

# **CAMP SITE SELECTION**

## **INTRODUCTION TO OUTDOOR LEADER SKILLS (IOLS)**

### **GUIDELINES –**

**SAFETY** – Avoid campsites in deep ravines, canyons and along streambeds that could flood. Look for highest ground possible in flash flood prone areas. Look for overhead dangers. These include the possibility of rock-fall from a scree-slope and widow-makers (dead trees that have started to fall but are held in place by other trees).

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS –**

Three types of campsites –

**Well used (established)** – Generally found at established campgrounds, along popular trails, and at trailheads. These sites are noted by large well-used fire rings/pits, charcoal grills etc. When encountered - use first.

**Little used** – As the name implies – some evidence of prior use (old fire rings) etc. Use, but try to tidy up when leaving.

**Pristine** – Unused (or recovered) sites, Leave No Trace principles apply. Avoid building a fire ring, and use the smallest space available. If staying for more than a day – consider moving tents and or sleeping areas daily to protect the grass and vegetation. Avoid making established trails/paths within the campsite if at all possible. Avoid fragile areas - Don't camp on meadows, especially in alpine areas, where several years of growth can be destroyed by the stomp of a Vibram sole.

**SIZE** – Given the above, use the smallest area for your group as possible, but large enough not to destroy the site.

**WATER** – A good campsite has water available. Water can also be a safety hazard, so never camp so close to a stream or river that should a thunderstorm occur up stream – you find your campsite flooded or worse. Be sure that your campsite is at least 60 meters from water to prevent inadvertently contaminating the water or scaring wildlife away from their nightly drink. Also, avoid game trails: animals might not be willing to approach a campsite, and that could mean they'll go thirsty if you are camped between them and the water they depend on. To avoid trampling down the area, make as few trips as possible (or only one) to gather water for the campsite. In areas with out running water, you need to consult your map so you can load up when you pass the last watering site. Also note – many watering sites are seasonal – a roaring stream in the spring may be only a trickle in the late summer.

**TIME** – It is better to stop an hour before you wanted to and set up in daylight, than to trudge on, and set up a campsite in the cold, dark when you are tired.

**TERRAIN** – Consider the following when selecting a campsite:

**Drainage** – Choose sites that will drain well, even in a downpour. Low areas or hollows are also generally cooler (colder), damp, subject to flooding and a haven for bugs. Gently sloping terrain is preferred to flat terrain. In dry country, avoid flash-flood zones, like the sandy creek bed of a canyon.

**Choose even surfaces** – It might surprise you to learn that the most comfortable sleeping spot isn't a soft meadow (which can be bumpy, wet, and mosquito-infested). Instead, look for forest duff or pine needles-or even mineral soil, sand, or gravel. On a closed-cell foam mattress, you'll find that it's more comfortable to be camped on a hard flat surface than a soft, bumpy one.

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**Spend a little time.** Sometimes it's hard to find a flat spot. The ground might be too rocky or hummocky or densely vegetated. Once you've spotted a possible home for the night, lay out your ground cloth and lie down to check out the slope and whether there are big protruding rocks that will poke you all night long.

**Natural cover** – look for areas that avoid some protection, but are not subject to lightning strikes, flooding or rock slides.

**Wind Breaks** – if possible – look for area that is sheltered for winds. On very windy nights, you'll want the wind to come from the back of your tent. There is nothing worst than to listen to rustle of a nylon tent all night when a few minutes looking for a more sheltered area would have minimized the effects of wind. If possible, hide in a clump of bushes, behind a rock redoubt. When storms threaten, give up comfort for protection-choose a protected spot over a flat one. Batten down. A calm evening can become a windy night. Set up your tent right the first time, with firmly planted stakes and taut guy lines. When the weather changes at 2 A.M., you can roll over and go back to sleep, rather than having to get up and fix things.

Having said that - Mosquitoes are worst on a warm, humid night, especially if there is no breeze. Heading for an exposed knoll or a wind tunnel (look for a saddle between two hills) might find you a breezy spot.

**Sunlight/Shadows** – More important than afternoon sun is morning sun. Look for an area that will provide some morning sunlight to the camp for drying out sleeping bags and tents. The only thing worse than then having to **pack** a cold, wet tent and damp sleeping bag is to get to the end of your day's trek and having to **unpack** and set up a cold, wet tent and crawl into a damp (now clammy) sleeping bag.

**Bear Triangle** – In areas that are inhabited by bears (and other predators) the campsite lay out should resemble at triangle or square. There should be one area for cooking, one area for storing of "smellables", one area for sleeping and some say, one area for the water source (as animals tend to gravitate to water during the night). The distances will vary, but 100 meters is a good general rule for the minimum separation between these areas. If possible sleeping areas should be upwind and 100 meters from cooking areas and smellable storage areas.

**STOVES – CAMPFIRES** – Wherever possible use a lightweight camping stove – it is more efficient, and Leave No Trace friendly. If you do use a campfire – use an established fire ring, be sure the embers are cold out and spread about upon departure. Note – be careful with stones that make up a fire ring – some contain minute amounts of water - when heated to extremes can explode.

**PRIVACY** – If possible, try not to crowd on in with other campers at a campsite, especially if out of established camping areas. They have a right to their privacy and solitude.

**PERMISSION** – In this day and age – permission is needed at almost any trek to camp. Reservations and fees for some sites require long lead-time planning. Always seek permission from the landowner or land managers in advance.

**CAMPSITE MANAGEMENT** – Make plans for the following:

**Campsite layout** – Do the following first. These are not necessarily in priority order but all four must be identified before Scouts start doing their "own thing." This avoids having a Scout have to tear down his tent to move.

- ◆ Locate cook area
- ◆ Locate smellable storage area
- ◆ Locate sanitation area (down wind, down hill and down stream) and ensure everyone know where it is and what to do. This also includes an area to dispose of dishwater.
- ◆ Locate sleeping area (upwind and 100 meters from cooking area and smellable storage area).

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**Sleeping arrangements** – Have a plan for sleeping arrangements – by Patrols, by Troop, the separation of adults and Scouts etc.

**Set up Priorities** – Shelter and Sustenance (food):

Set up dining fly if you have one. It provides shelter while other work is going on.

Personal tents and gear.

Gather water (wood for campfire).

Meal Preparation.

Note - there is a school of thought that advocates stopping mid-afternoon (early evening in the summer), cooking your evening meal, cleaning up and then trekking on for another mile or so to establish a sleep area. This avoids (not eliminates) some to smellable issues you encounter in a campsite where you cook, eat and sleep.