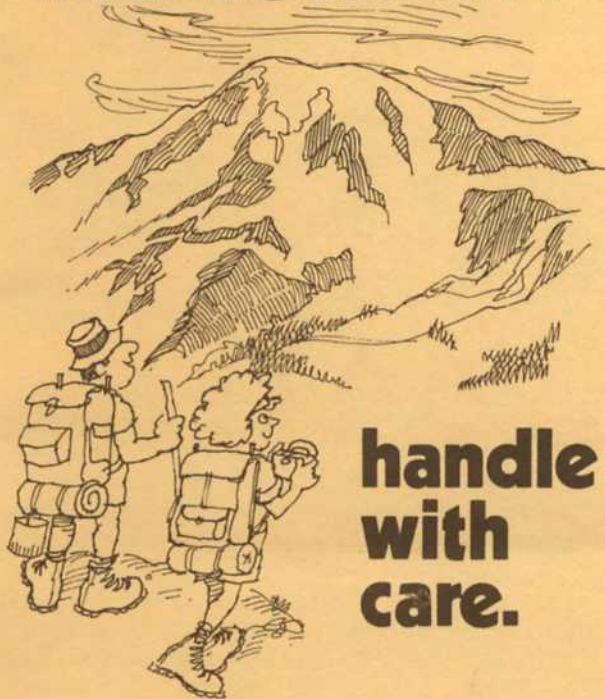


CAMPING REQUIRES PERMIT
NO PETS IN BACKCOUNTRY
FIRES WHERE PERMITTED ONLY
LITTER — PICK IT UP, PACK IT OUT.

Preservation of the
backcountry and wilderness is
everyone's concern.
Please share your thoughts with us:
Superintendent
Mount Rainier National Park
Star Route, Tahoma Woods
Ashford, Washington 98304

FRAGILE...

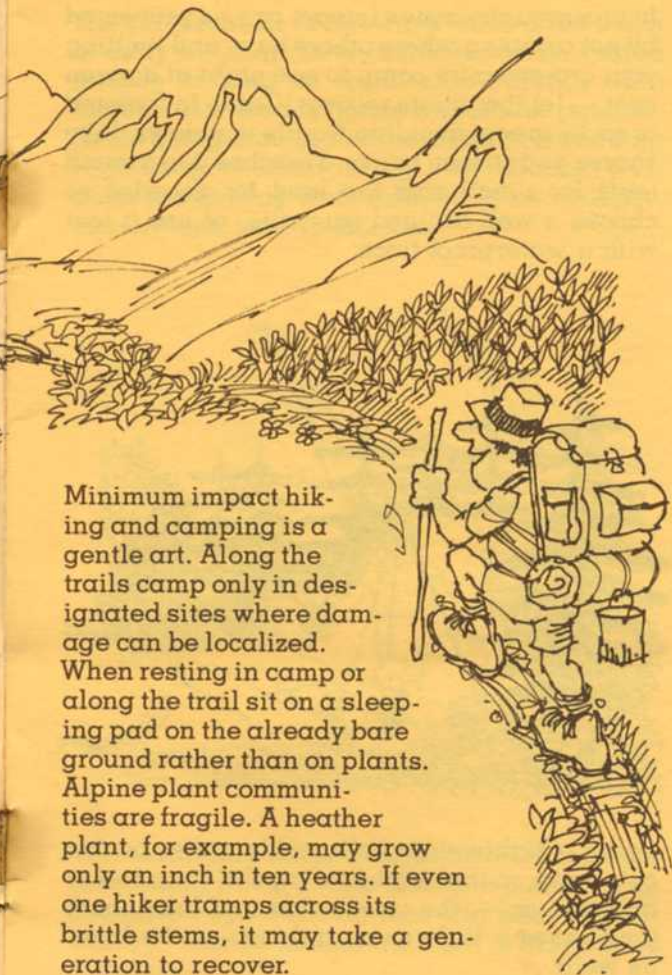


**handle
with
care.**

Mt. Rainier superbly dominates the Pacific Northwest landscape. To really feel the pulse of this wild land is to hike along some of the 300 miles of trails winding through flower-strewn alpine meadows, steep-walled canyons and virgin forests.

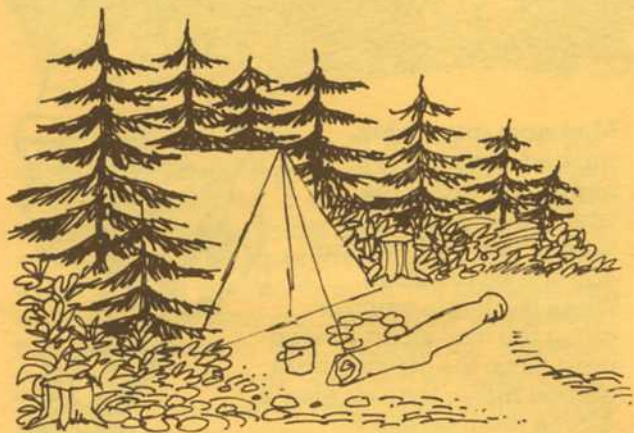


Looking at the vastness of Mt. Rainier's ice, rocks and ancient trees it seems difficult to believe this could be a fragile land. Trampled vegetation, eroded trails and campfire scarred meadows bear witness to the thousands of hikers who have passed through the backcountry of Mt. Rainier National Park. How can adoration, appreciation and exploration destroy? Primarily it's because there are so many of us. The surge in popularity of wild explorations has led to a new way to treat the land — a sort of wilderness ethic. The essence of this new approach is to have a minimum impact on the land . . . to leave no trace of one's presence. Implementing this new approach is not easy and is a real challenge to the wilderness visitor.



Minimum impact hiking and camping is a gentle art. Along the trails camp only in designated sites where damage can be localized. When resting in camp or along the trail sit on a sleeping pad on the already bare ground rather than on plants. Alpine plant communities are fragile. A heather plant, for example, may grow only an inch in ten years. If even one hiker tramps across its brittle stems, it may take a generation to recover.

In crosscountry zones impact can be prevented by not camping where others have, and limiting your crosscountry camp to one night at a given spot — let the plants recover. Camp in forested or rocky areas, avoiding fragile meadows, lake shores and stream banks. Trenches dug around tents for runoff scar the land for decades so choose a well-drained campsite, or use a tent with a waterproof floor.



Using a lightweight collapsible water bucket cuts down on the number of trips to — and wear and tear on — the streamside and lake shore (and saves a little wear and tear on the hiker as well).

The proliferation of freeways is too often a fact of daily life, but the wilderness can be spared this by staying on trails and walking right through the muddy spots and snow patches. Avoid going around such obstacles and trodding vegetation or shortcutting switchbacks. New trails are quickly worn through to become permanent and lead to erosion.



In crosscountry zones hikers should spread out rather than travel single file. One pair of boots damages vegetation far less and has less tendency to leave a matted trail that invites others to follow.

A sure way to leave one's mark on the mountainside permanently is to dig in heels when descending a steep slope or digging in toes when ascending one. Switchback the route rather than going straight up or down. Where possible, hike on rock or snow or through the forest. Walk as flat footed as possible — save the plunge step for snowfields.



Though the lightweight backpacker's stove is no substitute for the warmth and smell of a campfire, it is gentler on the land. Much of the usable wood has been stripped from most high country camps. This interferes with the natural recycling of nutrients through decomposition and eventual return to plant life, and gives the area a cleaned out look rather than the natural one of a wild forest. The remaining silver snags are works of art and are as much a part of the backcountry experience as mountain goats and avalanche lilies. They should be left intact.



Where fireplaces are provided, and the hiker feels the need for a fire to warm body and spirit, it should be kept small — around ten inches high. Use only small pieces of dead and down wood and use existing fire rings. Fire rings have a habit of proliferating around camps. Destroy extra ones by spreading out the rocks, scattering the ashes and covering with soil or duff. Mt. Rainier's volcanic soil is quickly made sterile by campfires and the scar remains long after use.

The climate at Rainier from mid-June through October is usually mild and sunny, but sudden violent storms often arise and last a few hours to several days. To the naive, Mt. Rainier's pristine beauty can turn into a landscape of cruelty and misery. Cold, wet and windy weather can lead to hypothermia for the unprepared. Part of the challenge of exploring Mt. Rainier, or any other area, is to come well equipped and fully aware of one's abilities and physical condition. The old warnings to carry the ten essentials and rain gear, wear wool and take it easy are time honored mountain truths that countless people have learned the hard way. Take advantage of their collective knowledge and experience.



In addition to unpredictable climate, there are hazards on Mt. Rainier not found in areas with gentler topography and less snowfall. Glaciers are riddled with hidden crevasses and only the skilled and well equipped should attempt traveling on them. As a lot of people also have learned the hard way, it's easier climbing up than it is coming back down. To avoid falls or being caught half way up with no way either to go up or come back down, realistically evaluate skills and equipment before challenging a pitch. Even an apparently easy crossing of a stream can be complicated by slippery logs and rocks. Avoid log walking if the logs are wet or have loose bark.



A hiker comfortable in the wilderness has time and energy to enjoy the surroundings. Take it easy on yourself. Allow time for enjoyment — time to watch a ptarmigan . . . an elk grazing . . . alpenglow stealing over a ridgetop. Taking back only memories of how many miles hiked misses many of the subtle pleasures that await the hiker who takes the time to probe. Remember that Mt. Rainier's trails gain and lose considerable elevation. Plan the hike to fit the conditioning of the least able member of the group. Fatigue can reduce a backcountry trip to an exercise in endurance.



Being chilled or overheated detracts from a trip. Up to 50% of one's body heat can be lost through the head. When hands and feet begin to get chilled, put on a hat, preferably wool. The heat saved will quickly warm the extremities.



On hot days a hat soaked in water and worn really helps cool off; or try splashing cold water on the back of the neck — it's one of the wildest sensations in the mountains. For the full treatment submerge wrists and feet in cold water.

Map and compass skills give the confidence to explore. "What peak is that over there?" . . . "Was that Panther Creek we just crossed?" . . . "How high up have we gone?" . . . "Where are we?" . . .

Part of the challenge is the unexpected. Ease your mind by taking the basic preliminary steps to prepare for emergencies as well as enjoyment. Register and let someone know your plans.





Mt. Rainier is home to fifty species of mammals and 130 species of birds. It is tempting to feed these residents — as the deer along the park roads demonstrate. However, the easy life afforded by generous handouts can alter habits, population numbers and living areas. Creatures made dependent on people are less than wild — less than what the hiker came to Mt. Rainier to see. Animals that have lost their fear of people can be dangerous. To avoid the danger to life, limb and camp from a rampaging bear, never feed one. Caching food, fish bait and even cosmetic items whenever away from camp or at night prevents the hassle of food loss and equipment damage from squirrels, mice, bear and deer — and their unnatural dependence on handouts. Carry out leftover food rather than scattering it near camps.



Pets are the source of many backcountry hassles and consequently it is illegal to take them in the backcountry. Most problems relate to the animals just doing their thing: Snitching food being prepared at ground level, urinating on packs, tents, and sleeping bags, chasing or killing wildlife, barking and threatening other hikers.

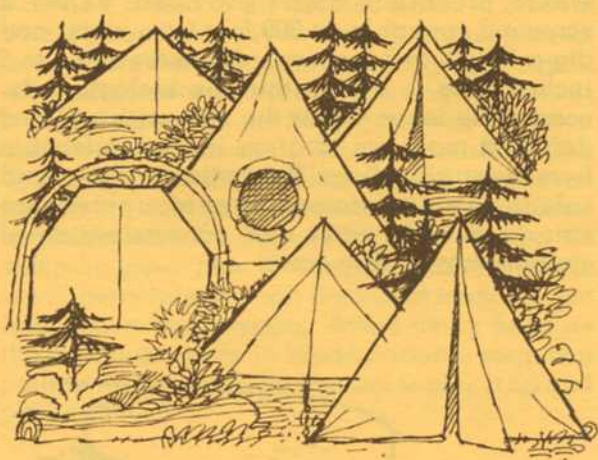
The presence of a pet, even if it were on a leash, in the backcountry disturbs the delicate ecosystem of the wilderness beyond the effects of hiker's presence. Native wildlife often shy away from areas used by dogs, preventing the observations hoped for by most hikers. Pets preclude the aesthetic experience of seeing a dog-like track and knowing it could be a coyote, fox, bobcat or cougar.

Drinking boiled or disinfected water to prevent contracting dysentery in the wilderness isn't an acceptable substitute for scooping up a cupful of ice cold, tasty mountain fresh water—but it is recommended. There is no sure way to determine if water is free of *Giardia lamblia*—the dysentery producing protozoan—as it can even lurk in ice cold rushing water. Prevent further contamination by disposing of water used for washing mess gear, clothes and bathing where it will percolate through the soil at least 100 feet from lakes and streams. Avoid using soap as the chemicals even in biodegradable soap can pollute water. Litter! Remember to pick it up and pack it out.



Where pit toilets aren't provided, select a screened spot at least 300 feet from water and dig a hole 6 to 8 inches in diameter and 5 to 6 inches deep to stay within the biological decomposing layer. Cover the hole with soil and duff and make its location indistinguishable from the surroundings. Sanitation in alpine and subalpine areas is important as many areas are saturated with water and contamination of streams can readily occur.





Do bright colors psychologically shrink the wilderness by visually intruding into wide spaces and solitude? When drab colors (browns, greens, blues) are used for tents and clothing, hikers are less visible and more can use the same general area without knowing of others' presence. As more and more seek the solitude of the wilderness, visual impact will become increasingly important. While it is true bright colors provide visibility for safety purposes, this can be provided for unobtrusively by a light-weight inexpensive plastic yellow tarp carried in the first aid kit (a vital part of one's gear) and used in the event of an emergency. Let the issue of bright colors give you some food for thought.



Personal freedom is a cherished part of many people's lifestyle. Rules and restrictions, however necessary and valid, are proliferating at an alarming rate. The plain truth of the matter is this: Freedom is a joy and a responsibility. The less impact on the backcountry an individual has the less restrictions will be imposed. The less backcountry problems there are necessitating ranger or search and rescue assistance, the less likely strict safety rules or area closures will be imposed on wilderness travelers. Less impingement of our personal freedom will depend on how this challenge is met.