



CAMP HYGIENE

1. Pooping in the Woods (or the beach)

The age old problem of 'pooping' raises its ugly head (excuse the pun) and this is usually a delicate subject, not least of all because we normally have ladies on our trips, but also the impact our ablutions have on the environment. So sit up and pay attention!

'Bog Bag' (Compulsory for each paddler or couple)

- 1 dry bag
- 1 trowel
- Bio-degradable toilet paper
- Wet wipes
- Bottle of methylated spirits tightly sealed
- Matches
- Disposable gloves (the type used at filling stations)

If you've opted to use the **intertidal zone** (the area between the high water & low water marks) 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 it's natural and anyway, when you've gotta go you've gotta go! **DO NOT POOP IN THE CAVES!!**

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 biodegradable toilet paper comes in (available to buy at Field & Trek stores). Do the wiping bit as necessary and maybe select a wet-wipe to add the finishing touch.

At this stage, your meths and lighter is going to come in handy even when using bio-degradable toilet paper (most people also use wet wipes). Consider for a moment what we have - we have a quantity of human waste which will (after all) bio-degrade 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 wet wipes are another matter!

Soak them with meths - apply lighter - allow to burn away - fill hole with sand or 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.



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 practice just to use water, but perhaps most of us aren't ready for *quite* that degree of closeness to nature.

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

2. 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, (mountain shelter) 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.

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**" (available from Amazon), 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? Or a good walk up the beach and away from where most people would walk - don't forget the marker!!

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 downhill. 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. 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 - Aaaaaah!

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 and or beaches.

ALWAYS use **BIO-DEGRADABLE** toilet paper (available from Field & Trek).

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 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 its side - like a big X. That's how the Scouts do it and there isn't much that they don't know about living (crapping?) 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.

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 - hmm



A warm day for a nice wash in the sea using one end of the beach. The other end was designated for toilet.

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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. Personally, I don't bother.



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 the runs or even food poisoning. Not a nice thought on a long trip, and I know, having spent 7 years in the military washing my pressed metal plate with 500 hundred other troops!

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 grunge 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.

Only use **Bio-degradable hand wash & general wash** (available from Field & Trek)

Bring a small container of detergent and a sponge - the sort with a scouring pad on one side. Apply just a little soap (**bio-degradable**) 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 here 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.

NO "Fairy Liquid" please!!

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.



Low Impact Kayak Camping

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. 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.

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 long ship 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 'white man's' 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?

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- 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!** Green, live timber doesn't burn all that well so why bother? Plenty of dead wood around if you look for it, and indeed there is one active sea-paddler (yours truly) who is known to just buy a bag of logs on his way to the coast and take that with him or just take a small bag of good kindling like tar rich Swedish pine.

A note of caution - you might want to think about *what* you burn on the fire - 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

Low Impact Kayak Camping Continued

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. Feed monkeys in South Africa and they have to be shot.

I've yet to be mugged by a greedy seal down on the backwaters of the Naze, 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 fact that seals will nibble at your boat toggles or even climb on board (pictured below)!! 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 the UK have to breed at some stage - best to leave them undisturbed during those times.



Be considerate of other visitors: This one just boils down to basic 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 wood pile 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 wood pile - 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. **Don't forget to leave a box of matches with 3 match sticks protruding, heads inside.**

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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 lay-bys obstructed or small local car-parks full of paddler's cars. Car sharing helps reduce the number of vehicles of course and we try to do this on our Dorset trips as far as possible.



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

THE END