

# Minimal Impact Guidelines

Victoria's parks and reserves protect an amazing diversity of natural and cultural areas and provide an enormous variety of recreational and educational opportunities. With an increasing number of visitors to these areas, human impacts on the natural environment are becoming a serious issue. Escaped campfires, the spread of exotic species, trampling vegetation and the rapid deterioration of walking and four wheel drive tracks are all becoming commonplace. It is therefore important when visiting these areas that we are considerate of our environmental and cultural impacts and take positive steps to minimise them.

## Minimal Impact Guidelines

By using minimal impact techniques, park visitors can reduce damage to the environment, and the subsequent need for track closures and walking restrictions.



## Flora and Fauna Conservation

Remember that all native plants, animals, geological features and historical and cultural remains are protected by law in national parks and must not be disturbed or removed.

### Keep wildlife wild.

Feeding wildlife can upset natural balances and can lead to health problems for the animals as well as making them reliant and even aggressive towards humans. Remember the healthiest food for wild animals occurs in nature.

Sadly many national park car parks have overpopulations of animals such as Kangaroos and Wallabies due to visitors having fed them in the past. This has led to high frequencies of inbreeding, health problems such as Lumpy Jaw and an unnatural population of species, which in winter when there are less visitors can lead to starvation.

### Be considerate

Visitors should be considerate of and avoid disturbing animal habitats. For example, when walking on the beach, walk below the soft sand to avoid trampling bird nests such as those of the Hooded Plover who nest in the soft sand higher up the beach.

## Groups in Parks

Parks are great areas for schools, clubs and other groups to visit and enjoy. When visiting as a part of a school or other large group remember it is important that your group advises the local park office of your visit.

### Group Sizes

When hiking, try to keep your group small. Large groups have more environmental impact, affect the experience of others and can be socially unwieldy.

Many parks including Wilson's Promontory and the Great Otway National Park have set size limits for groups walking within sections of the park. This helps to reduce human impacts on the natural environment as well as the social impact for other park users. Check with the local park office for specific group size limits.

### Avoid Peak Times

If possible, avoid visiting popular parks at the peak times of the year (December to February). You will miss the crowds and spread the impact, giving the environment a chance to recover.

## Take in, Take out.

Pack to minimise your rubbish and remember if you have carried something into a park, carry it out again with you.

Most national parks have a *no bin* policy. This is because park rubbish bins are often used to dump household litter and because they attract

wildlife which maybe harmed by the rubbish or scatter it throughout the landscape.

## Toilet Hygiene

Where toilets exist please use them. If there are no toilets, walk at least 100 metres from water, tracks and campsites, dig a 15 centimetre hole and bury your waste and toilet paper.



## Keep to the track

In terms of protecting the environment, it is important for both people and vehicles to stay on designated tracks. Wheel marks can last for decades in some environments such as in the Alps or the Mallee, and can lead to severe erosion and weed invasion. Short cuts made on tracks anywhere by vehicles or feet can soon become ugly erosion scars.

## Cinnamon Fungus

In some parks the root rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is a major problem. Causing the dieback and death of many native plant species, its spores are spread on tyres and people's shoes. The best way to prevent its spread is to remain on the track and ensure shoes and tyres are kept clean.

## Becoming Lost

Unfortunately people sometimes become lost in bush areas such as national parks, sometimes sadly with fatal results. Remember to plan your trip carefully and stay on tracks to minimise the chance of getting lost.

## Campfires

Each year campfire escapes account for approximately 10% of bushfire ignitions. In Victoria we are fortunate to still be able to have campfires in many of our national parks. To keep this privilege, we need to use campfires responsibly.

Gas or fuel stoves have less impact on the environment and are preferred. Remember fires are not permitted in many parks including Wilsons Promontory and many sections of the Alpine National Park.

If a campfire is necessary, people must comply with safety regulations. Fires may only be lit in fireplaces provided, or as directed by signs. Use common sense when lighting a fire, keep it small and only light in an open clear area. Remember to completely extinguish your fire before going to bed or leaving your campsite.

## Total Fire Ban Days

Total Fire Ban days are declared when conditions are hot, windy and the bush is dry. Campfires or the use of bbqs and other fuel stoves is prohibited on days of Total Fire Ban.

There are five fire ban districts in Victoria - it is up to you to find out when a fire ban is active. Contact the Victorian Bushfire Information Hotline on 1800 240 667, listen to the radio or contact your local DSE, Parks Victoria or CFA office before lighting up. Remember if in doubt, keep your campfire out.

## Cultural Respect

Visitors should be aware of and respect cultural sites. Remember cultural remains are protected and should not be removed or interfered with.

## Leave pets and firearms at home.

With the exception of guide dogs, most parks declared under the National Parks Act around Australia do not allow dogs, cats and other pets.

This is mainly to protect native wildlife. If dogs and cats escape in a national park they could prey on native animals and birds. Feral (ownerless) cats and dogs cause havoc in natural areas. Even the scent and sounds of dogs and cats are enough to scare off native wildlife. In addition domestic animals may spread diseases to native animals, and vice versa. As well, dogs and their droppings present potential disturbance and danger to park visitors.

There are parks where dogs are permitted, generally on leads and under control. Dog walking regulations depend on individual parks, however, suitable parks often include - regional, metropolitan and reservoir parks. Most local councils can provide a list of local areas where dogs may be taken, both on and off leash.

