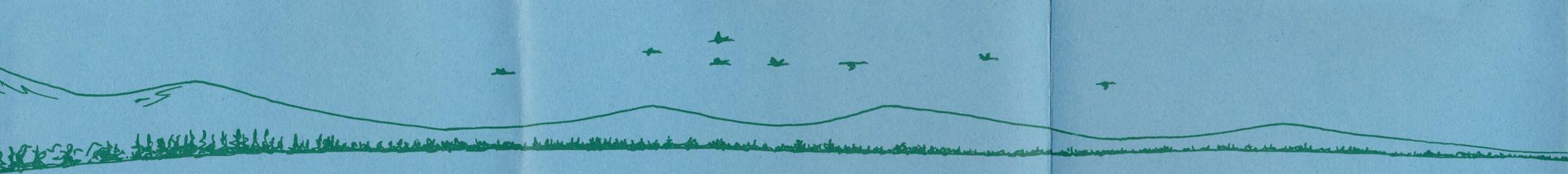


Your
Arctic
Adventure



Introduction

Arctic Alaska is one of the greatest wilderness areas in the world. It is a delicate balance of tundra, boreal forest, coastal plains, and mountains. Its vastness is deceiving because the arctic ecosystem is extremely fragile and is easily impacted by man's activities. The arctic climate produces permafrost and marginal growth conditions for vegetation. Land that has been damaged may take years to regenerate, or it may never recover.

If the arctic ecosystem is to be preserved, certain standards of visitor behavior are required -- standards unnecessary in areas with more resilient ecosystems. Minimum-impact camping techniques, if practiced by everyone, will reduce impacts to the Arctic, and ensure an opportunity for discovery.

The following suggestions should help you enjoy your trip to the Arctic, and minimize impacts to the environment.

Uniquely Alaska

As a visitor to the arctic wilderness you must be well prepared and self-sufficient. Most of the Arctic is true wilderness, and equipment, supplies, and even emergency services may not be available. In many areas of the Brooks Range it may be weeks or months before you encounter another person.

Make certain that your equipment is sturdy and functional, and that you have adequate field repair kits. First aid knowledge and supplies are a must. Signaling devices such as smoke flares, mirrors, strobes, or signal cloths should be carried for emergencies.

Leave your itinerary with a dependable person and make firm arrangements with an air taxi operator. Air taxis may be delayed several days due to bad weather, so carry extra food. For more information on wilderness survival and camping safety, consult a good backpacking guidebook.

Groups

A wilderness trip may be enhanced through sharing. However, groups should be small enough (6 or less) so the wilderness experience is enriched. The cumulative impact of large groups on the environment is especially noticeable and lasting in arctic ecosystems.

Trails

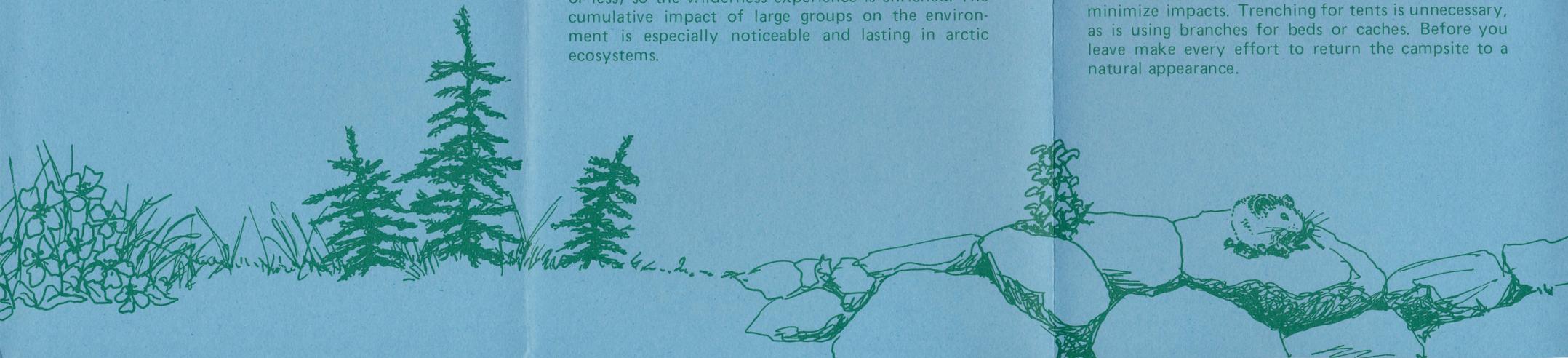
Trails form quickly in the Arctic and may result in permanent scarring. If healing occurs it may take years. To minimize trail formation, groups should travel in fan pattern whenever possible. Use game trails, but be aware that you may surprise wildlife when hiking in brushy areas. Above all, leave your route unmarked.

Campsites

Selection of a campsite is probably the most critical decision you will make in trying to minimize your impact. Gravel bars make excellent campsites because they are durable and well-drained, often have fewer mosquitoes than other sites, and high water the following spring will erase signs of your presence. Remember that high water can occur at any time so locate your camp well above current water levels.

If you must choose a vegetated site, select a location with hardier vegetation such as moss or heath, rather than more fragile lichens. Move camp every 2-3 days, or before signs of your presence become noticeable.

Wearing soft-soled shoes around camp will minimize impacts. Trenching for tents is unnecessary, as is using branches for beds or caches. Before you leave make every effort to return the campsite to a natural appearance.



Fires

Tree growth in the Arctic is very slow; a spruce tree only inches in diameter may be hundreds of years old. In some areas wood may be scarce or nonexistent. Because of this, gas or propane stoves for cooking are strongly recommended. A gas or propane stove is also good for emergencies since it is easy to light.

If you need an open fire, it should be built on exposed inorganic soil. Fire at other locations will kill the vegetation and create long-lasting scars. Only dead and downed wood should be burned.

All traces of the fire should be erased before you leave. Remove all bits of foil, wire, and other unburned material from the ashes and pack them out. All ashes and charcoal should be deposited in the main current of a river if possible, and all rocks should be returned to their original locations. A fire pan can be easily carried and it will prevent fire scars. If these steps are taken, others will not be attracted to camp repeatedly at the same location, allowing the site to recover.



Water

Carry a collapsible water jug to cut down on trips for water, thereby reducing trail formation. Bathe and wash dishes at least 100 feet from sources of drinking water and use biodegradable soaps. Water may contain *Giardia lamblia*, or other intestinal parasites. Take preventive measures by treating or boiling your water.

Latrines

Human feces may carry harmful microorganisms. Bury feces at least 150 feet from all potential water sources. On the tundra, remove a fist-full of vegetation and scoop out a small depression. Mosses, leaves, and snow are natural toilet papers. Replace the tundra. All paper products, including tampons and sanitary napkins, should be burned or packed out. Cigarette lighters make it easy to burn toilet paper at the site.



Litter

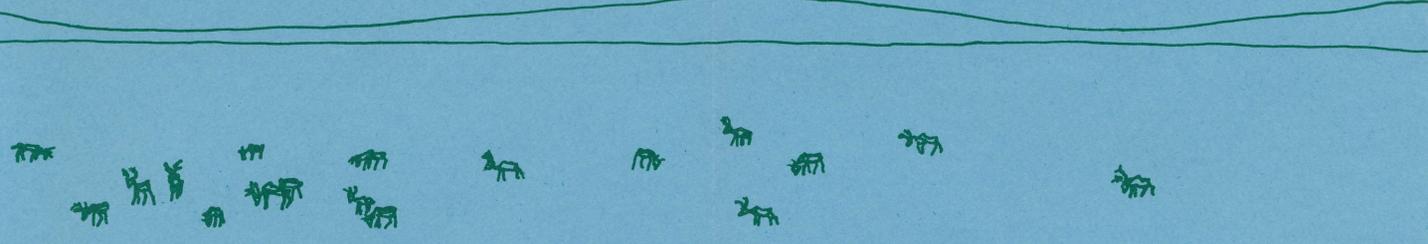
If you pack it in, pack it out. Land managers need your help to maintain these areas in a pristine condition. If you find litter, carry it out whenever possible. Buried garbage will only resurface due to frost action or curious animals. If a bear digs up garbage and begins associating people with food you may be creating a dangerous situation. Check with local residents before disposing of garbage at a rural community.

Private Property

Private lands and cabins are scattered throughout Alaskan parks and refuges. Though travel may be through remote country, you may encounter private property. Cabins, caches, traplines, and fishnets should be respected and not disturbed. The use of private cabins in emergencies is acceptable, but they are still private property. If you use supplies or firewood from a cabin, you must notify the owner and replace the supplies. The owner may be depending on the supplies next winter. Check with the land manager of the area you are visiting for land status.

You may also encounter prehistoric or historic sites. These sites usually hold great significance for the local Native people. Respect their heritage and leave the sites undisturbed.

During your trip in the Arctic, you will most likely visit rural communities. Invasion of community privacy is a concern of many rural residents. Be sensitive to local lifestyle activities. Obtain permission to use community facilities. Also obtain permission to photograph residents and private property.



Wildlife

Observing wildlife in its natural habitat will be one of the most rewarding aspects of your trip. Remember that you are only a visitor in the animal's world. Respect their territory. By helping wildlife maintain their independence from people, your safety and the wildlife will be protected.

- *cook and cache food away from tents.
- *avoid strong smelling foods and keep yourself free of food odors.
- *dispose of fish entrails in a river's main current.
- *avoid food waste with good menu planning.
- *select a campsite away from game trails or fresh bear sign; if a bear becomes a repeat visitor or displays an unusual amount of interest, move your campsite to another area. Don't encourage a confrontation.
- *always give wildlife the right-of-way on game trails.
- *avoid meeting or separating a bear with cubs or a moose with calves.
- *don't travel silently in bear country. Make noise and stay alert.
- *cold water and a short growing season produce a lower carrying capacity and productivity for all fish in the arctic. Take only what you will use; learn and practice catch and release techniques.
- *you will disturb wildlife less if you use a long lens for photographing wildlife, and carry binoculars or a spotting scope for observation. Maintain distance from nests and dens.

The wilderness areas you will be experiencing belong to all of us. They are given to us as a public trust. We should use them wisely and carefully so that we can pass them on to the next generation. If each of us is to have the same freedoms and opportunities to experience these wild areas, each of us must touch them gently.





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