

# Secondary School Field Trip Handbook



Supporting nature-based  
learning in our parks

Nature based learning provides rich opportunities for students to experience holistic and cross-curricula learning. The understanding and skills gained not only improve learning outcomes but also promote positive relationships between individuals, communities and the natural world.



## 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 a field trip. An Acknowledgement of Country shows an awareness of, and respect for, the Traditional Owners of the land on which your field trip 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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*Front page image - Crystal Brook Falls; Gorge Heritage Walk, Mt Buffalo NP.*



## Outdoor learning in secondary school

Welcome! We're so excited that you're interested in supporting your students to learn in parks and nature. Nature-based learning provides rich opportunities for students to experience holistic and integrated learning across different curriculum areas. The understanding and skills gained not only address specific and cross-curricula learning outcomes but also promote positive relationships between individuals, communities and the natural world. 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 secondary school educators organise a field trip to a Parks Victoria site, tread lightly during outdoor activities and know who to contact for more information.

## Finding the right location

Parks Victoria manages a diverse range of over 3,000 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 place to find out what park is most suitable for your visit is 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 – Minimal Impact Guidelines

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 *Minimal Impact Guidelines for Schools*, you and your students can learn in and about these amazing natural places while helping us to protect them.

The *Minimal Impact Guidelines for Schools* are available on the Parks Victoria website and should be referred to for information regarding how to manage specific activities for minimal environmental impact. Reviewing the guidelines with your students before undertaking a field trip will help to foster a mindful and respectful approach to being in nature.



## Managing risk outdoors

While learning outdoors is a fantastic way to develop skills and knowledge, there are hazards associated with outdoor environments that must be adequately addressed before setting out on a field trip. Completing a risk assessment will inform your field trip planning and will identify the resources, staff and equipment required. The type and level of risk, and possible consequences, will differ depending on a range of factors including the location, activity and cohort of students.

Factors to consider when assessing the suitability of outdoor locations include:

- staff experience and qualifications required for the activity and location (including first aid)
- the level of access to resources, services and facilities that may be needed, such as campsites, water, walking trails, toilets, shelter from extreme weather, or interpretive information
- the level of access to communication equipment and networks for routine and emergency use
- evacuation points and routes including alternative routes in the event of an emergency
- the external assistance available in the event of an emergency or extreme weather conditions
- the potential exposure to environmental hazards and difficulties
- the ability and fitness levels of students

You can find comprehensive guidelines for planning a field trip on the Department of Education and Training's [Excursion guidelines page](#).

## Keeping informed about park and weather conditions

When learning outdoors, conditions can change at short notice. Monitoring the weather and emergency warnings in the days leading up to and on the day of



your field trip will help you to keep your group safe. When undertaking a field trip on a Parks Victoria site, you should also keep up-to-date with changing park conditions. The following links will assist you to identify risks for your risk management plan and allow you to develop alternative arrangements for keeping students safe in a changing environment.

- [Change in park conditions](#) - any change of conditions will be listed on the individual park's page on the Parks Victoria website.
- [Code red park closures](#) - information about park closures due to Total Fire Ban.
- [Planned Burn Notification System](#) - planned burns are coordinated and managed by Forest Fire Management Victoria and can be implemented at short notice as the weather allows; usually during spring and autumn. You can subscribe to be notified when planned burns are going to take place but be aware this information can be sent at very short notice.

## Adventure activity guidelines

An adventure activity is any activity that involves greater than normal risk. The safe running of outdoor and adventure activities requires:

- appropriate planning,
- the identification of potential risks and difficulties,
- active decision making, and,
- the use of an accredited provider to lead activities where there are not appropriately trained school staff.

You can find comprehensive guidelines for planning specific adventure activities for schools on the Department of Education and Training's [Excursion guidelines page](#).



## Let us know you're coming

Once you've decided on a location, organised your field trip 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's 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 visitor communication and emergency management. You can let us know you'll be visiting with your class by registering your field trip 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 a field trip 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](mailto:events@parks.vic.gov.au) or give us a call on 13 19 63.





## Learning for nature

Field trips are a fantastic way to address curriculum outcomes and students' learning needs. Perhaps even more importantly, field trips 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.

## Nature journaling

Creating a nature journal with your students can help to foster a mindful approach to your upcoming field trip and can assist with unpacking *Minimal Impact Guidelines for Schools* before you leave the classroom. As land managers, Parks Victoria undertake many actions to care for Victoria's protected places. Creating a nature journal helps you to tune in and notice even the smallest things around you. You can use or adapt the journaling 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.

## Protecting our places

Volunteering is a fantastic way to get hands-on during a field trip 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 field trip 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 the *Minimal Impact Guidelines for Schools* and create a nature journal to foster positive environmental values and respectful behaviours
- ❑ Monitor weather and emergency updates. 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](mailto:education@parks.vic.gov.au) or call 13 19 63.

