

Primary School Excursion Handbook



Supporting nature-based
learning in our parks

Contact with nature is critical for our physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. It has positive effects on our ability to concentrate, to learn, to solve problems, to relax and be creative.



Acknowledgement of Country

Parks Victoria respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of what is now known as Victoria. For many thousands of years, Aboriginal people have lived in harmony with and carefully managed Country, with which they have a deep spiritual connection. Contemporary Aboriginal people are proud of their ancestry and in addition to their inherent rights, have ongoing spiritual and cultural obligations to ensure that their ancestral land and culture is managed responsibly and appropriately.

Parks Victoria respects Traditional Owners' deep and continuing connection to Country and encourages all school groups to undertake an Acknowledgment of Country before commencing an excursion. An Acknowledgement of Country shows an awareness of, and respect for, the Traditional Owners of the land on which your excursion is being held. If you would like guidance on how to form your Acknowledgement, please visit [The Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria](#).



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Outdoor learning in primary school

Welcome! We're so excited that you're interested in supporting your students to learn in parks and nature. It's such a natural match – kids love the outdoors, it helps them learn better and to grow into healthy and happy people throughout life. That's why Parks Victoria is committed to *Learning in Nature* and has been using our *Healthy Parks Healthy People* approach for more than 15 years.

This handbook is designed to help primary school educators organise an excursion at a Parks Victoria site, tread lightly during outdoor activities and know who to contact for more information.

Finding the right location

Parks Victoria manages over 3,000 diverse parks, reserves and waterways. These protected places make up 18 per cent of Victoria's landmass, 75 per cent of Victoria's wetlands and 70 per cent of Victoria's coastline. Parks Victoria's protected places serve a range of purposes, from protecting the natural and cultural environment to providing recreational opportunities.

The best way to find out what park is most suitable for your unit of work is to visit the Parks Victoria website, where you can search by park name, landscape or by activity. Information about each park's facilities can be found here too. If there is a park near you that is not listed on the Parks Victoria website, it is likely it is managed by a different agency. Get in touch with your local council to find out more.

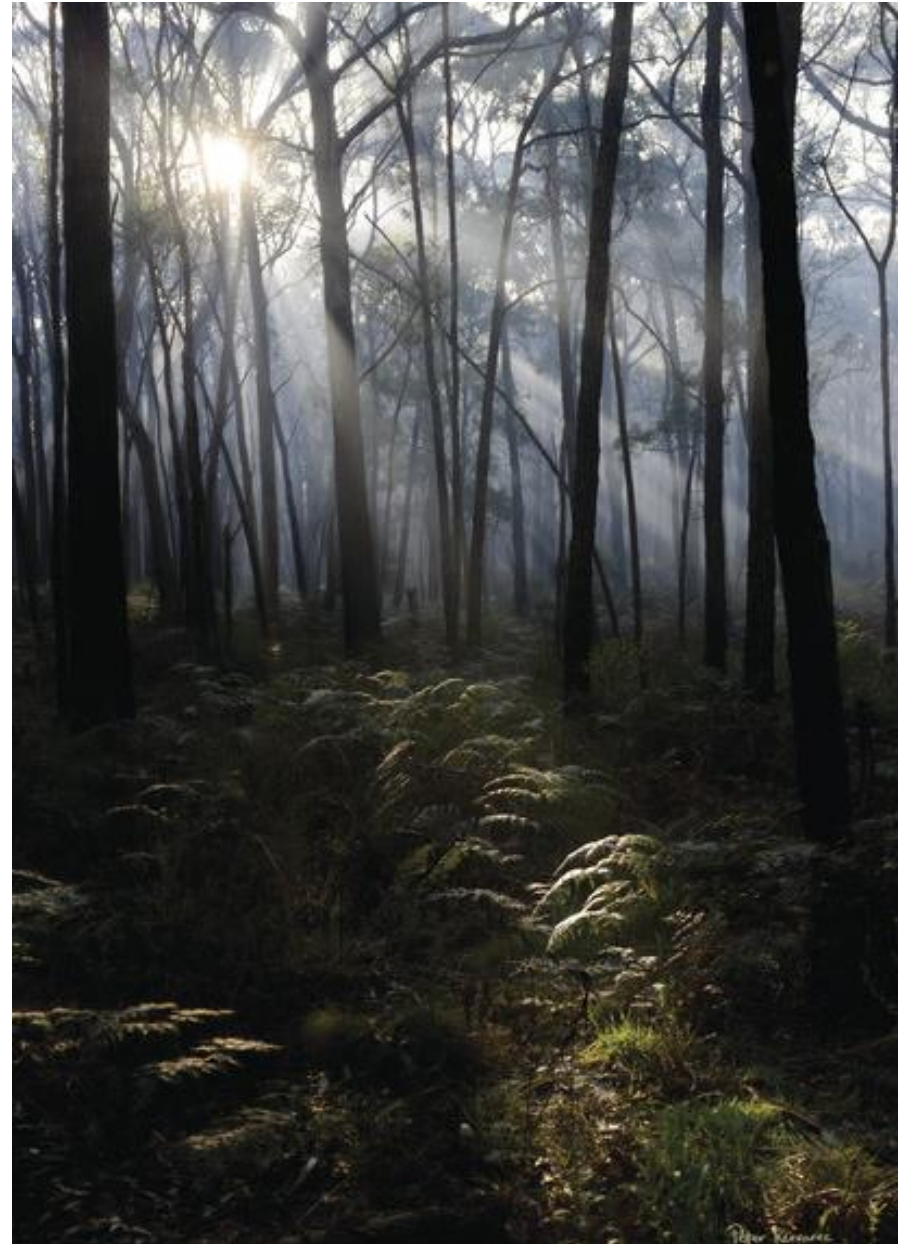


Treading lightly

National parks, reserves and marine protected areas form the core of Aboriginal cultural landscapes, which have been modified over many thousands of years of occupation. They are rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage, holding social, spiritual, and ceremonial significance. They also provide important homes to many species of plants and animals, some found in only a few areas, and others nowhere else in the world!

Spending time in national parks, reserves and other protected areas is an excellent way for students to develop positive environmental values and to learn more about the world they live in, and how humans and nature interact with each other. By following our *Treading Lightly* practices, you and your students can learn in and about these amazing natural places while helping us to protect them.

Our *Treading Lightly* practices have been adapted for a primary school audience from Parks Victoria's more in-depth *Minimal Impact Guidelines for Schools*. These guidelines are available on the Parks Victoria website and can be referred to if you need further information regarding how to manage specific activities for minimal environmental impact.



Following Parks Victoria's treading lightly practices for excursions will help your group to protect Victoria's precious natural places too.

Know before you go

- Learn more about the Traditional Owners' living culture and prepare an Acknowledgement of Country for when you arrive on site.
- Use the Parks Victoria website to find out about the park you are going to visit, what you can do there and what facilities will be available when you arrive.
- Check for changes in park conditions leading up to and on the day of your excursion by visiting the specific park webpage.
- Monitor the weather in the lead up to your trip and make sure everyone has the right equipment, clothes and footwear with them and understands emergency protocols.
- Take plenty of food, water and sun protection, and pack to reduce rubbish.
- Have a discussion with your students about treading lightly and create a *Caring for Nature Code* (see page 5).

Stick to the tracks

- Tracks are carefully designed to help people enjoy nature and protect the environment. Sticking to the track minimises erosion, limits the spread of disease and weeds, and helps you to stay safe by reducing your chances of getting lost. Using the designated tracks also lessens disturbance to precious cultural artefacts, native animals and plants, and geological features.

Keep nature wild

- Take photos, drawings, notes and memories, and only leave footprints. Parks protect cultural history and important ecosystems, and are home to many native plants and animals, so it's important to be respectful and leave things as you find them.
- Remember to take any rubbish and waste with you when you leave the park.
- View animals from a distance so they don't become frightened.
- Let animals eat their natural food because they are healthiest when we don't share our human food with them.

Be a happy camper

- Camp in designated spaces, keep your group together and place tents on sandy or hard surfaces in well-drained areas.
- Reduce your noise at night time so native animals can share the space too.
- Use the fireplaces provided and always put fires out completely when you're done.
- Protect wildlife by using biodegradable detergent or soap and be mindful to dispose of your waste water at least 50 m away from waterways.

Let us know you're coming

Once you've decided on a location, organised your excursion according to your school's procedures and policies, and completed the Department of Education and Training's Student Activity Locator (if required), there are some steps you can follow to let Parks Victoria know about your visit. Following Parks Victoria's registration and/or permit processes helps everyone to tread lightly, while ensuring that your group can be contacted and kept safe during an emergency.

Safety and care during emergencies

ParkConnect is Parks Victoria's online database for emergency management and visitor communication. You can let us know you'll be visiting with your class by registering your excursion through the [Education Group Activity form](#) on ParkConnect. Registering at least one month in advance helps us to better understand your planned visit and keep you safe by organising a coordinated emergency management response with local ranger teams and government departments if required. User guides are available on the [ParkConnect Education page](#) if you need help with setting up a ParkConnect teacher account or submitting your form.

Permits for protection

Travelling in smaller groups helps us all to tread lightly on the environment; that's why Parks Victoria recommends an upper limit of 100 students moving in a group at any one time. Victoria's parks, reserves, and waterways are not only great sites for excursions, they can also provide the perfect location for your next school or sporting event. Our parks and waterways are governed by sets of specific rules, which at times require permits to undertake activities. These permit processes are in place to ensure school groups know how to limit their impact and protect Victoria's special places too. For schools, permits are usually required when you are planning to run an excursion or event with more than

100 students in one location. For more information about permitting, please visit our Event Permit webpage. If you are still unsure if your group will require permit, you can email events@parks.vic.gov.au or give us a call on 13 19 63.



Learning in nature

Excursions are a fantastic way to address curriculum outcomes and students' learning needs. Perhaps even more importantly, excursions are an ideal and natural point for students to begin to develop a sense of belonging, place based connections, positive environmental values and respectful behaviours.

Caring for nature code

Creating a *Caring for Nature Code* with your students can help to foster a mindful approach to your upcoming excursion and can assist with unpacking the treading lightly practices before you leave the classroom. As land managers, Parks Victoria undertake many actions to care for Victoria's protected places. You can use or adapt the following activity with your students to incite discussion, inspire creative thinking and tune students in to ways we can all care for natural and cultural landscapes.

Show students images of where you will be conducting your excursion. Ask students to predict what they might observe during the excursion. Who might have spiritual and cultural connections here? In small groups students can brainstorm ways to care for the park and its special features, including a short sentence about why their actions might help. As a class write a collective Caring for Nature code, pledging what you will do to be respectful and tread lightly.



Protecting our places

Volunteering is a fantastic way to get hands-on during an excursion and give back to your local parks. Join us in protecting the environment by encouraging students to put their knowledge and values into action.

We have many exciting and diverse volunteer activities that you and your students may wish to get involved in. You can search for activities in parks close to you, or activity types that support your current units. Visit the [Volunteer ParkConnect page](#) for more information.



Park excursion checklist

- ❑ Find out about the park you are going to visit, what you can do there and what facilities are available
- ❑ Visit the park and conduct a risk assessment and any other paperwork according to your school's excursion policy
- ❑ Submit an [Education Group Activity form](#) for emergency management:
- ❑ Consider how you will organise activities to manage group sizes for minimal environmental impact
- ❑ Find out whose Country you're visiting on your excursion and research (or if possible, make contact with) the Traditional Owners to learn more about their important places and living culture
- ❑ Have a class discussion about *Treading Lightly* and create a *Code for Caring* to foster positive environmental values and respectful behaviours
- ❑ Use the specific park webpage to check conditions leading up to and on the day of your visit, and make sure your group is safe and well prepared
- ❑ When you arrive, respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country on which your excursion is taking place. If you would like guidance on how to form your Acknowledgement, please visit [The Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria](#).
- ❑ Enjoy your time in nature!

Contacts

For further information or questions about education in parks, please contact education@parks.vic.gov.au or call 13 19 63.

