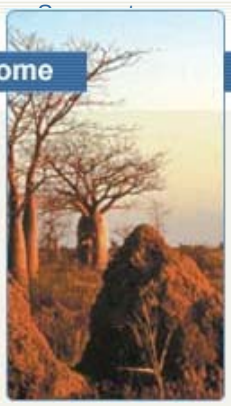

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

"The notion that [outdoor] recreation has no environmental impacts is no longer tenable."
Curtis H. Flather and H. Ken Cordell

What effect does a footstep have?

The answer is, it depends.

A footstep means different things to a young tree and meadow grass, to leaf litter and fragile soil, to a gravelly river bank and rain forest moss. Unfortunately, trampling causes vegetation damage and soil erosion in virtually every environment. Recovery that takes a year in some environments might take 25 years in others.

Other impacts are also possible. Most soils contain animals that live or feed on decaying plants. Trampling destroys habitat for insects, earthworms, molluscs, and snails, as well as the fungi that fertilise the soil and help make re-growth possible. Vegetation protects underlying soils. Once plant growth is destroyed, erosion can continue with or without further use. In general, wherever you travel and camp, use surfaces that are resistant to impact such as rock outcrops, sand, gravel, dry grasses, snow, and water.

Avoid non-durable surfaces such as soft plants, riparian zones, muddy sites, and fragile soil layers. When travelling along a shoreline, hike on durable surfaces and spread out. Along stretches of coastline where there are no designated trails, hiking at low tide is generally best because the hard sand, gravel, or rock of the intertidal zone (the area between the highest and lowest tides) is exposed. In this area, be careful to avoid crushing intertidal life such as mussels and barnacles. Hiking at high tide usually causes greater impact because the higher water level may force you to walk in fragile sand dunes or vulnerable coastal vegetation.

Concentrate use in popular areas In popular areas, aim to concentrate use on tracks, established campsites, and other developed sites such as trailheads and picnic areas.
Concentrating use in these areas and, if necessary, on the surfaces mentioned earlier, will minimise disturbances to soils and vegetation. Stay on designated tracks.

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