

Leave No Trace on the Appalachian Trail



Group Leader & Participant Guidelines



Appalachian Trail Conservancy

7. Be Considerate of Others

For many the A.T. is a place to enjoy the quiet solitude of nature. Be an ambassador for groups by respecting everyone you meet along the way.

- Step off the Trail onto a durable surface to let others pass.
- Plan to gather for breaks & tent out of sight & earshot of others.
- Let nature's sounds prevail. Remind your group that voices can travel far, especially across water.
- Avoid monopolizing viewpoints, water sources, & shared areas at overnight sites.

Learn More

Scan the QR code, visit appalachiantrail.org, or contact us for:

- The latest Trail conditions
- Camping regulations & permits
- Trip planning help
- Group volunteer opportunities
- Maps & guidebooks
- And more!



4. Leave What You Find

Help keep the Trail beautiful and protect A.T. ecosystems.

- Leave cultural artifacts, plants, & other natural objects alone.
- Don't carve into or graffiti trees, rocks, signs, or shelters. Leave your mark in shelter logbooks instead.
- Don't stack rocks, dig trenches, or build structures.

5. Minimize Campfire Impacts

Campfires can permanently scar soil, strip an area of important nutrients by using up dead wood, & accidentally start wildfires.

- Use stoves for cooking & other lights for ambiance instead of having a campfire.
- Know where campfires are allowed on the A.T. Respect local regulations & burn bans. Don't have a campfire when it's windy.
- If you have a campfire, keep it small & use only dead, downed wood no thicker than your wrist - leave the hatchets at home!
- Burn campfires to ash & make sure they are out & cold before leaving or going to sleep.

6. Respect Wildlife

Protect the animals that call the A.T. home.

- Properly store all food, trash, and scented items at night in a bear can and clean up all trash, spills, & crumbs.
- If you can't cover an animal with your thumb when you look at it, you're too close!
- Keep dogs leashed.



Why It Matters

Millions of people visit the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) each year. Each person's actions add up! Your group can be stewards of the Trail by practicing the 7 principles of Leave No Trace:



PLAN AHEAD & PREPARE



TRAVEL & CAMP ON DURABLE SURFACES



DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY



LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND



MINIMIZE CAMPFIRE IMPACTS



RESPECT WILDLIFE



BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS

1. Plan Ahead & Prepare

Researching where you're headed & bringing the gear you need are the foundation of a fun, safe, low-impact trip on the A.T.

The group size limit for most of the A.T. is 10 people for overnight trips or 25 people for day hikes, including leaders. It may be fewer in some areas like designated wilderness. This is to protect the Trail from damage that can occur when larger groups travel together.

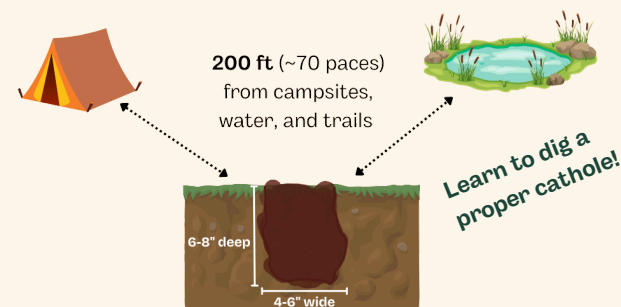
- Limit your group to 10 people for overnights, 25 for day hikes.
- Check with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) or land managers on camping policies (including group size limits) & if a permit is needed.
- Carry tents or tarps so you can leave shelters for solo hikers.
- Visit popular spots during less crowded times or in the off season. Try to visit the Trail midweek.
- Reduce trash by repackaging food & planning meals.
- Bring gear that facilitates low-impact camping: trash bags, camp stoves, trowels, strainers for dishwater, & bear cans.

2. Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces

Durable surfaces include bare dirt, rocks, low elevation grassy fields, snow, tent pads, and the center of the footpath.

- Camp at designated sites vs. making your own campsite.
- Stay on established trails when hiking & moving around camp.
- Gather only on durable surfaces. Avoid gathering on vegetation, shorelines & edges of streams, bogs/wet areas, & in alpine zones.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly



- Pack out all trash & food waste. Don't burn trash or leave any food, including compostable items like apple cores - these can attract animals if left behind.
- Poop goes in the privy (outhouse). If no privy is available, bury poop in a cathole dug 6-8" deep & 70 big steps from water, campsites, & trails.
- Only poop & toilet paper goes in privies and catholes. Pack out all wipes, tampons, pads, & other trash.
- Wash dishes & bodies, & brush teeth 40 big steps from water. Strain & pack out food scraps.

Register Today 

Register your group's itinerary on ATCamp.org to reduce crowding & get trip planning resources!



Have an overnight group larger than 10 people? Plan to split up & camp separately or camp at a front country campground & day hike on the A.T.

Contact us for trip planning help at info@appalachiantrail.org.