

## Coping in the Wilderness - Low Impact Kayak Camping

"Leave No Trace" has emerged as the mantra for a generation of outdoor recreation fans, notably in the US & Canada where it can be argued that usage of the "wilderness areas" is perhaps higher than in UK, but that shouldn't mean that here in the UK we don't have a growing problem and this article aims to help with practical and realistic ideas and suggestions as to how we can all keep the wilderness and our remote spaces pristine and beautiful.



Landing on the Sandaigs, Sound of Sleat - a beautiful unspoiled landscape. (Pic: Helen McKenna)

Personally I like the concept of "Take nothing but photographs - leave nothing but thanks". Not a bad philosophy. But how does the principle of low-impact apply to us kayakers? After all, we don't leave any footprints on the ocean and there aren't that many of us anyway, so what's the problem? Well, a quick search around on the Community Forum here on UK Sea Kayak Guidebook (or via the links in the Almanac, Camping & Outdoors page) reveals that remote areas like the Garvellachs are sometimes found to be polluted with the excrement left from visiting parties, the land in the immediate vicinity of a popular open bothy on the West Coast of Scotland is the same and we now have suggestions that the risk of being infected with giardia in the UK is a real possibility as a result.

For people brought up with the convenience of hot running water, toilets and living in our modern urban environment, there's a lot of stuff to come to terms with when taking to the outdoors! That campfire experience is great - but how does the landscape recover from that lovely fire we all enjoyed? And seeing as how we can't just pull the plug on our washing up water, how do we clean dishes and what happens to the dirty water afterwards? And then there's the unmentionable, the toilet! Just for starters, how do you have a crap and what do you do with the results afterwards?

No problem. We're all outdoors types, we know what to do. Well, on the Garvellachs there is a spring by the monastery. It's the only fresh water source in the immediate area. It forms a small pool and (as far as I know) is pure. Until someone used it as their washing basin and left it polluted with soap scum, the remains of a meal and generally churned up. Now was that just poor outdoor skills, bad manners or just not knowing what to do in the circumstances?

In truth there is relatively little information available to us - if we've had some involvement with Scouting or Guiding we might have a head start but there is little to no information or guidance from the "Associations" although the BMC does provide some general advice and the SCA gives some environmental guidelines in the Touring pages of its portal, including useful details on the sensitive periods for wildlife. Elsewhere, there is little I can find from any of the clubs or other organisations involved in helping people take to the outdoors and certainly little in the way of published material in magazines. Maybe I've missed it, but none of the commercial organisations taking people into the wilderness seem to give any pre-trip advice but perhaps it gets dealt with once they're out there.

Where does that leave us? I guess "knowing what to do" must just come naturally. And it's ok because it'll all get washed away anyway. Well, it doesn't and there are enough piles of other peoples

shite, fire rings, rusty cans and polluted springs in Scottish paddling areas to suggest that some support might be useful. Please don't be offended if I use words like shite - it's not nice reading about it but it's even more unpleasant finding it! We can call it po-po's, human excrement, number two's, our "doings", anything you like. But it's still shite.

Sure the grass grows back over fire rings - by next year - but why should I land on a beach and discover so many of the things that I can't even pitch a tent on the machair? And that pile of empty tins neatly left in a poly bag is not going to be picked up by the local cleansing operative. Not on an island anyway. Strange, but true, I've found it!

So if this helps people develop some strategies for coping with things they don't know how to cope with, that's cool. If you already know how to cope with such things, drop me a line with any constructive, practical, realistic suggestions for additions or improvements to this article. That said, the utopia of not using detergent, not having fires and carting your poop away in a dry bag is all well and good, but lets stick to what can actually be done.

I'm coming at this from the perspective of a long-term involvement with the outdoors, a love of wild places and a desire to help folk who might need support rather than as a raging environmentalist determined to hug every tree I come across. (Not that there's anything wrong in that). I've spent years camping and teaching camping techniques within the Scout Movement and try and use minimal impact techniques in my own outdoors activity.

Taking a lead from the US "Leave no Trace" site at <http://www.Int.org/main.html> we can use their seven principles as a starting point:

**1 » Plan Ahead and Prepare**

**2» Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces**

**3» Dispose of Waste Properly**

**4» Leave What You Find**

**5» Minimize Campfire Impacts**

**6» Respect Wildlife**

**7» Be Considerate of Other Visitors**

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**1 » Plan ahead and prepare:** In short, you need to know where you're going before you get there, understand if it's a fragile or protected area, and be prepared in case of an emergency. Leave No Trace encourages adventurers to plan their trips carefully "to avoid times of high use" (like holiday weekends) and to travel in small groups. This will lessen your impact on the land and help keep damage to a minimum. A party of 6 has less impact than a party of (say) 12. Obvious really.

Many parts of the UK have areas designated as SSSI's (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and it's a good idea to know where they are if you're planning to camp in a specific area. Up on the Solway Coast there's one, as per the pic below - it also looks like a very nice area to pitch a tent on and just happens to be a spot where you'd be hoping to camp if you'd launched at one of the logical put-on's further down the coast.

Pitch there of an evening and you'll probably be asked to move. However, just across the water there's a fine little island where you'll be undisturbed and cause no offence.

Generally, sea kayakers don't have access problems but you should be aware that the UK does have some strange access laws in some places, notably England and Wales. I have no idea what the situation is in Ireland or elsewhere. Speak to the British Canoe Union or if your query is about access in Wales, try the Welsh Canoe Association. Scotland has it's own legal system, and the Scottish Canoe Association's view on Access is outlined on their website. In Scotland, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 grants some useful Rights & Responsibilities. Please exercise them appropriately and responsibly.

If you fancy a night in a bothy, the Mountain Bothies Association website contains valuable information on bothy usage.



Choices! (Pic: Helen McKenna)

**2 » Travel and camp on durable surfaces:** You'd be surprised how much damage one person can do in what the Americans call "the backcountry". From trampling waterfront plant life, to scattering low-lying scrubs, it's best to stay away from areas that can't handle your presence (cleared areas, existing paths, and rocky clearings are the goal). Keeping to paths and established campsites will help maintain the wilderness areas that you travel through. Stick to established beaches and landing sites.

In Scotland you're unlikely to find too many problems camping wild, especially in the coastal areas. The rest of the UK may be different though. Good manners to ask I guess - and saying thanks afterwards costs nothing. I had an interesting discussion with a lady on the shores of Loch Ffyne who was adamant she owned the foreshore but "as you've asked, of course you can camp". Well, she may not have been strictly correct but hey, being nice got me a cup of tea and some rather splendid cake.

That nice green/yellow/brown stuff on the rock is probably a several hundred year old lichen. Lighting a fire by it isn't going to help it much and neither is scrambling all over it. Camping on the heather is going to flatten it, but it'll recover quickly.

Are those nice yellow flowers some rare species of bog orchid though and is the Pewit merely saying "hi" or trying desperately to get you to shift off it's nest site?



A lovely place to camp, on Loch Etive.

I'd encourage you to think about whether locations of camp sites etc should be included in trip reports or postings on web-forums and the like. Doing so may encourage excessive usage of the same areas and so exposes the land to potential damage. There are usually lots of camping spots and by spreading the load we allow time for nature to recover. On a similar note, people can help by keeping group sizes to a reasonable number, as mentioned earlier.

On the subject of bothies, the MBA maintains a number of these (mainly in Scotland) and asks that locations not be publicised and states *"bothies are not available for groups of 6 or more because of overcrowding and the lack of facilities such as toilets"*. Bothies aren't "public property", in all cases they belong to the landowners who allow the MBA to maintain them for use by those of us who love to roam, and respect the great outdoors.

**3 » Dispose of waste properly:** "Pack it in, pack it out," is the general rule of Leave No Trace when it comes to waste. Toilet paper, rubbish, and other waste really need to come out with you. Packaging and other combustible rubbish can be burned if practical, or at the very least it must be taken away with you - beer cans don't burn! Orange peel and banana skins take a long time to decompose so something else worth taking out with you or burning.

Flatten cans, just to save space, and take them away - there was enough room in the boat to bring them and the contents, so there's plenty of room to take them away when they're empty. Remove excess packaging before you pack the boat and bring some poly bags as gash bags.



Gash bag being taken away. (Pic: Douglas Wilcox)

But lets be realistic here. Packing out your empty beer cans is one thing - you want me to carry out my crap as well? What about washing pots and dishes? How do I keep myself clean? If you want to get ill, neglect your camp hygiene - a nicely upset tummy will be the likely result.

OK - so the Americans are advocating the "crap carrying"! Cavers in UK do it already. What's the problem? Well, for one thing, here in UK we don't seem to have got a handle on that just yet and although there are all sorts of chemicals and potions available in the US to help neutralise our natural output and keep it from exploding as it decomposes in that sealed container, we don't seem to have them here. Maybe the idea of carting a few kilos of warm poop around in the back of a kayak is less than attractive, but think how the backpacking brigade feels and that's what they do these days in the US folks.

However, soil conditions in UK are perhaps better for encouraging the natural decomposition of human waste, given that we have a high rainfall and seldom suffer the arid conditions found in many parts of the world.

I would argue though that commercial parties or large groups really should try and find some way of reducing the impact they generate and also help make the entire experience more enjoyable for everyone. Maybe it would be possible to bring something like a "porta-potti"? Now there's no way that's going to go in the hatch of a Nordkapp but if the group had a big double like an Aleut II then it would probably fit in the centre hatch, or perhaps even the concept of using a big BDH bottle could be adopted and the contents emptied in deep water each day. How about a communal latrine-pit?

Commercial groups, and others operating professionally in the great outdoors do have a vital role to play in education. Do it right, and customers learn the correct ways. Do it "any old way" and the customer thinks it's ok "because that's how the pros do it, so it must be ok!". I've been on several commercial trips, one being billed as an "introductory training course" and never been given any guidance as to how to deal with these fundamental things! Just a thought.

In many part of North America, usage of the wild areas is so high you'll find "wilderness toilets" placed there by the authorities! Lets get this right - you expect to find a bathroom in the wilderness???

Fortunately, (or perhaps not) we have yet to get to this stage in UK and let's hope it stays that way.

So - you just have to have a crap - you're on some remote Scottish beach or staying in a bothy - what do you do? Before you get to that situation, get yourself a "Bog Bag" - I use a small dry bag to hold the basics to help make that fundamental human need as easy, comfortable and hygienic as I can. It also means that when my mates see me heading off carrying a purple dry bag, they don't embarrass me by asking "where are you going?" Well they do, but at least they know not to come looking for me!!

Now if you think I'm about to advocate aiming into a ziplock and using that little bag to store nasty things, I'm not. We're going digging!



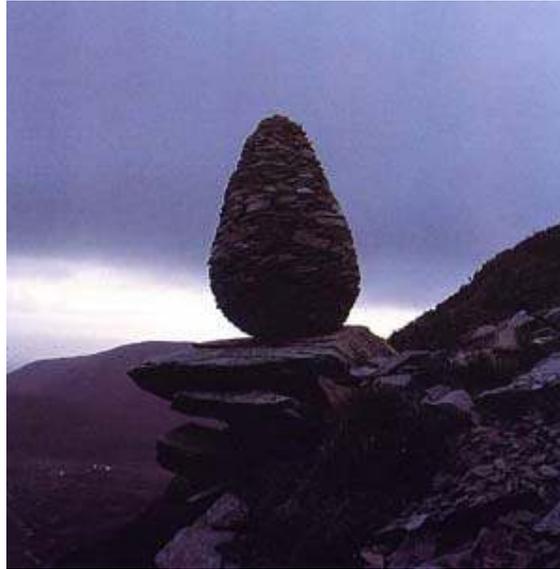
The basic essentials for a Bog Bag!

***Bog Bag:***

- Small dry bag or similar - just to contain everything
- Small trowel - an ordinary garden one is fine, or a folding one if you like.
  - Pack of "pocket tissues" or toilet paper
- Pack of "wet-wipes", antiseptic wipes and/or small bottle of environmentally friendly, salt-water lathering liquid soap
  - Small bottle of meths and a lighter.
- Ziplock bag with a few ziplock bags in it if your strategy is to remove used paper, sanitary items etc.
- A few disposable gloves - the sort provided at petrol stations or the disposable latex gloves sold in DIY stores for decorating. Optional really, but if they make it easier for you to deal with things like used paper - - -

We also need to think about hand washing / personal hygiene, and while we're at it, washing pots and dishes as well.

### **The Intertidal Zone Option**



An egg-shaped cairn six feet tall in the valley of Glenleith Fell, Dumfriesshire marks day becoming night. Image © Andy Goldsworthy and found on [http://www.senorcafe.com/archives/2003\\_11.html](http://www.senorcafe.com/archives/2003_11.html)

If you've opted to use the **intertidal zone** (good choice - congratulations) then proceed as follows! Stroll off in the general direction of one end of the beach you've landed on. If you're lucky, there'll be rocks or something to give privacy but if you can't get privacy then accept that its natural and anyway, when you've gotta go you've gotta go!

Choosing one end of the beach means that you're more likely to find privacy, if there is a rip (and most beaches will have) then it's going to go seawards and if we all use this protocol then we'll all know not to wash dishes or ourselves in the area. An alternative of course is to "designate" part of the beach as the "intertidal" zone and make sure everyone knows where it is. If another group arrives on "your" beach, it would be kind to tell them where you've designated your "intertidal".

Use your trowel to scope out a wee hole in the sand or the pebbles - or lift a suitable rock - make whatever clothing adjustments you need to (thank the Lord for drop-seat salopettes) and position yourself in an appropriate stance over the hole. I find it helps to have chosen a decent sea view and also find it helps to have checked that no yachts are about to come cruising round past the nearby headland - - - You can always wave of course, but I find the crew tend to not wave back.

Enjoy.

Now, this is where the pocket tissues come in. I rather like the ones impregnated with stuff to help keep your runny nose from getting all raw, but that's an optional luxury. Do the wiping bit as necessary and perhaps select a wet-wipe to add the finishing touch.

At this stage, your meths and lighter is going to come in handy. Consider for a moment what we have - we have a quantity of human waste which will (after all) biodegrade and will also serve the numerous sea beasties well. In a salt water environment, this stuff is going to get recycled fairly quickly. But the toilet paper is another matter!

Soak it with meths - apply lighter - allow to burn away - fill hole with sand / pebbles or replace rock and the deed is done! No, not quite. After all, what about your mates? Believe me, there is absolutely nothing worse than happily strolling off to a comfortable spot, producing your trowel or lifting that rock and finding you're not the first person to have exactly the same idea. Yuck.

Now, this is where you can get artistic and create some sculpture. Maybe not on the same scale as the previous one, but a small pile of stones will mark your small pile neatly and warn others. You could even just make a pile of sand, or mark an "X" in the sand.



Goldsworthy works with natural materials to produce fantastic, natural sculpture which echoes the landscapes he works in. There is one of these eggs just up the road from where I live and it's really nice to see it when driving past. If I see somewhat smaller sculptures in the intertidal zone or bushes it's really nice to know I should walk right past - - -

On the theme of using natural materials, some folk will use sea-weed, grass or sphagnum moss as alternatives to toilet paper. In places like Nepal, it's common practise just to use water, but perhaps most of us aren't ready for *quite* that degree of closeness to nature.

Tony Laidler mailed to say *"In 'Kayak Routes of the Pacific Northwest', Peter McGee recommends use of the 'intertidal flush' described here. However, the Canadian version includes the technique of simply taking a dump directly into the sea and relies on the sea breaking the waste down. He advocates the use of natural toilet paper 'popular types.....include stones, vegetation and snow' .*

*When a group of us went to the Queen Charlotte Is. to paddle a few years ago, this type of waste disposal was advocated on the "mandatory orientation course" that we had to take prior to setting paddle in the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve. Once I had pioneered the idea, it was enthusiastically taken up by the rest of the party. It needs a rocky coastline and obviously the chosen spot should be some distance from your encampment. Seaweed makes superb toilet paper - natural 'wet wipes' Since then I have used the intertidal flush on paddling trips whenever possible."*

Now wash the hands - that biodegradable salt-water lathering soap comes in handy and the job's a good 'un. Wet-wipes/antiseptic wipes work too and can be burnt if you have a fire or packed out.

If you don't fancy the idea at all, and want to take it away with you for disposal at home or at least back in civilisation, here's something worth considering - the Poop Tube - a neat way of packing out human waste, made from pvc pipe. See <http://www.fastq.com/~jrschroeder/poop.htm>

### **The Onshore Option**

So you don't want to use the intertidal zone? Maybe the tide's in, or maybe you really don't want to go anywhere near those slippery wet rocks? No problem - have trowel, can deal with the problem **on land**. In fact, if you're using a bothy, the chances are that there may well be a shovel or spade provided and some bothys even have instructions as to where the best place is. On Raasay's North end, the instructions in the bothy there suggests the view to the West is best.

Once again, a little gentle exercise is called for, again clutching your Bog Bag. Stroll away for a decent distance, picking up a couple of bits of stick on the way. According to Kathleen Meyer (1994) in her seriously good book "How to Shit in the Woods", you're aiming to get at least 150 feet (call that 50 paces or so) from **any** likely drinking water source - and that is really important - and away from places folk are likely to move around on or camp. Into a forest is quite good - or perhaps over that wee hill behind your tent or the bothy?

Making sure you're away from water sources is important - human crap carries a large number of nasty pathogens and these can travel a surprisingly long way through the soil. Water sources include that nice, soft, easy-to-dig in boggy bit seeing as how it's the likely source for the wee stream that's just down hill. You know, the one you fill your water bottle from?

Now we need another of those holes. You don't have to dig to China, all you need is to go down maybe six inches or so. Meyer notes that the '*most effective enzymes for breaking down excrement live in the top eight inches of the soil*'. Enzymes are good - nature at work. The trowel comes in handy here, or perhaps one of those sticks you picked up. At the very least, you could scrape a "cat hole" with the heel of your boot.

Trousers down and do what comes naturally.

At this point, we have more choices folks. We can burn the toilet paper and I have to say that's my favourite method BUT we've now got a potential fire risk to consider, especially if the ground is dry. Setting the heather alight or burning down a forest is not the low-impact sort of camping we're trying to achieve. Where I think there is a likelihood of recreating Towering Inferno, I have another strategy.

On with the gloves - collect the used paper - slip it into a ziplock and seal it - remove the gloves and put them and the original ziplock into another ziplock and seal! Easy innit? If you want, you can package this lot up and take it away for disposal. Personally I drop the lot into a well burning fire and have done with it. Yes, burning plastic creates some hydrocarbons but they are going to get created anyway at some stage and I believe the impact is less than leaving used toilet paper lying round the countryside.

Again, grass or moss makes a very acceptable natural alternative, but do watch out for nettles or other prickly things!

Whichever way you deal with the used paper, Meyer suggests using one of your sticks to do a little gentle stirring of the pile to try and get some soil from the edges of the hole in contact with the nasty stuff - not something that comes naturally to me I have to say, but Meyer's book tells us that this helps break down the crap by '*bringing soil bacteria in contact with more of the faecal matter, so aiding decomposition*'.

Once again I recommend marking the spot - another small cairn, or "X marks the spot" and those sticks can be laid crossed on the ground, or stuck in the ground in such a manner as to make a vertical cross on it's side - like a big X. That's how the Scouts do it and there isn't much that they don't know about living outdoors.



The "rock sculpture" approach.



Crossed sticks, just laid on the ground - easy to kick over, so perhaps not the best.



An "X" made of the same sticks stuck in the ground - slightly more substantial.

Again, wash the hands. But of course as we're 150 feet away from any water, and as you wouldn't be doing that washing in the burn or stream anyway would you, that's where the wet-ones come into their own. Pack out or burn in the fire afterwards.

(By the way, sanitary towels, tampons and the like should all be either burned in a fire or packed out with you - they don't seem to decompose at all well, even buried. Bring a few disposal bags nicked from the ladies at work if this embarrasses you (or use a zip-lock) and discretely dump in the fire.)

Groups, especially "organised groups", could consider the merit of a communal latrine trench - it need not be especially large, perhaps 6 or 9 inches wide by a few foot long. Carrying one of the readily available folding "trenching tools" in a group should be practical and if the sods are carefully removed and laid aside they can be replaced once the trench is backfilled before leaving the area.

After use each individual covers up his own material (that's poop, btw) with some of the excavated earth. As previously suggested, paper is either burned or packed out rather than being buried. On departure, backfill, replace the sods and mark the spot. Give it a few days or so and there will be no trace.

For the commercial trip operators, a question. Do you provide latrines, a porta-potti, or at least some guidance for your paying clients, or just leave them to struggle in the wilderness? I guess perhaps if you're a client you might want to ask your trip organiser what their toileting arrangements are, given that they are making a living out of the beautiful, wild places they are taking you to.

Another option that's just come on the market is something called The Green Loo - a foldable and transportable toilet system that uses bio-degradeable plastic bags to hold waste. After use, the bag(s) can easily be taken away for disposal, or buried in a suitable latrine pit dug for the purpose. As the bag degrades, the contents leech into the soil. Certainly I believe it is something for groups, especially commercial one, to give serious consideration to. See <http://www.biobags.co.uk/products/BioToi%20V%202.htm>

An alternative worth considering - the Poop Tube - a neat way of packing out human waste, made from pvc pipe. See <http://www.fastq.com/~jrschroeder/poop.htm>

If you don't know, or are unsure of what to do or how to cope, make a point of asking. The good commercial operators will offer support and (with a bit of luck) may even provide some resources to help you.

### ***Personal hygiene***

This need not suffer just because you're in the wilderness either - hand washing after toileting is one essential, but there's nothing like a nice wash after a day in a boat! If you can spare the fresh water to do so, washing in it is nicer than the sea, but even a quick rub over with a face-cloth and perhaps some of that salt-water soap will work wonders and freshen you up a lot at the end of a day. If you can spare the fuel to heat water just for washing, that's really nice!

Some folk seem to get by without washing at all for a weekend or more - hmmm.



A warm day, and someone is having a nice wash - in the sea - using one end of the beach. We'd designated the other end for "toileting".

I can get a full body wash with a pint or so of warm water and a face-cloth by using a dixie. If you dislike washing yourself using a utensil you'll also use for cooking, you can buy a dinky little folding bowl. Some folk even manage to avoid having to use water and soap at all and wet-wipes/antiseptic wipes do a grand job and can be either burned or packed out.

One luxury well worth having is a decent towel and the modern "soft fibre" towels are great, dry quickly and pack small. Not cheap, but they are nice.

Teeth I can deal with quite happily using sea water - I doubt a mouthful of toothpaste does the ocean much harm and it's probably better than swallowing it! Shaving, for those of us without beards, is also rather nice I'm told and again it doesn't take much water.



Dixie or a dedicated bowl - up to you. Fang kit, salt-water lathering soap, deodorant and a face-cloth. Some men bring shaving kit - I grew a beard.



Decadent luxury! A nice soft towel. Dries quickly, packs away small. Nice!!

### ***Washing dishes and pots***

A basic necessity that poses another challenge for those unused to doing this without running hot water, a sink and lashings of lovely soft bubbles to keep our hands all soft and gentle! It's a 3 stage process and one worth doing properly so as to avoid any chance poorly washed dishes and utensils causing food poisoning. Not a nice thought on a long trip!

1: Scrape off any remaining food scraps from your plates and pots - this can be burned on the camp fire but if you don't have a fire, then pack out the remains rather than just tipping them on the beach or the grass. Alternatively, dump in the sea for the creatures to enjoy.

2: Now get the worst of the remaining gunge off the pots and plates. A lot of muck can be removed from pots without having to use any detergent at all. Wet sand, a handful of sea-weed or a clod of wet earth makes a really good scrubber or scourer and will deal with just about anything, and is especially good for getting the soot off Trangia pots. If you avoid cooking greasy foods then the pots are so much easier to clean.

3: Then you can wash the dishes and pots with hot water and detergent or biodegradable liquid soap. There is no need to have a massive bowl full of hot water with loads of detergent squirted into it, like at home. A dixie is more than adequate, or you could even buy a special folding bowl for the job although I prefer to use mine for washing me.

Bring a small container of detergent and a sponge - the sort with a scouring pad on one side. Apply just a little soap to the sponge pad by holding the pad to the container and upending it. You get a nice circle of detergent on the pad and let the lather build in that. The scouring pad deals with any really stubborn muck. If you are able to find phosphate-free detergent that's best of course or the special salt-water lathering liquid soap mentioned earlier could do the job too.

The little bottle of detergent shown on the next page usually lasts a couple of years before needing re-filling! I can easily use the same quantity in a couple of days at home!



Small container of detergent and a sponge scouring pad.



You only need a tiny amount of detergent - literally the amount left on the sponge by upending the bottle like this.

Let's accept we're in the real world here, the aim is to minimise the impact, not attain a utopian green dream however nice that would be. We've burnt hydrocarbons getting here, we're probably travelling in craft built of glass-fibre, living in nylon tents and wearing synthetic clothing produced from hydrocarbon by-products - even breathing produces carbon dioxide and that's not good either.

If you are using a commercial domestic detergent like "Fairy Liquid", then the suggestion about using a sponge means you only use a tiny amount anyway and used water can be disposed of in the sea. If you're using proper biodegradable soap, that's even better of course. There are plenty of creatures who'll dispose of any small food scraps in the sea.

But please, don't dump washing-up water laden with food scraps and detergent in a burn or stream! That burnt rice hangs around in the crystal clear stream beside the beach rather longer than you'd like if you were the one planning on taking drinking water from it that evening.

Alternatively, just scatter the wash-up water as widely as you can, perhaps in the heather or gorse. I try *not* to just dump it on the ground *you* might be camping on later that evening.

For large parties there might be merit in making a communal soak-away - a small hole on which has been laid a platform of sticks that supports a filter made of grass or bracken. Washing up water is poured through the filter to catch food scraps and that in turn can be burned on the evening camp fire and the hole filled in. Best not to bury food scraps if at all possible, as it only attracts scavengers like rats or foxes.

This technique is standard practice in Scouting for camps where there are no disposal facilities and the ground recovers very quickly indeed, with no trace of damage if the hole has been properly filled and the turf replaced.

**4 » Leave what you find:** Part of low-impact travel is the idea that you should leave the area in as natural a state as possible when you move on. "Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them," the Leave No Trace folk advise. "Examine, but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artefacts." This also extends to the flora and fauna; don't transport local plants and animals out of the area and attempt to relocate them at home. Keep in mind that non-native and invasive species are already a serious problem in many parts of the country.

I guess taking some coral from the pristine beaches of Arisaig or Iona might not be such a crime. Unless we all do it, and others see us doing it and do so themselves, and before we know where we are, some bloke is loading a Transit!

Certainly removing artefacts from one of the many ruined churches or historic sites on the West coast of Scotland would be a bad idea. "Take nothing but photographs".



The monastery on Eileach an Naoimh, the Garvellachs. (Pic: Tony Page)

**5 » Minimize campfire impacts:** Of all the things humans do in the wild, the campfire is one of the most destructive yet also one of the fundamental things we all enjoy. Their impact is so long-lasting that many areas in the States have outlawed open fires altogether and I've heard a suggestion that the Loch Lomond Park Authority is considering the same in Scotland.

One of the reasons I go to the outdoors is to enjoy a proper fire, and I'm going to continue to do so. I did say earlier that we live in the real world and it's a very social, companionable activity. With a little understanding of how to do it, there's no reason why it should cause any damage.

Here in UK we don't (yet) have a ban on outdoor fires, but there are a few things for us to think about.

- We can enjoy a fire, without leaving any evidence that there has been one! That means using the intertidal zone if possible so that the remains of the fire are washed away on the tide.
- Failing that (the tides' coming in right? Who wants their fire doing a Viking funeral longship impression?), then stay off the machair or the grass and make your fire on the beach. In the morning, remove all traces and kick the sand over the fire pit.
- If you really, really have to build a fire on a grassy area, try to remove the turf, line the edges with stones and clear the ashes when cold before replacing the turf. Another Scouting practice and it works! Properly done, the ground will recover in a couple of weeks.
- If you can't remove the turf, use stones to make a fire ring and fill the centre with about 6 inches of sand. Build your fire on that. It'll protect the ground underneath. When you leave, scatter any ashes, remove the stones and clear the sand back onto the beach.
- Please consider whether you should have a fire if you can't protect the grass or fragile machair.
- There's no need for a massive bonfire - the Native American Indians have a saying - "Indian, he build small fire. Keep warm. White man, he build great big fire. He keep warm carrying wood". But a massive bonfire is rather nice. Have you left some wood for the next folk though?
- Be sure to burn everything down to ash before leaving the site (fuel can and does spark back up again if the conditions are right) - water the area well - if you aren't prepared to put your hand in the remains, it isn't wet enough. Clear all stones and ash.

- If you do find the desecration wrought by other's poor outdoor practice, remove the stones, clear the ashes as best you can and roughen the surface of the burned area to help the grass re-establish.



A small, driftwood fire, in a spot where no lasting damage can be caused.

The fuel source for these fires does bear some thinking about too - driftwood is good, old tyres aren't! If you visit the North east end of Scarba you're going to camp near some trees - many of those trees bear evidence of some nice folk using a saw to remove what they think is going to be burnable timber for their fires.

That would be green, live timber. It doesn't burn well so why bother? Plenty of dead wood around if you look for it, and indeed there is one sea-paddler active in Scotland who is known to just buy a bag of logs on his way to the coast and take that with him.

*A note of caution* - you might want to think about *what* you burn on the fire - a friend in the timber trade tells me that most treated wood (like that fence-post washed up on the beach) contains arsenic and a suggestion has also been made about the potential dangers of burning plastics. It seems that the problem is that burning PVC creates a serious hazard in that particulates (smoke) containing toxic and persistent dioxins are produced, due to the chlorine content of the material. There is an argument against the incineration of public waste in commercial incinerators which may not operate at a sufficiently high temperature to prevent dioxin production.

It seems that although most packaging is made from polyethylene (polythene), which seemingly doesn't have the same properties as PVC, it is not always easy to tell one from the other and there are likely to be other undesirables released on incineration. Perhaps burning large quantities of plastic junk and standing downwind of the smoke may not be a good idea!

Finally, be wary of lighting a fire on peat or heather when it's been really dry - there is a risk of the fire smouldering under the surface and apparently it can travel a surprisingly long way and burst to life again.

**6 » Respect wildlife:** Paddlers are often keen observers of nature and know to give a wide berth when watching or photographing wildlife. But, don't forget that these creatures are very definitely wild, and you're visiting them on their turf. Feeding wildlife spoils their survival instincts, disrupts the order of nature, and causes all kinds of problems down the road. Start feeding bears in the States and they'll likely start bothering you.

I've yet to be mugged by a greedy seal on the West coast of Scotland, but I have heard of a sea otter in Canada who was seen climbing onto a passing kayak and raiding a dry bag secured on the rear

deck before attempting to prise the hatch cover off in search of the goodies within. True! Even truer is the picture below, sent by John Willacy - it's endearing - but is it a good thing that wild creatures become so habituated to humans?

The seals and bird life we all love to see in UK have to breed at some stage - best to leave them undisturbed during those times. The Scottish Canoe Association offers some useful environmental guidelines and has links to other relevant conservation and wildlife bodies.



A very friendly seal. (Pic: © John Willacy)

**7 » Be considerate of other visitors:** This one just boils down to respect. Be courteous to the locals and use local shops, pubs and cafes if you can. Try and leave the area at least as pristine (if not better) than you found it. Sometimes that might mean carting out the junk others have left, or clearing their fire pits or sorting their mess. Such is life.

Leaving some wood on the beach for others is nice. But perhaps it's not a good idea to leave a woodpile for them, as that's not a natural part of the landscape. But if you're in a bothy, it's kind to leave at least as much wood as you found in the woodpile - it's even kinder to leave more. And it's really kind to leave a fire already laid in the hearth, and the bothy clean and tidy when you leave it.

Car parking (even in the remote parts of Scotland or Wales) can be a bit difficult sometimes - and can upset the locals when they find laybys obstructed or small local car-parks full of paddlers cars. Car sharing helps reduce the number of vehicles of course. Campsite owners will often let you leave vehicles if you've used their site as a starting point and I usually offer a "parking fee" - it's sometimes accepted, more usually not.



A lot of cars- all were however parked with consideration for local users and a local business.

### **Acknowledgements & Additional Resources**

Thanks and acknowledgement to Paddling.net and Tim Sprinkle whose original article prompted this expanded version geared towards UK needs and attitudes.

Thanks to Douglas Wilcox, Tim Dawson, Helen McKenna, John Willacy, Jeremy Hastings, Tony Laidler and Andy Bien for additional photographs and/or comment and contributions. Special thanks to Douglas Wilcox and Paddles Magazine for allowing UKSKGB to host the PDF of Douglas' article on "Surviving Your First Camp".

Further reading on wilderness toilet techniques: Meyer, K (1994) - *"How to Shit in the Woods"* - Ten Speed Press (Berkeley, California). This has a wealth of practical suggestions in addition to those I've outlined above. Some may be right for you - others not. It's also a very funny book!

Wilcox, W - *"Surviving Your First Camp - how did the environment survive your visit?"* - Paddles Magazine, issue 110, November 2005. Downloadable from UK Sea Kayak Guidebook.co.uk at: [http://www.ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk/leave\\_no\\_trace/planningacamp.pdf](http://www.ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk/leave_no_trace/planningacamp.pdf)

SeaPaddler.co.uk has an interesting table showing how long it takes for various materials to degrade: <http://www.seapaddler.co.uk/rubbish.htm>

Environmental guidelines from the Scottish Canoe Association: <http://www.canoescotland.com/Default.aspx?tabid=345>

General advice from the British Mountaineering Council for an International Mountain Code: [http://www.thebmc.co.uk/world/exped/guide\\_1.htm](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/world/exped/guide_1.htm)

Mountain Bothies Association website contains valuable information on bothy usage: <http://www.mountainbothies.org.uk/>

General information on Giardia can be found on the Broxtowe Borough Council website here: [http://www.broxtowe.gov.uk/index/health/health\\_food/food\\_poisoning/poisoning\\_giardiasis.htm](http://www.broxtowe.gov.uk/index/health/health_food/food_poisoning/poisoning_giardiasis.htm)

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Thanks for reading this - I hope we never know the other has been where we are!

If you think this article can help others in some way, please feel free to link to it at [http://www.ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk/leave\\_no\\_trace/art\\_Int\\_1.htm](http://www.ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk/leave_no_trace/art_Int_1.htm), copy all or parts of it for your own web-site or distribute it in whatever way you feel may help people in understanding how to cope in our wild spaces. I'd appreciate an acknowledgement if you do this but do please "brand" it to your own style if you want to. I'd also welcome practical, constructive ideas for improvements and you can contact me via: [editor@ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk](mailto:editor@ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk)

With the notable exception of the pics copyright of Andy Goldsworthy and John Willacy, and the ones from Douglas Wilcox and Helen McKenna, all other pictures are mine as is the bulk of the text. Feel free to use them. Please however note the acknowledgement to Paddling.net and Tim Sprinkle above.

Again, I'd encourage you to think about whether locations of camp sites etc should be included in trip reports or postings on web-forums and the like. Doing so may encourage excessive usage of the same areas and so exposes the land to potential damage. There are usually lots of camping spots and by spreading the load we allow time for nature to recover. On a similar note, people can help by keeping group sizes to a reasonable number.

Mike Buckley – March 2006.