

Enjoying the bush

Through our walks program and other activities, [NPA ACT](#) encourages enjoyment of the bush and nature.

Here are a few do's and don'ts to help you enjoy your bush experiences, stay safe and protect and preserve the natural landscape for future generations.

You can also check out some other print and online publications such as [Bushwalking 101](#) on NPA NSW's website and [Guidelines for Participants](#) on our website. Our walk leaders can also refer you to other suitable references and guidelines.

Picking a walk – know your limits

Gradings

Walks are graded in our outings program. Ensure you understand the grading system and that you are able and fit enough to manage the grading.

Know your limits. Strenuous activity, especially when it is very hot or very cold, or in the mountains where the weather can be unpredictable, can be dangerous, especially if you are not used to sustained exercise.

NPA ACT walks are led by experienced volunteers who know or have researched the area. Some of our walks, particularly pack walks, limit numbers, so book early.



Preparing for your walk

Become familiar with the area of the walk by studying maps, brochures and online sources, and by seeking advice.

Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to get back in case of emergencies. Arrive at the meeting place on time.

Risk waiver

Before beginning an NPA ACT walk, you will be asked to sign an attendance record and risk waiver form. Note any hazards and read the conditions carefully before signing. The leader may refuse to take you if you don't sign the form.

Medical conditions

Tell the leader if you have a medical condition, such as asthma, bad knees, head cold, are on medication or have any physical limitations.

What to wear

Wear footwear that is comfortable and suitable for the conditions. We recommend thick socks and proper walking boots or shoes with sturdy soles for harder walks.

Wear practical and comfortable clothing suitable for the likely weather conditions and take enough clothing to allow for sudden weather changes.

In cold weather carry thermal underwear and insulating polar fleece or breathable waterproof jackets, or even a woollen jumper.

Always carry wet-weather gear. We recommend a Goretex® or similar rain jacket, but there are cheaper options. Choose gear being aware that you may have to walk a considerable distance in rainy or windy conditions if the weather suddenly changes.



What to pack

Food and water

Take enough food and water on all walks – snacks for morning and afternoon tea and lunch for day walks, and all meals for pack walks. Drinking enough, and regularly, is important to avoid dehydration. Usually 2 litres of water are enough for a day walk, but you may need more if it is going to be hot.

Medication

Carry medications you might require and a basic first aid kit, including triangular and elastic bandages, antiseptics, an analgesic such as paracetamol, blister treatment and Band-Aids.

Navigation

We recommend carrying a map of the area and a compass and knowing how to use them. You should also carry a torch and matches, or a lighter in a waterproof container.

Overnight walks

On overnight pack walks, always carry a lightweight tent, preferably with a sewn-in floor or a flysheet with groundsheet. You will also need a sleeping bag rated to the conditions that you are likely to encounter.

On the walk

During the walk, listen to the leader's advice and directions.

Stay in contact

Stay with the group. Don't lose contact with the person immediately in front or behind you. If you do, call to those in front to stop to allow the group to close-up. Otherwise stop and stay put.

In scrub, keep a few paces behind the person in front. It is your responsibility to avoid springing twigs, not the person's in front to hold them back.

Fences

Get through rather than over fences, but if you do have to climb, do so at a post. Leave gates as you find them. Make sure the last person knows whether to close the gate or leave it open.

Keep the peace

Radios, CD players, mobile phones and similar devices are out of place in the bush. Leave them at home or at least turned off.

At the end of the walk

Make sure the whole party has returned before leaving for home in case your assistance is needed.

Conservation

The key to protecting and preserving the natural landscape for future generations is minimal impact.

Use existing tracks and don't create new ones. Don't cut corners on zig-zag tracks. In trackless country spread out and don't walk in others' footsteps.

Avoid easily damaged places such as peat bogs, cushion moss and fragile rock formations. Wade through waterlogged tracks – don't create a new track around it.

Remove all your rubbish, including food scraps, paper, plastic, aluminium foil, and containers. Carry out what you carry in. Don't burn or bury rubbish.

Watch where you put your feet so as not to damage delicate plants. Don't pick wildflowers.



Try not to disturb wildlife. Give snakes a wide berth. Don't feed wildlife, as unnatural food could be harmful. Try to avoid breaking bushes, dislodging rocks, or disturbing wildlife habitats.

Leave dogs and other pets, and firearms, at home.

Don't handle Indigenous artefacts or touch or deface Indigenous paintings or rock engravings.

Report sightings of feral animals and illegal use of protected areas to the local area manager or a parks ranger.

Check out the Qld Government [Department of Environment and Science](#) website for other useful information on minimal impact bushwalking.

Hygiene

Maintain a high standard of hygiene on walks and in camps.

Cover food and avoid stepping over uncovered food.

Don't drink river or stream water if there is any doubt about it. Boil it for several minutes, use disinfectant tablets or carry and use a filter pump.

Always bathe or swim downstream from where drinking water is obtained.

Don't contaminate streams with soap, detergent, oils, food scraps or toothpaste. Wash cooking and eating utensils well back from the edge of lakes or watercourses.

Where there is a toilet use it. Otherwise bury all human waste in a hole (carry a plastic trowel) at least 15 cm deep and 50 m from streams, camps and tracks. Carry out items that don't easily decompose, such as sanitary products.

Carry a plastic bag for your rubbish. If you find litter left by others show care for the environment and remove it.

Clean your camp site before you depart, leaving it as tidy as you would wish to find it.

Camping

Choosing a site

Choose your site carefully. Try to avoid high-usage camp sites to limit overuse. Avoid camping in sensitive areas. Look for low-impact camp sites.

Find an open camping space where you don't have to trim branches or clear vegetation. In overgrown areas trample undergrowth flat rather than pull it out.

Don't camp in caves or rock overhangs which have Indigenous art as the art can be damaged by dust, smoke and fumes.

Camp as far away from other groups as practical and ensure your behaviour and activities don't disturb or offend them. Consider the comfort and feelings of others when you site your tent.



Camp fires

In general, always carry a fuel stove on overnight or longer walks. Use it in preference to a camp fire for cooking. For keeping warm, thermal clothing is better than a fire.

Light a camp fire only when it can be done so with safety and not in hot, dry conditions or in dry, windy weather.

Check local camp fire regulations, as some areas are 'fuel stove only' for environmental protection reasons. Camp fires are generally not permitted at times of high fire risk or when fire restrictions apply.

Light your camp fires on bare ground swept clean of leaves and other debris and keep it well away from tents, stumps, logs, living plants and river stones, which may explode when heated.

Don't site fires on tree roots or peaty soil. Use existing fireplaces or sites where available.

Keep the camp fire small and burn only dead wood that has fallen to the ground. Don't break limbs from trees or shrubs.

Carry out, don't burn aluminium and plastics as the fumes can be dangerous.

Make sure your camp fire is out when you leave camp. Use water rather than smothering it with soil or sand.



Huts

Don't rely on finding a hut. Always carry a tent.

Respect the rights of people who are there first and be prepared to make space for latecomers.

Don't leave food scraps or store food in huts as it encourages vermin. Clean the hut and fireplace, replace firewood and close doors securely on leaving.

Safety

Emergencies

Take care to avoid the need for an emergency rescue, but know what to do in an emergency.

When an emergency arises, don't panic. Sit down, make a logical plan, and stick to it.

Be trained in first aid so you know how to handle illnesses and injuries.

Navigation

Become proficient in bush navigation. Use a map and compass and observe landmarks with a view to fixing a position.

Carry and know how to use a global positioning system (GPS) for position location, a personal locator beacon (PLB) for emergency medical evacuation and a mobile phone (turned off) in areas with phone coverage for phone contact.



Getting 'unlost'

If a GPS is available use it to determine your position and then plot a route back to the start or safely back on track, otherwise proceed generally as below.

Scout around for landmarks. Sit down and pool ideas. Decide on the most probable position and plan the best route to safety (along ridge, down creeks etc.). If retreat to a previous landmark is possible or worthwhile, do it.

Shelter

Don't travel at night. Find a sheltered camp site before dark. If you are unable to find a route to safety, find a sheltered but conspicuous camp site with water. Stay put and maximise visibility, which may involve lighting a smoke fire.

Last word

Remember, to enjoy the bush you need to get there first – please drive carefully.

Outings subcommittee of the NPA ACT, October 2023