



Paddle Scotland Wild Camping Guide to Good Practice

The [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) states the following about wild camping:

“Access rights extend to wild camping.

- *This type of camping is lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place.*
- *You can camp in this way wherever access rights apply, but help to avoid causing problems for local people and land managers by not camping in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals and by keeping well away from buildings, roads or historic structures.*
- *Take extra care to avoid disturbing deer stalking or grouse shooting. If you wish to camp close to a house or building, seek the owner's permission.”*

Wild camping is one of the best ways to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of Scotland's countryside and when done responsibly it has minimal impact on the environment and other people.

This document seeks to provide advice on how to keep impacts to a minimum, as well as setting out the legal position and describing the advice given in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) .

This advice is primarily aimed at paddlers who wild camp as an essential part of multi-day journeys.

This guidance is aimed at paddlers who seek to wild camp alongside rivers, lochs, canals and coasts as well as using commercial campsites.

Choosing a Site

A discreet place: find a discreet place to camp rather than resorting to popular congregational spots that tend to be overused. Camp as unobtrusively as possible - keeping well away from buildings, roads or historic structures

Group size: this is a key consideration when choosing a wild camping spot, the larger the group, the fewer the options. Limiting group size may be required for responsible wild camping.



Environmental impact: camping begins to affect the vegetation after a few hours, so aim to move frequently and do not stay longer than 3 nights in the same place.

Consider not only your impact, but that of others as some sites, even though small, are already suffering due to overuse.

Remember that people make a living from the land: choose discreet open areas, you should not camp in enclosed fields of crops or animals.

Leave no trace : enjoy the freedom of wild camping whilst leaving no trace of your passage. Always aim to protect our country's outstanding scenery and wildlife!

Water

Protect the quality of water in burns, rivers, canals and lochs. A burn may be the water supply for a remote house.

- Take drinking and cooking water from a point upstream of your tent.
- Walk downstream to wash your hands and face.
- When washing dishes use biodegradable liquid and take water in a container a few metres away from the source of the water. Pour away the used water onto the land, so that the biodegradable liquid doesn't pollute the water source.
- Brush your teeth a few metres away from the water source.

Minimise Disturbance to Wildlife

Watercourses and loch sides are important sites for birds and other animals.

Birds: most birds breed in the Springtime months (April – June) so remain alert to their presence and avoid camping where you might cause disturbance to them. Be prepared to move if you become aware that you are disturbing nesting birds or other animals. You can check with [RSPB](#) and [NatureScot](#) for areas to avoid during the breeding season.



Remember that **noise** travels from tents and over water disturbing wildlife as well as humans.

Food scraps , (even when buried) attract scavenging birds and animals, some of these prey on vulnerable nesting birds. Carry all food scraps out with you.

Fires

A small fire may be lit on a tidal beach as long as you light it below the normal highwater mark and are certain that there is no risk of setting fire to any nearby trees or vegetation. The next high tide will remove traces of the fire.



Similarly, a small fire may be lit on a shingle bank at the side of a river or loch provided that there is no risk to vegetation and that the ashes/remains can be dispersed before leaving so that there is no trace left behind.

Fires are **not** advised at inland camping spots.

Fires **must not** be lit on peaty soils and close to tinder dry grass as this poses a VERY HIGH FIRE RISK. Areas may be high risk at any time of the year, not just in times of drought.

Dead wood is a very important habitat for insects and many small animals, and in some parts of Scotland's coastline, wood is not in plentiful supply. Only light a fire of the size required for the group and for the length of time necessary, in order to conserve resources.

To burn, or not to burn?

Burn	Do not burn
Wood	Tins
Paper	Plastic bags, packets or containers
Card	Cling film
	Rubber. creosote

IF IN DOUBT – CARRY IT OUT!

Burning Dioxins on Camp Fires

The most serious pollutant given out by burning plastics, creosote and rubber is a family of chemicals call Dioxins. These are bad both for human health and the environment.

Why?

- Dioxins can damage the human immune and nervous systems, cause cancer, lead to birth defects and cause impotence!
- They are stored in body fat, don't get broken down and therefore can build up to dangerous levels
- The other by product of burning plastics is soot which can be inhaled deep into the lungs, affecting breathing (particularly bad for asthmatics), and soot can contribute to global warming

Incinerators – the difference

Incinerators burn plastics at very high temperatures to destroy dioxins, waste gases are filtered before release removing particulates. Incinerators release waste high into the atmosphere so that little descends to ground level, whereas campfire gases mostly remain at your level posing hazards.

Toilet Hygiene

DO:

- Find a spot at least 30m (about 100 feet) from fresh/running water when going to the toilet
- When camping by the sea it is advisable to urinate/defaecate below the highwater line so that the incoming tide will flush away your human waste. Care and discretion need to be used to ensure that you don't cause health hazards for others or pollute sensitive areas.



- In inland areas bury excrement in a small hole (not under boulders). A trowel can be used to lift a flap of turf. Pay attention to burying excrement properly, particularly when the ground is frozen or covered in snow.
- If a suitable place cannot be found then you must bag your waste and carry it out.
- Use natural materials in the place of toilet paper, such as moss, grass and seaweed.
- If you use toilet paper then pack it out in small plastic bags. Burning toilet paper is not recommended as it is not easy to burn and may create a fire hazard.

DO NOT:

- Use areas of sensitive vegetation such as west coast machair – this vegetation takes a long time to recover so holes should not be dug at all. Find a more suitable place.
- Burying toilet paper isn't recommended as it takes a long time to biodegrade.
- Burying tampons and sanitary towels is not acceptable as animals will dig these up. Carry these out in plastic bags. Placing in a container with a tea bag helps to reduce any odours.

HUMAN SANITATION IS NOT A TABOO SUBJECT: PLEASE DISCUSS WITH YOUR FELLOW PADDLERS!

Leave No Trace Camping

Remove all litter (even other people's). Think ahead and carry in only what you are prepared to carry out. Do not hide or bury litter under stones as it can harm wildlife and offend those who follow after you.

Choose a dry site to pitch your tent, rather than digging drainage ditches and removing vegetation. It is acceptable to remove boulders and small rocks, but return them afterwards to the same place and place the same side up.

Roadside Camping

Although camping beside a road is not wild camping, it does take place and can be lawful. However, whenever possible, use an official campsite with sanitation facilities.

- If you are just looking for a place for a few hours of sleep then as a last resort: pitch late, leave early and be unobtrusive.
- Ask residents nearby before pitching if you wish to camp near to houses.
- Vehicles have a great impact on vegetation. Park on hard ground or on a safe metalled area. Don't park in passing places or drive down a private road.
- Take particular care with toilet hygiene and use public facilities if there are any nearby.

- Avoid sites that are at risk of being overused. Congregational roadside camping causes significant problems and is a genuine cause of concern to local communities around Scotland.
- Unofficial roadside sites used by people with large tents, often for several nights at a time, have become a serious problem and are facing a crackdown. Avoid these places and do not add to the problem.

Camping and the Law

[The Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) – establishes a statutory right of access to most land and inland water, and this includes the right to camp.

[The Scottish Outdoor Access Code 2005](#) – contains guidance on the responsibilities that accompanies the access rights in the Act. The Code provides specific advice on wild camping and recommends that in order to avoid problems you should not camp in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals.

[Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Bylaws 2017](#) – bylaws now restrict camping in some areas, please read the guidance for details.

Wild Camping & Scheduled Monuments

In Scotland, the most important historic sites are protected by law under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. These sites are called 'scheduled monuments' and those visiting have a particular responsibility of care towards them. Please see the attached documents and links for more information and guidance.

[Wild Camping at Scheduled Monuments](#)

[Find the Location of a Scheduled Monument](#)

Useful Websites:

[Mountaineering Scotland](#)

[Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)

[Scottish Environmental Protection Agency](#)

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