



WILD CAMPING IN SCOTLAND – Rights and Responsibilities

Camping wild is a great way to experience Scotland's remote areas. It can have almost no impact when done responsibly. True wild camping is not the same as roadside / informal camping, and the distinction is explained below. Informal camping is not specifically addressed here, or in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, but the general principles still apply.



Camping, the Law and the Code

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 established a statutory right to camp over most of Scotland, if done responsibly. A section in the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865, which contained an offence of camping on land without the consent of the owner or occupier, has been repealed via Schedule 2 of the Act. The Code (www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/) gives advice about responsibilities and says;

“Access rights extend to wild camping. This type of camping is lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place. You can camp in this way wherever access rights apply but help to avoid causing problems for local people and land managers by not camping in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals and by keeping well away from buildings, roads or historic structures. Take extra care to avoid disturbing deer stalking or grouse shooting. If you wish to camp close to a house or building, seek the owner's permission.

Leave no trace by:

- taking away all your litter;
- removing all traces of your tent pitch and of any open fire (follow the guidance for lighting fires);
- not causing any pollution.”

Respect the Rights of Others

Part of the adventure of real wild camping is finding your own secluded spot rather than resorting to popular congregational places that tend to be overused and often damaged. The aim is to leave your campsite in at least as good, if not better condition, as you found it. This avoids cumulative impact over time. The larger the group, the harder it is to have no impact, so keep groups small. Other access users may enjoy the countryside in a different way from you, so camp as unobtrusively as possible and remember that noise travels.

Many people have to make their living from the land, and just as land managers are required to consider you and your rights, so consideration should be given to theirs.

Toilet hygiene

This is often the greatest impact and the detailed advice is contained in the MCofS online advice Where to Go in the Great Outdoors (<http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/access/where-to-go-leaflet.asp.pdf>).

Protect vegetation

The vegetation is damaged by repeated camping on the same spot over a number of nights or by different campers over time. The aim is to move frequently and do not stay for any longer than 3 nights in the same place. It is important to consider that vegetation is more sensitive at higher altitudes and may never recover fully at the highest altitudes.

Deadwood is an important habitat for insects and many small animals, so it is best to avoid campfires completely. As well as damaging the deadwood habitat, lighting fires poses a high fire risk which can exist at

any time of year, and not just in times of drought. Organic material in soils can burn for weeks and flare up again, so can be damaging out of all proportion to their initial size. Stoves are almost always the preferred option

Minimise disturbance to wildlife

Watercourses, loch sides, mountain plateaux, moorland and crags are all important sites for birds and animals. Be aware when choosing your camp site, and be prepared to move if you become aware that you are disturbing birds or animals, particularly in the breeding season.

Food scraps, even when buried, attract scavengers which may prey on vulnerable nesting birds or displace more specialist animals. Even fruit peel can take years to break down completely. All scraps of food need to be carried out.

Leave camp as you found it

Remove all litter, even other peoples if it is safe to do so. Think ahead and only carry in what you are prepared to carry out. Do not bury or hide litter. Choose an appropriate camp site that does not require you to dig drainage ditches, remove vegetation or boulders. If you do move the odd boulder, replace it in the same place and the same way up.

Roadside or informal camping

Although camping beside a road is not wild camping, it does take place and is lawful. Following a few simple guidelines can reduce any impacts, but whenever practicable the preference should be to use an official campsite with sanitation facilities. Should you wish to camp near houses, ask nearby residents before pitching. An area of intensively managed ground around a building is called “curtilage” in the Code, and access rights do not apply in such places. Remember vehicles have a great impact on vegetation; park on hard ground or on a safe tarmac area, not passing places on single track roads. It is better to walk to your car than drive to your tent. Sites that are at risk of being overused are better avoided. Congregational roadside camping can cause significant problems, especially take particular care with toilet hygiene. If you are just looking for a place for a few hours sleep, then pitch late, leave early, be unobtrusive and leave the site in as good condition as you found it, or better.

Learning the Skills

It is fun to learn the skill of no impact camping. The techniques will benefit you, others and the environment. You can pass this skill on to your friends too. The MCofS can answer questions that are not answered in this advice; you do not need to wonder whether what you are doing is right or wrong. We are here to help.