

BACKCOUNTRY OF ALGONQUIN PARK

Leave No Trace **Outdoor Skills and Ethics**

presented by ...

AlgonquinAdventures.com

in partnership with ...



leave no trace
CANADA

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Leave No Trace



The Leave No Trace educational program promotes skills and ethics to support the sustainable use of wildlands and natural areas.

Leave No Trace is about respecting and caring for wildlands, doing our part to protect our limited resources and future recreation opportunities. Once this attitude is adopted and the outdoor ethic is sound, the specific skills and techniques become second nature. More information is available at ...

www.leavenotrace.ca

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Booklet Background

The Algonquin Backcountry Recreationalists was a community group operating from 2007 to 2015, representing concerns of Algonquin Park backcountry recreationalists.

The ABR's goals were to preserve, protect and enhance wilderness-like experiences in the backcountry of Algonquin Park.

As part of their promotion of the Leave No Trace principles, they produced this booklet, which continues to be available through the AlgonquinAdventures.com website.

Introduction

We enjoy the backcountry of Algonquin Park in a variety of ways. We explore its lakes, rivers, portages and trails in canoes, kayaks .. on foot, horseback, mountain bicycles, skis and snowshoes.

While our experiences are personally satisfying, they can be costly to the park's backcountry values .. to its features, landscapes and wild creatures.



Algonquin's backcountry is a delicate network of natural and wilderness-like protected zones and watercourse setbacks.

Polluted water, displaced wildlife, eroded soil, and trampled vegetation are just some of the impacts linked directly to recreational activities. Even our mere presence has an influence.

Considerable damage could be prevented if all recreationalists were well informed, complied with regulations, and applied Leave No Trace skills and ethics.

This booklet is a special adaptation of Leave No Trace principles for the backcountry of Algonquin Park, the aim of which is to be part of the solution. At the heart of LNT are seven principles for reducing the damage caused by outdoor activities. Leave No Trace concepts can be applied anywhere .. in remote wilderness, city parks, even in our own back-yards .. and in any recreational pursuit.

This application of Leave No Trace principles and practices extends common courtesy and hospitality to other backcountry visitors and to the natural world of which we are all a part.

LNT principles are based on an abiding respect for nature. This respect, coupled with good judgement and awareness, will allow us to apply the principles to our own circumstances.



This particular booklet has been developed by Algonquin Backcountry Recreationalists, acting on behalf of the places and wildlife that make the backcountry of Algonquin Park so special to us all.

At the heart of Leave No Trace are seven principles for reducing the damage caused by outdoor (non-motorized) activities and recreation. This booklet takes us through these seven principles of Leave No Trace, as they apply to Algonquin Park's backcountry and its unique circumstances.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Initially consider both the expectations and capabilities of your group. Adequate skills, equipment and supplies; as well as an awareness of travel conditions and adherence to park regulations, are all of crucial importance both in planning a safe trip and in enjoying your trip.

Traditionally, Algonquin backcountry trips are planned with an official Canoe Routes or Hiking Trail map spread out on a table, with pencil and paper in hand. Usually, a general area and its corresponding "Access Point" are chosen as the starting point.

Before all else, you should decide if you want a 'grand tour' .. seeing as many lakes as possible, being early to rise and late to sleep? Or .. do you want a leisurely trip, with opportunities to explore shorelines, search out wildlife, fish, swim and lay about?

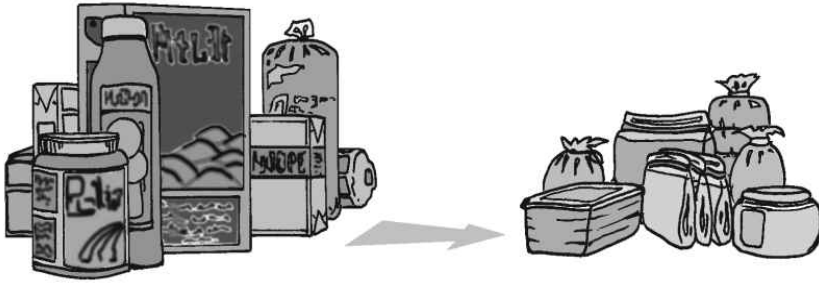
From a specific park "Access Point" onward, daily paddling/hiking/portaging distances and their required times, correlated to the groups physical abilities, become primary factors. Your expectations, combined with your abilities and the potential demands of each watercourse, trail or portage, should determine the "location" at which you plan to be each evening.

Unfortunately, its not a simple matter of scaling your maximum capabilities on to a map. There are a number of "variables" that don't show up on such a map, but which can adversely affect your comfort and safety. They include topography of portages, wind direction and strength, wave height, rainfalls and extremes of temperature.

Topographical maps allow you to gauge the general grades of portages. However, their actual roughness (rocks, roots and/or muck) can only be learned from those who have already travelled them before. This information can be gleaned from personal contacts, printed accounts and online trip-logs.

Build Leave No Trace into your plans by picking an appropriate destination(s) for your group and allowing plenty of time to travel and camp in good style. Be prepared to sit tight or turn back if you sense danger or sustain an injury. That way, you won't have to abandon Leave No Trace techniques for the sake of safety. For instance, poor planning or a disregard for approaching bad weather can transform an easy trip into a risky encounter with hypothermia. When cold and wet, it's tempting to think that the impacts of poorly sited campfires and makeshift shelters are warranted.

By using a detailed topographical map in conjunction with the latest official map, by referring to the experiences of others and by maintaining an honest awareness of your own limitations and preferences, you should be able to plan a daily energy and time "buffer" for dealing with the majority of unfavourable surprises. If the weather turns on you, at least you'll have the "buffer" to fall back on. It's definitely preferable to have your camp pitched, a good meal eaten, dishes washed and the next day's drinking water prepared ... all before a lazy rest in front of the sunset and campfire.



Repackage daily food portions into plastic bags and containers.

Important regulations to incorporate into your trip planning include the park's backcountry prohibitions on bottles and cans, dogs off-leash, campsite occupancy over 9 people, damage to trees and the use of campfires during dry-spell fire-bans.

Registration of your trip is mandatory and reservations are highly recommended. While specific campsites aren't assigned, your registered trip-plan does expect you to spend each night on a specific lake.

If your trip planning involves the Recreational-Utility zone of the park, it's prudent to refer to the map provided online by the Algonquin Forestry Authority (www.AlgonquinForestry.ca). There the AFA shows both its intended areas of logging and construction, and the logging roads by which it will haul out the cut trees. It is preferable to choose a route that avoids the noises of both the tree-cutting operations and the log-hauling trucks.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Where we place our feet can have a variety of impacts. Trampling causes vegetation damage and soil erosion in virtually every environment. While Algonquin Park's campsites, trails and portages are established features in the landscape, we should still be careful how we “use” them, rather than “abuse” them.

Repeated footsteps not only destroy surface vegetation, they compact the soil itself. This “soil compaction” reduces its ability to absorb water, to support insects, fungi, bacteria and even to regenerate vegetation. Compacted soil allows rain to wash away the seasonal accumulations of organic debris, flushing it downgrade into water courses. Due to the compacted soil's lack of any biological “binding matrix”, the compacted soil itself is also eventually eroded downgrade into watercourses.

All too often we observe muddy lake-bottom contamination along campsite shorelines and portage landings. Those large campsite tree roots we see .. spread out over bare shoreline rock, campsite clearings and trails .. were once growing strong under the healthy forest floor. Since then .. years of footsteps, compaction and erosion have occurred. Now those roots are exposed, stressed and weakened. By being careful how we use campsites, portage landings and trails, we can reduce the extent and degree of future erosion and its destruction of surrounding vegetation and trees.



Exposed tree roots will eventually collapse.

Whether coming ashore in a canoe, setting up a tent at a campsite or walking a portage/trail, try to keep to the area that has already been impacted the most.

When using a portage landing, be sure to initially place your emptied canoe(s) in a holding-location well up on the trail area, so that other people using the landing aren't forced to squeeze by canoes occupying the durable area and thereby impact the adjacent shoreline vegetation. This will not only help prevent the erosive widening of the landing, but is also a courteous consideration of other canoeists.

When determining where to land at a campsite, try to find an already-impacted, durable location. Do your best to minimize any impact on shoreline vegetation. Likewise, when securing your canoe(s) for the night, bring them ashore via an already-impacted, durable section of the shoreline.

When setting-up camp, place your tent(s) on an already-impacted, durable location. When tying tarp ropes to trees, choose durable thick-barked branches and/or use stretchable or padded, low-abrasion loops to minimize impact. The out-moded practice of gouging drainage gulleys around tents actually promotes destructive erosion. Damage of live vegetation .. trampled for a new tent location, cut for firewood, impaled with nails, strangled by wire or otherwise impacted .. is all contrary to Leave No Trace principles.

The lateral branches of large trees are not as durable as might be thought. Years of continually being used for winching-up suspended food-packs has resulted in many such branches having their protective bark worn down, resulting in their premature demise. The practice of initially suspending a small metal pulley, through which the actual winching rope is threaded, goes a long way to preserving lateral food-pack branches.

When travelling a portage or trail, try to stay on its travelled, durable central part. Obviously if a section is so flooded or eroded as to be unsafe, an alternate way has to be sought. But whenever possible, do not impact adjacent vegetation. It's usually this very vegetation that prevents the broadening and deepening of eroded sections of trail.

Dispose Of Waste Properly

Pack It In .. Pack It Out

“Pack it in, pack it out” is a familiar mantra to seasoned visitors to Algonquin Park. Any user of the backcountry has a responsibility to clean up before he or she leaves. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, garbage, kitchen waste and leftover food.

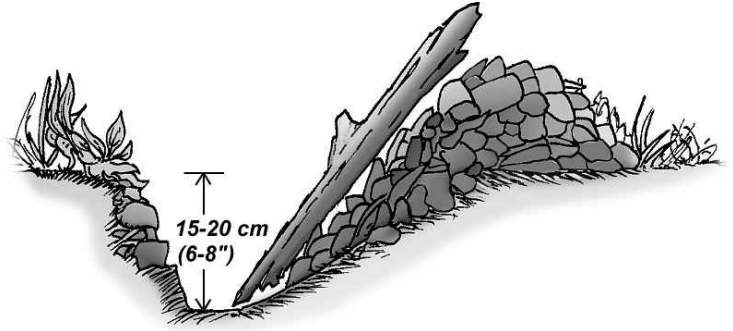
Plan meals to avoid generating messy, smelly garbage. It is critical to wildlife that we pack out kitchen waste and leftovers. Don't count on a fire to dispose of it. Garbage that is half-burned or buried will still attract animals and make a campsite unattractive to other visitors.

Overlooked trash is litter, and litter is not only ugly .. it can also be deadly. Plastic bags kill shorebirds, turtles and water-based mammals. Fishing lines and lures ensnare and injure everything from dogs to loons, so don't leave any behind. Carry strong plastic bags to haul out trash.

Human Waste

The four objectives of proper human waste disposal are:

- Avoid polluting water sources.
- Eliminate contact with animals.
- Maximize decomposition.
- Minimize chances of social impacts.



Without a privy? .. Dig a 'cat-hole'!

Improper disposal of human waste can lead to water pollution, the spread of illnesses such as Giardia, and unpleasant experiences for those who follow. Wherever soils are thin or sparse, rainstorms can flush food wastes and other pollutants from campsites directly into water sources.

Whenever possible, take time to locate and use privies for human waste disposal. If no facilities are available, deposit solid human waste in "cat-holes" dug 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 inches) deep and at least 60 meters from water, campsites and trails. Use a sharp stick to dig the hole, move the soil to one side, re-cover the hole after use and then disguise it with forest duff. The microbes found in soil will break down feces and the pathogens they contain. Don't leave human waste under rocks because it will decompose slowly there and may wash into water sources. Use as little toilet paper as possible and bury it deeply in the cat hole.

Always pack out feminine hygiene products in air-tight plastic bags or containers, because they decompose slowly and attract animals. The odour of urine can be very unpleasant. Urinate well away from campsites and trails.

Personal Washing

When necessary to wash one's "priority parts" with soap, use a large pot or an expandable vinyl bucket. Locate one's self at least 60 meters beyond camp, latrine and any watercourse. Attend your "priority parts" with a face-cloth conservatively lathered with unscented soap. Once the "lathering" is completed, rinse off the soap starting from the top-down, with plain water from the container. The general washing of the rest of one's body can subsequently be done by "scrubbing" with an un-soaped face-cloth during "swimming sessions" in a lake or river.

Washing Dishes

When washing dishes, use a large pot or expandable vinyl bucket along with biodegradable soap, soapless steel-wool or abrasive sand. When finished, carry the container of waste water at least 60 meters beyond the campsite, latrine and any watercourse. Slowly syphon off the dishwater into the forest floor. Food debris

remaining in the container, should be added to your waste food container and “packed-out”. This practice keeps soap residues from watercourses, by allowing the soil to act as a filter and keeps food contaminants away from utilized areas.

Waste Food

Waste food should be “packed-out”. Excess moisture can be “boiled-off” to reduce weight, prior to being stored in a strong plastic bag or a plastic jar .. and kept with food away from animals.

Cleaning Fish

The waste from fish cleaning should be disposed of in deep water, at a distance from campsites and trails. This practice gives creatures like seagulls and snapping turtles the opportunity to consume the remains. Fish waste should be neither buried nor disposed of on land. Its decomposition gives off considerable odour, which is a strong attractant to bears.

Leave What You Find

Preserve Nature and the Past

We visit Algonquin's backcountry for many reasons, among them to explore both nature's and history's surprises. When we leave rocks, plants, antlers, bones, artifacts and memorabilia as we find them, we pass the gift of discovery on to those who follow. “Leaving what we find” means retaining the special qualities of the natural and historical areas for the long term.

Discovering evidence of earlier cultures such as aboriginal artifacts and old logging equipment is exhilarating, and it's tempting to take such things home as souvenirs. These items are reminders of the rich human history of the landscape and belong to all people for all time. It is illegal to excavate, disturb or remove these resources from the park.

Let photos, drawings and memories comprise your souvenirs. If you think you may have discovered something new, identify its location as precisely as you can, take detailed photographs and report your find to park authorities.

A compact well-featured camera, and knowing how to use it, will allow you to bring back valuable mementos of your Algonquin discoveries without taking away from the experiences of those who follow after you.

Avoid Spreading Non-Native Species

Invasive species of plants, animals, and insects can cause large-scale, irreversible changes to ecosystems by eliminating native species over time. Invasive species can damage any habitat type. There is no effective treatment for many invasive species and they can destroy the native natural heritage we intend to conserve.

The potential for new infestations increases every day as more and more recreationalists travel from one environment to another around the globe. Don't transport flowers, weeds, aquatic plants or firewood into the park. Empty and clean your packs, tents, boats, fishing equipment and other gear after every trip. Water, mud and soil may contain harmful seeds, spores, or tiny plants and animals. Firewood from outside the Algonquin region could carry destructive insects from regions already infested. And, never use live bait-fish or anything more evolved than earthworms for fishing bait.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

The natural appearance of many shoreline areas and campsites has been compromised by the careless use of fires and an uncaring demand for firewood.

Each year, campfires damage and destroy a number of Algonquin campsites. Campfires are no longer essential to comfort and food preparation. Many lasting impacts associated with campfires can be avoided by using lightweight stoves.

Use a Stove

Backcountry campers should carry a stove, matches and sufficient fuel to cook all meals. At times of tinder-dry conditions, the park may declare a fire-ban and having a properly equipped stove becomes an absolute necessity. Also, during periods of persistent rain, all firewood becomes soaked and a stove again becomes a necessity. Likewise, in times of high winds when a fire becomes unmanageable and unsafe, a compact stove can be effectively sheltered and become the only alternative. The advantage of stoves is that they can be used for cooking in a minimum of time and with a maximum of convenience.



White-gas stove on a stable rock base.

Use Only Official Fireplaces

One should have a campfire only when conditions are right ... no strong wind, no tinder-dry conditions, downed-dead-wood is plentiful, there's sufficient time to return the ashes to a safe cold state and one has the use of a properly intact official fireplace.

Algonquin's backcountry campsites are equipped with official fireplaces. These are far more than a ring of stones laid on the forest floor. Park staff have dug down a substantial depth and width to remove any organic forest soil and roots at the location. They've then filled the resulting pit with mineral sand and/or gravel, in order to reduce the likelihood of a smouldering fire becoming established in the underground organic layer.

Many destructive fires are started when campers unwittingly relocate the stone-ring part of a fireplace to a “more desirable” location. They then move on, oblivious that their relocated fire-ring has started the underground organic layer smouldering. Later the wind may pick up and cause the fire to break-out to the above-ground organics, producing a conventional forest fire .. or the underground fire may spread for days destroying tree after tree from below by killing their roots. This is the very important reason for using only the established campsite fireplace!

Tending Your Campfire

Before you even light the fire, make sure all combustible materials are swept clear for 5 feet around the fireplace; whether its a winter's accumulation of pine needles and leaves, or twigs and wood chips from previous campers. By cleaning off this “spark-zone”, you'll reduce the chance of fire spreading beyond the fireplace. Likewise, when you stack your prepared firewood, make sure it's kept beyond this same “spark-zone”.

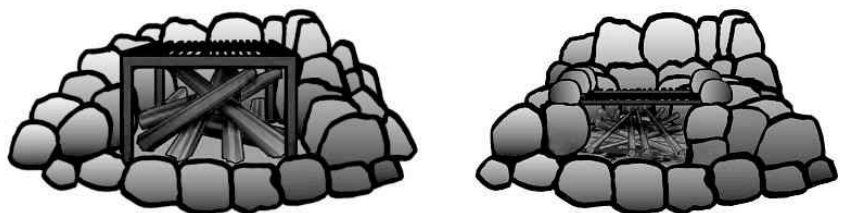
A fireplace's stone-ring can be “down-sized” by moving the rocks inward and thereby reducing the ring's diameter. This will facilitate the placement of a cooking grill closer to the fire and also reduce the amount of firewood required. When cleaning out an accumulation of ashes, make sure they are dead-cold and dispose of them following the previously mentioned “cat-hole” procedure.



Just enough fuel for the job.

Under no circumstances should any live vegetation, or dead branches from live trees, be used for firewood. Ideally the gathering of firewood should be limited to fallen branches and twigs from the forest floor. A couple of loop-ended ropes or straps serve well to bundle and carry firewood from the surrounding area. Also, last year's empty pine cone husks, gathered from the forest floor, can make good fire-starters.

If more substantial firewood is needed, it should be limited to dead-fallen trees located far beyond the sight of the campsite, privy or shoreline. Ragged, saw-amputated dead trees are definitely not part of the natural landscape!



Downsized fireplaces save fuel.

Never leave a fire unattended. Don't try to burn foil-lined packets, leftover food, or garbage that would have to be removed later. Burn wood completely to ash, giving yourself sufficient time to add all unburned stick ends. Prior to leaving the campsite or going to sleep, soak the ash with water and extinguish all the embers.

Respect Wildlife

Wild animals need recreationalists who promote their survival rather than add to the difficulties they already face. Animals respond to people in different ways. Some species adapt readily to humans in their domain, resume their normal behaviours and are said to be “habituated.” Other animals flee from humans, abandoning their young or critical habitat. Still others are attracted and endangered by human food and trash. Fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals are all affected by people who use their habitats.

Observe From A Distance

Always watch or photograph animals from a safe distance to avoid startling them or forcing them to flee. Do not follow or approach them. Bring binoculars or a telephoto lens to watch wildlife. Be prepared to back away if animals react to your presence. Move away from any disturbed animal, even if you must detour from your intended direction of travel.



Keep your distance.

You have more options in your movements than animals do. Treat them cautiously and generously. Avoid quick movements and direct eye contact, which may be interpreted as aggression. Don't disturb wildlife by trying to get its attention and if animals are on the move, stay out of their line of travel.

Adult behaviours influence the relationship of children to the natural world. Show respect and restraint by teaching children not to approach, pet or feed wild animals. Always keep children in immediate sight. They're often the same size as animal prey. Don't encircle or crowd wildlife, tease or attempt to pick up a wild animal. Young animals, removed or touched by well-meaning people, may be abandoned by their parents.

Avoid Sensitive Times and Habitats



Mothers are very protective of their young.

While pursuing and protecting mates, defending territories, birthing, guarding young or nests, and when food is scarce, animals are generally quite sensitive to the presence of people. The more you understand about a species, the more considerate you can be of the animal's needs and temperament, especially at critical times and in critical places.

Never Feed Animals

Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviours, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Headlines are made when wildlife is attracted to humans and their food.

Bears get the most attention for tearing into tents and food-packs in search of a meal, but campers more commonly have to deal with the annoyance of mice, raccoons or birds looking for a handout. These animals pose little threat to human safety, but their presence is a nuisance. They can be vectors for disease, and their reliance on human food is a detriment to their own well-being.



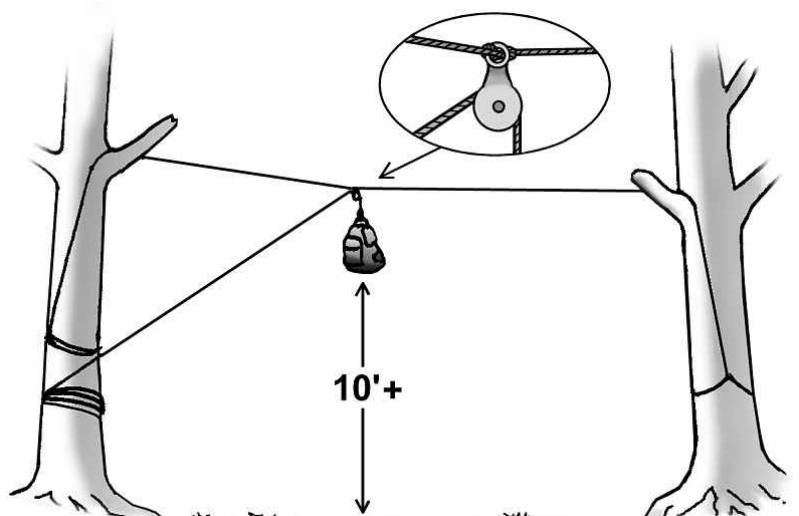
Don't encourage!

Human foods and products are harmful to wildlife because animals would otherwise forage and eat a nutritious diet derived from their natural environment. Serious illness or death can occur when wildlife consumes food wrappers and other "inedibles."

Animals are adept opportunists. When tempted by an untidy backcountry kitchen or by a handout from a curious camper, they can overcome their natural wariness of humans. Aggressive or destructive behaviour may follow. When in conflicts with humans, animals ultimately lose. Prospects of an easy meal also lure wildlife into hazardous locations such as campsites, trail-heads, roads and campgrounds, where they can be chased by dogs or hit by vehicles. They may also congregate in unnatural numbers, increasing stress and the spread of disease within their populations.

Store Food and Trash Securely

"Food" includes leftovers, dog food and scented or flavoured toiletries. The salt in hiking boots, backpacks or clothing also attracts many small mammals. Keep a clean camp by removing even the tiniest food scraps and food wrappers. Be careful not to drop food on the trail as well.



Low-abrasion hanging of food pack with pulley.

Hang “food” from a tree limb or from a rope strung between two trees at least 10 feet off the ground, 6 feet from the tree’s trunk, and 6 feet away from the supporting limb. Under no circumstances store food in a tent or under a canoe.

Control Your Dog

Wildlife and dogs are not a good mix. Even on a leash, dogs harass wildlife and disturb other visitors. The best option is to leave them at home. Every dog is a potential carrier of diseases that infect wildlife. If you must bring your dog, ensure it is well trained and in good condition for the trip.

Since Algonquin has wolves, dogs should have current vaccinations, to avoid being carriers of or contracting infectious diseases such as rabies and parvovirus. Your dog must be kept on a short leash and fully under your control.

Owners should remove their dog's feces from trails, portages and campsites by disposing it in a “cat-hole”, just as one would human waste.

Preserve The Fisheries

Algonquin is home to more than 25 percent of the remaining natural brook trout and 10 percent of the natural lake trout populations in Ontario. We can help protect these fish populations by conscientiously adhering to provincial fishing regulations, limiting our catch, practising catch-and-release whenever possible, using barbless hooks and handling to-be-released fish with special care.

Recreationalists who plan to fish for trout are encouraged to pick up Algonquin Fisheries Assessment Unit Survey forms from a park office, and to then record and submit their experiences. The survey results help in fisheries management.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

We share Algonquin Park's backcountry with people of different recreational expectations and attitudes. The subject of outdoor “etiquette” is often neglected. We’re reluctant to examine our personal behaviors, specially in the backcountry where many believe a sense of freedom is paramount.

Respect Other Visitors and Protect The Quality of Their Experience

Some people visit the backcountry to enjoy quiet and solitude. Others come for camaraderie and specific outdoor activities. So if possible, find a campsite out of sight and sound of others. When travelling close to or meeting others, try to maintain a co-operative spirit. After all, we can and do rely on each other when mishaps occur.

More often than not, our experiences ultimately depend on our treatment of others and their attitudes toward us. Although our motivations and sense of adventure vary, there’s always room on the trail for people with open minds and generous hearts.

Yield To Others

The little things are often the most important. Simple courtesies such as offering a friendly greeting on the trail, stepping aside to let someone pass, waiting patiently at a portage landing, or preserving the quiet .. all can make a difference. Likewise, don't disturb the equipment of loggers or aboriginal harvesters, who legally use some areas of the park.



Portage landings can get crowded.

Canoeists may find themselves waiting in line at portage landings. Lend a hand, if appropriate, to help others.

Keep A Low Profile

On portages and trails, take rest breaks a short distance from the trail on durable surfaces, such as rock or bare ground.

If the vegetation around you is thick or easily crushed, pick a wide spot in the trail so others can easily pass by. If packs and equipment aren't being moved immediately, don't accumulate them on portage landings.

Adjusting To Unforeseen Circumstances

Sometimes high winds or health issues may force you to stay at a campsite beyond the duration indicated on your registered trip-plan. Such a continued presence at a campsite may impact others' plans. In such circumstances, if a party comes by searching for a campsite, you should be prepared to explain your situation and offer to share your campsite .. specially if the lake has few campsites, if it is a busy time of the season, if it's late in the day or if weather conditions are threatening.

Let Nature Prevail

The playing of open-speaker sound devices are prohibited in the backcountry. If an electronic audio-device is required, use it with earphones or turn its volume down very low and put its speaker close to your ear.

Late in the day, when the wind has dropped (typically in the evening) the sounds of conversations, screaming children and barking dogs can carry great distances over open water .. disrupting others' peace and quiet. Keeping these sounds and noises to a minimum will improve others' enjoyment of the backcountry.

High powered, bright lights can be obtrusive .. so either dim them or make sure you're not subjecting others to an unwanted probing "floodlight".

