Minimum Impact techniques

How to walk softly in the wilderness!

Why Low Impact?

- Everything you do in life has an environmental impact?
- The issue is choices!!
  - How can you live in a way that conserves the world's resources versus destroying the resources? (The big picture question)
  - How can you minimize your impact in the wilderness environment? (The outdoor lifestyle question)

The Wilderness

- What is wilderness?
- How much ‘wilderness’ is there in America?
- The Wilderness Preservation System
  - 109 Million acres (5% of U.S. land)
  - Multiple national agencies manage the land (NPS/USFS/BLM/USFW)
  - The Wilderness Act - 1964
  - A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

Backcountry Etiquette - A Quiz

This is a learning exercise to generate discussion during a class session. Answers are given at the end.

- 1. U.S. Forest Service or other agencies latrine boxes (outhouse) are suitable for disposal of biodegradable garbage.
- 2. Cooking with a backpacking stove is generally preferable to cooking with wood.
- 3. Dig a trench around your tent if it looks like rain.
- 4. It’s okay to throw apple cores into the woods because they are biodegradable.

Backcountry Etiquette - A Quiz

- 5. Dishes may be washed in a nearby stream or lake if go away from your campsite and you use biodegradable soaps.
- 6. Use existing fireplaces or fire rings at backcountry campsites.
- 7. Natural mattresses of pine boughs or leaves are preferable to foam sleeping pads
- 8. Bring along a strong plastic bag for garbage.

Backcountry Etiquette - A Quiz

- 9. Leave some food for the wild animals that visit your campsite especially in times of drought or severe winters.
- 10. Loud noises and shouting are acceptable during daylight hours.
- 11. Toilet paper will disappear into the ground after a heavy rain.
- 12. Dig a deep latrine at each campsite.

Backcountry Etiquette - A Quiz

- 13. Lashing tables and pounding nails into trees improves the campsite for the next party.
- 14. Walking off trail in the backcountry should be done in single file in order to limit the impact to one small area.
- 15. Carrying firearms in the backcountry is helpful in order to protect you from predators like bears and wolves.

Backcountry Quiz Answers

- 1. False - human waste only. Garbage goes in dumpsters. The pit toilets fill to quickly and become management problem.
- 2. T/F - Depends on the environment; two reasons for stoves environmentally - if fuel wood supply is scarce (e.g. deserts and high alpine), fire danger is high (danger of starting forest fires from you campfire).
- 3. False - ancient practice which encourages erosion. No need. Set you tent on a slight height of land and water drains away.
- 4. False - pack out all garbage; even harmless 'seeds' introduces non-native species and the food changes animal feeding patterns.

Backcountry Quiz Answers

- 5. False - no soaps in streams even ‘biodegradable ones’. You can swim in the stream - just don’t use soaps.
- 6. T/F - Depends on remoteness of site and management agency; established sites usually maintain fire rings so reuse them; true backcountry settings return the former error of an unnecessary fire ring to the natural state.
- 7. False - only in a true survival situation would it be acceptable and even then there are alternatives.
- 8. True. If not for your garbage for someone else before you.

Backcountry Quiz Answers

- 9. False. Never feed the animals.
- 10. False. Consider your neighbors at all times.
- 11. False. Check with management agency, pack it out or burn it
- 12. False. Check with management agency, cat hole method is generally the method of choice.
- 13. False. Ancient practice, highly impactful.
- 14. T/F. Depends on the ecosystem. Which method has more minimal impact.
- 15. False. Almost all wilderness, the animals are not the danger.

Minimum Impact Camping

Leave no trace

- Physical Impact
  - Camp away from fragile areas (streams, meadows, lakes)
  - Campsites left undisturbed/ return ground cover
  - Stay only a day or so and then move on
  - Keep fires small / use stoves when needed
  - Use only low impact fire pits
  - Burn only dead and down wood
  - Stay on the trail (no cutting switchbacks)
  - Off trail hiking: minimize impact on vegetation

Minimum Impact Camping

Leave No Trace

- Physical Impact
  - Pack it in - Pack it out
  - Pack out others trash
  - Take only pictures leave only hundred dollar bills
- People to People Impact
  - Travel in small groups
  - Take advantage of lesser used areas/ off times
  - Be non-visible and inaudible
  - Leave radios, dogs, and other noise makers home
  - Yield the right of way on the trail
  - Smile and be friendly

Minimum Impact Camping

Leave No Trace

- Sanitation Impact
  - Wash dishes and bodies away from streams (50-100 feet)
  - Don’t put soaps or foods into streams or lakes
  - Bury human waste 200 feet from open water area
  - Use the ‘cat hole’ method in most areas
  - Check local regulations regarding human waste
  - Use a natural toilet paper when ever possible
  - Feminine hygiene products procedure
  - Eliminate food waste/ pack or burn if needed