

Countryside Code agreed by Comhairle na Tuaithe

Based on the

Leave No Trace - Principles Of Outdoor Ethics

For all users of our countryside, to encourage respectful enjoyment of this valuable resource

1. PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE

Before you go check, where possible, if access is allowed and your activity is permitted in the area you wish to visit e.g. is your dog welcome too? Is there parking available?

Respect any signs, regulations, policies and special concerns for the area that you wish to visit. Permits may sometimes be needed for activities on public lands.

Where possible travel by public transport and share cars.

Ensure you have the skills and equipment needed for your activity.

Check the weather forecast. Prepare for changeable weather and the possibility of something going wrong.

For environmental, safety and social reasons, keep group numbers small

2. BE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS

Park appropriately – avoid blocking gateways, forest entrances or narrow roads. Remember that farm machinery, local residents and the emergency services may need access at all times.

Respect landowners, land managers and their property – avoid damaging walls and fences, do not disturb farm animals.

Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.

Avoid making loud and excessive noise. Let nature's sounds prevail.

Support local communities e.g. make a point of spending money in the areas you visit.

3. RESPECT FARM ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

Dogs should be kept under close control and should not be brought onto hills or farmland without the landowners permission.

Observe wild animals and birds from a distance. Avoid disturbing them at sensitive times: mating, nesting and raising young (mostly between spring and early summer).

Never feed wildlife or farm animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health and alters natural behaviours.

4. KEEP TO DURABLE GROUND

Durable ground includes established tracks and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.

To avoid further erosion, keep to the centre of tracks at all times.

IF CAMPING:

Protect water quality by camping at least 30m from lakes and streams.

Aim to leave your campsite as you found it, or better.

IN POPULAR AREAS:

Concentrate use on existing tracks and campsites.

Walk single file in the middle of the track even when wet or muddy.

Keep campsites small and discreet.

IN MORE REMOTE AREAS:

Disperse use to prevent the creation of new tracks and campsites.

Avoid places where impacts are just beginning to show.

5. LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND

Respect property. For example, farming or forestry machinery, fences, stone walls etc. Leave gates as you find them (open or closed).

Preserve the past: examine- but do not damage archaeological structures, old walls and heritage artefacts e.g. holy wells, mine workings, monuments.

Conserve the present: leave rocks, flowers, plants, animals and other natural habitats as you find them. Fallen trees are a valuable wildlife habitat - do not remove or use for firewood.

Avoid introducing non-native plants and animals e.g. zebra mussels in rivers and lakes.

Do not build rock cairns, structures or shelters.

6. DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY

"If You Bring It In, Take It Out" - take home all litter and leftover food (including T bags, fruit peels and other biodegradable foods).

To dispose of solid human waste, dig a hole 10-12cms deep and at least 30m from water, campsites and tracks. Cover and disguise the hole when finished.

Bring home toilet paper and hygiene products.

To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 30m away from small streams or lakes and if necessary use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Bring home any solids and scatter strained dishwater.

For more information on sanitation in the outdoors read the "Where to go in the outdoors" leaflet. (www.countrysiderecreation.com)

7. MINIMISE THE EFFECTS OF FIRE

Where possible avoid open fires in the countryside.

Fires can cause lasting impacts and can be devastating to forests, natural habitats and farmland.

When camping use a lightweight stove for cooking.

WHERE FIRES ARE PERMITTED:

Use established fire rings, barbecues or create a mound fire.

Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand. Do not cut growing vegetation for use as firewood.

Avoid burning plastics or other substances, which emit toxic fumes.

Burn all fires to ash, put out fires completely, and then scatter cool ashes.

Dead and dry vegetation is highly flammable - do not light fires in these conditions.

Winds can spread fires - exercise extreme caution in such conditions.