

Walk Softly

Adirondack
High Peaks
Stewardship Skills
and
Wilderness Ethics



Presented by
The Adirondack Forty-Sixers



Walk Softly

when you hike and climb in the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Mountains. You are embarking on a journey which will take you through wondrous forest, across streams and bogs, up rock slides, and through precious alpine meadows.

Walk Softly

along the trails that lead through mountain passes, by lakes and ponds, and up lofty summits composed of rock that is more than a billion years old.

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to mountains sculpted by the Ice Age, over brooks that carried its melt away, and by vegetation that is rare and beautiful on many of the peaks.

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Learn and practice the Stewardship Skills presented in this pamphlet and adopt the principles of Wilderness Ethics so that what you enjoy today may increase in wonder as the years go by.

Walk Softly

because when you hike and climb in the Adirondack High Peaks region you are accepting responsibility for yourself and the wilderness area that you have entered. Walk Softly so that all of us, now and in the future, can enjoy the splendor of this incredible natural resource, the Adirondack High Peaks.

Hiker Responsibility

Those who use the Adirondack High Peaks area for recreation must be responsible for themselves and for the people with them. Personal safety and responsibility are therefore important aspects of the Walk Softly philosophy. It is vitally important that hikers/backpackers follow these personal safety and responsibility guidelines:

1. Plan your trip carefully and thoroughly before embarking from any trailhead.

- Consult guidebooks such as the Adirondack Mountain Club's *Guide to the Trails of the High Peaks Region*.

- Study and become familiar with routes described in the guidebooks and shown on trail maps.

- Know how to use a map and compass.

- Pack intelligently – carry lightweight camping clothing and gear which will see you through any emergency which might occur.

- Carry food and snacks only in nonbreakable, non-glass containers. Repackaging of most food is recommended.

- Carry plenty of water and a water purification system for replacing water as you use it.

- Test and set up equipment at home... before setting off on your trip.

- Register your plans with someone at home and in state trailhead registers and keep to your itinerary.

- Know the limits of your group's abilities.

2. Keep your group's size small for all hiking and camping trips. No group greater than 8 in number should hike or camp together.

3. Camp only in approved camping areas:

- Camping anywhere above 3500 feet in elevation should be avoided. Never camp above 4000 feet.

- Groups should, whenever possible, camp only in designated camping areas.

- Outside the Eastern High Peaks area, campers may camp, if necessary, at least 200 feet away from any stream or trail and under 3500 feet in elevation.

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The Wilderness Ethic may be summarized briefly: Our impact upon the wilderness should be minimal. Whenever possible, we should "Leave No Trace" of our visits to the mountains that we love.



Each year, more and more people come to the Adirondack High Peaks. Most of them truly respect the wilderness, but too many people are enjoying the lakes and ponds, the passes and the summits. We are, in effect, loving our mountains to death. By the force of sheer numbers, hikers and climbers, backpackers and campers, skiers and snowshoers are placing unnatural pressure on the High Peaks environment. Their activities contribute to erosion of trails, the spoiling of forests, and the deterioration of fragile alpine summits. What Nature has taken tens of thousands of years to create, wilderness enthusiasts are unknowingly destroying because many of them are unaware of their impact.

Those who use the High Peaks and other wilderness areas for their hiking and camping must adopt Wilderness Ethics and practice Stewardship Skills.

Some important ethical principles and basic outdoor skills follow:

~ Properly dispose of the waste that you produce:

Never urinate or defecate where your waste may directly impact waters and wetlands. Instead urinate away from trails and streams and dig catholes for defecation. These small holes (about six inches in depth) should be in well drained soil. After you have finished, fill the hole with the soil you removed and disguise the site with natural forest litter.

Wilderness Ethics



~ **Packing out human waste:**

Some people go so far as to use plastic bags to pack out their bodily waste and the toilet paper they use. In our active High Peaks environment our body waste deteriorates quickly when disposed of properly. Even toilet paper biodegrades quickly during warm weather. Other personal items, such as feminine hygiene products, should be packed out.

~ **Do all washing of body and dishes away from streams and wetlands:**

Use soap sparingly when washing up. Be certain that none of it has direct impact upon any body of water or wetland. Wash dishes, pots and pans, etc. at least 200 feet away from any water, any trail, and your campsite. Broadcast washing and rinse water over a wide area. Plan and prepare meals so that there is little or no waste. Leftovers should be packed out, not buried.

~ **Minimize potential encounters with bears and other wild animals:**

Keep no enticing goodies in tents, not even candy bars or toothpaste. Leave no scraps of food around your campsite. Do not leave packs with food in them unattended. Employ bear bags wherever you camp.

~ **Always return places where you have camped or rested to their natural state:**

Camp on high ground. Do not dig ditches around your tent. Do not trample or pull up or deface vegetation. Restore your campsite to its original condition before you depart.

~ **Always use backpacker stoves for cooking and heating of water.**

Open fires must be avoided at all times.

Stewardship Skills

Responsible hikers/backpackers care for the land on which they recreate. In the Adirondacks...

1. Stay on established trails. Even in wet or muddy conditions this is important. Hikers seeking to avoid mud often contribute to further trail erosion and unsightly destruction of vegetation and soil.

- Stick to established routes on peaks which do not have maintained trails. Erosion and habitat destruction are often more severe where hikers attempt "bushwhacking."

- Except in winter, when such marking may be necessary for safety, do not "flag" routes with surveyor's tape or other materials. Do not build rock cairns or create other trail markers. Never deface a tree or any other vegetation to mark a route. In fact, as much as possible, try to leave no trail that others might follow. Just one person's bushwhacking can damage vegetation and create unnecessary erosion of the meagre top soil of the mountains.

- When ascending to a peak "above timberline," stay on the marked route at all times. Walk, stand, rest, sit only on bare rock or gravel surfaces. Do not venture onto fragile beds of alpine vegetation.

- Employ similar practices for establishing a wilderness campsite and for living in it. Avoid any and all destruction of the natural habitat.

2. Pack Out What You Pack In!

- Never leave any of your gear or foodstuffs behind anywhere that you camp or hike. Carry out all packaging (including paper) that you brought in. It is unpleasant to find debris, such as aluminum foil and pop tops, left by irresponsible hikers. Make it your practice to pick up after yourself and others.

3. Take Nothing From the Mountains!

- Leave plants and flowers and all forms of wildlife exactly where you find them so that they may continue to live and die where they belong. Any artifacts of past land use (lumber camp and ski slope equipment, for instance) should be left where you find them. Take only pictures home with you.

Walk Softly in Winter



Winter hikers and backpackers have to be as concerned about wilderness ethics as much as those who enjoy the High Peaks at other times. While their numbers may not be as great as those of recreationists the rest of the year, the people who enjoy the mountains in the winter make more obvious impacts. They have to be more careful about disposal of waste and more mindful that what they dispose of in the woods may be flushed directly into streams with spring's thaw.

Winter enthusiasts must also be aware that they impact trails severely if they do not employ snowshoes or skis. Winter hikers also have to be careful not to scar summits and exposed rock or wound vegetation with their ski pole tips and crampons.

Walk Softly in Spring and Fall

There are times when hikers should simply stay out of the High Peaks. When winter ends and spring begins its thaw, mountain trails are particularly prone to damage from the soles of boots that impact them. Nature is even more fragile and vulnerable in the spring than it is in winter. The same is true in late fall, when the area experiences nighttime freezing and daytime thaw. At those times, responsible hikers stay home.

Walk Softly Remember...

Plan trips carefully and be prepared for what you might encounter...

Be familiar with the state's rules and regulations for the areas where you will hike and climb...

Camp and walk only on durable surfaces...

Pack litter and waste out with you...

Properly dispose of what you cannot pack out...

Preserve and restore the environment of your camping areas and hiking paths...

Do not make fires. Use backpacker stoves for cooking...

The information in this pamphlet has been developed by the Adirondack Forty-Sixers based upon principles of wilderness ethics such as those outlined in the National Outdoor Leadership School's *Leave No Trace, Outdoor Skills & Ethics, Northeast Mountains* and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's "Information for Hikers and Backpackers in the High Peaks Wilderness Area," *Foot Notes*.

Other perspectives on mountain stewardship and outdoor ethics may be gathered from publications such as B. Hampton and D. N. Cole's *Soft Paths: How to Enjoy the Wilderness Without Harming It* (Harrisburg, PA, Stackpole Books, 1988); K. Meyer's *How to Shit in the Woods* (Ten Speed Press, 1989); and Guy and Laura Waterman's *Wilderness Ethics: Preserving the Spirit of Wilderness* (Woodstock, VT, The Countryman Press, 1993).

For further information concerning the Adirondack Forty-Sixers, their stewardship and educational programs, and on becoming a member of the 46ers, write to