel in and location of the fire pit. You should always seek the current regulations and most up to date information before you go by contacting 13 1963.

Where you are permitted to have a fire:

- Keep the fire small and contained.
- Attend to the fire at all times, i.e. an adult must be present and no further than 50m away from a fire that is alight or amber coals but hot to touch.
- Bring your own firewood in from outside the park, preferably from a sustainable source. Collecting firewood and kindling on park land is illegal, damaging essential habitat for local flora and fauna.
- Ensure that your fire is fully extinguished when you are not in attendance. A good rule is 'If it's cold enough to comfortably touch, then it's cool enough to leave'.

Do not light fires on days of total fire bans.



Figure 1: Woowookarung Regional Park

Nature's classroom



Take photos and record sounds

To remember special moments, places or plants, encourage students to take a photo or a recording that they can refer to later on during their learning.

Photos and recordings leave no impact of the environment and are a great way to allow students create a resource for future reference.



Write a journal

Direct students to write a journal whilst immersed in nature. You might encourage them to tap into their senses, describing sights, sounds and smells.

Journaling throughout an excursion or camp is a fantastic way for students to capture their experience in a written expression.



Draw landscapes or biofacts in the field

Honour the experience of being outside in nature using artistic measures. Students can sketch the landscape of a particularly beautiful scene or ecosystem as a way of capturing the moment.

Botanical drawing of leaves, wildflowers or gumnuts is another way to highlight the beauty of nature up close.

Be prepared and stay safe

Anyone entering parks and forests during the bushfire season needs to stay aware of forecast weather conditions. Check the Fire Danger Rating and for days of Total Fire Ban at [emergency.vic.gov.au](https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au), on the

VicEmergency smartphone app or call the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226.

Some sites may be closed during High / Extreme / Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating days. Check the latest conditions at parks.vic.gov.au or by calling 13 1963.

For emergency assistance call Triple Zero (000). If there is a green emergency marker sign near you, read the information on the marker to the operator.



Want to learn more? Visit parks.vic.gov.au/learning-in-nature