



Paddle Scotland Inland Paddling Guide to Good Practice

We have ample opportunity in Scotland to explore and sample many different environments, including those of rivers, lochs, canals, and sea lochs. They teem with wildlife, and offer varying landscapes and experiences.

All paddlers must be aware of their possible effects on the surrounding environment. We need to be aware of our environmental footprint and our responsibility to safeguard our flora and fauna. Thoughtful consideration for those with whom we share the environment is essential. ([See Paddler's Code](#)).

Travel

We virtually all use cars or vans for travel, both because of a lack of public transport in many areas but also because we have to carry craft for paddling. To reduce our impact we could:

- Fit good roof bars to maximise the number of boats carried on one vehicle
- Keep down our speed when driving
- Use bicycles or public transport (when possible) to reduce the impact of shuttles
- Park carefully and legally
- Keep our belongings together whilst preparing to paddle or exiting from a river
- Take our litter home.

Please change discreetly, and move away quickly, especially if overlooked by houses. [The Paddlers' Code](#) advises how to behave on the water.

Planning trips

This applies whether going for a short day out, or a multi-day camping trip. The paddler should consider;

- **Group size** – limit according to considerations such as safety, communication, need to camp!
- **Access, places of interest, rapids, camping** – Planning ahead will always make the trip more enjoyable, check guide to rivers and other waterways to identify difficulties, areas of interest, campsites etc and allow time prior to paddling if possible, to view these.



- **Disturbance of wildlife** - The spawning grounds of salmon are often found in the upper reaches of rivers, disturbance to these beds of gravel may occur when paddlers attempt rivers in low water conditions, so please consider this and wait until river levels are more suitable.

‘Leave No Trace’ in order to avoid irritating others whilst outdoors!

Landing, Camping and Fires

It can be difficult in narrow river valleys to find appropriate camp sites that fulfil the requirements of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code including to avoid disturbance to residents and farmers. Wild camping on islands can be inconspicuous and quiet.



Campsites: if possible, use formal campsites when available – there are many beautiful sites. These may provide access for day paddles, or an overnight stop.

Fires: Consider fire safety – and keep fires to shingle banks or below the water line in sea lochs so that the tide will extinguish and remove signs of your fire. Do not light fires on peat. It is your responsibility to leave no trace of your fire.



Halting points: When landing for a stop, please carefully choose a place where others are not disturbed, and obviously take everything away with you when you leave.

Leave no trace: Please follow the [SCA Wild Camping Guide to Good Practice and SCA Human Sanitation Guide](#). This is how you can best contribute to a safer and better environment. Also see the [‘Leave No Trace’ website](#), SCA [Reporting Pollution](#) advice and information on [Wildlife Crime](#)

Birds and mammals

There are some general rules to follow in the countryside, and always be cautious. If you think you are disturbing an animal or bird, you probably are! Watch carefully on the water around you, and also what is happening on river banks and loch-sides.

- **Domesticated farm animals:** Always be very careful around domesticated farm animals and whenever possible avoid fields with cattle or sheep (not just in the Spring, but all-year round).
- **Dogs:** Many paddlers take dogs with them, but please ensure that they are under control at all times and kept away from animals and other people.

Water birds

Dippers hop around rocks on upland rivers, and are very active and attractive little birds. They will be feeding, so just watch quietly, and move on.



Herons are ever present, and large and slow-flying. They have a habit of taking off and flying downriver in front of paddlers, and if not careful, you could be in the situation of driving them further and further from their own bit of the river, and nest sites. Either use a wider part of a river to allow them to pass upriver past you, or decide to stop for a break, when they might well pass you of their own volition.

Ducks and geese hatch their young in the Spring, between March and June, be careful of not disturbing hen birds with young when they are swimming. Little ducklings can be hard to spot in the water, and they often appear as dots.

Black-throated divers are a fairly rare bird, only found in northern Scotland, nesting on sandy beaches such as on the Loch Maree islands. They were the source of concern about disturbance some years ago, but enquiry at the Visitor Centre will give you their current status and location.

Remember that virtually all UK birds and their nests are protected by law, so paddle carefully and don't disturb. You might well be rewarded by seeing the blue flash of kingfishers by canoeing silently.

Mammals

Otters are a European Protected species, so paddle carefully and observe the otters, but don't interfere either with their passage or their holts, which are often a series of holes in river and loch banks.



Beavers are now a European Protected species in Scotland since 2016. Paddlers might well come across beavers swimming in the larger rivers such as the Tay and Earn, but their dams and lodges will usually be on much smaller watercourses.

As these mammals are so new, many of the public have no idea of where they live, or why. Beavers are both vegetarian (they do not eat fish!), and also very clumsy on land. Therefore, to find enough food by way of leaves, grass etc., they design as large an area of water as they can, so there is a large margin edge, and plenty of food. This is why dams are built, to hold water back (and also aid flood prevention downstream). This makes them feel safe from predators.



Their homes (being European beavers, not Canadian), often start off as holes in banks, but lodges are built to protect their kits. Beavers spend their time engineering their environment, building dams and lodges, and often working all night long. The familiar 'pencil' cuts off trees can now be seen on the side of many rivers. Observing these animals is quite possible if both quiet, and downwind of them, but beavers are usually seen in this country at twilight. Our wider family of paddlers, in the USA and Canada, become used to paddling medium sized rivers, and sliding down a series of beaver dams

Badgers and other animals



Other mammals you might see include badgers, stoats, weasels, pine martens (all mustelids, like otters), and red squirrels. Our native wild cat is, sadly, virtually extinct now, but a captive breeding and re-introduction programme is now underway. All of the above might be seen in any rural part of Scotland, badgers present on the banks of the Spey, and pine martens present in the Findhorn valley.

The water vole is a timid little animal, found on lowland rivers and marshes, and canals. It has become rare and is being reintroduced, having been predated by mink for many years. It lives in holes in banks.



Fresh water pearl Mussels are now rare, fully protected, and subject to criminal collection. They are only found in clean and usually clear water, which is why they are vulnerable, and these locations are usually fairly small watercourses.

Plants

Follow the general rule of not disturbing or picking plants, and therefore, along with 'Check, Clean, Dry', not moving vegetation from one river basin to another.

We now have several very common and rapacious **Non-Native plants** which have spread enormously such as: Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum giganteum*), and Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). Giant Hogweed is harmful to humans: simple touching causes very severe burns and blisters.

Himalayan balsam

Japanese knotweed

Giant Hogweed

When in river gorges, please lift boats over rocks as boats will scrape off and damage mosses and lichens, and some of these plants are becoming rare.

The Seven Principles of Leave No Trace

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimise Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Principles in SOAC

A reminder that these are;

- **Respect the interests of other people** – *acting courteously always bringing benefits, and others have a total right to carry on their work, or follow other pursuits, in the countryside*
- **Care for the Environment** – *always leave land and water as you find it, or in a better state, e.g. by picking up litter*
- **Take responsibility for your own actions** – *Stay safe and alert*

Links to further information

[RSPB Scotland](#)

[Plantlife Scotland](#)

[Scottish Wildlife Trust](#)

[The Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)

[GB Non-native Species Secretariat](#)

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