

# November 2023 Trail Talk Calendar



## Topic: Leave No Trace Principle 2 - Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

This month the conservation committee would like to promote the importance of traveling on durable surfaces while spending time in the great outdoors. We are asking Worcester Chapter activity leaders to promote this topic and to incorporate it into your pre-activity trail talk. This is the second of the seven principles of “Leave No Trace,” and is essential to protect the soil from erosion and compaction from increased human foot traffic. Over time, people can cause great destruction to sensitive ecosystems by overuse and nonstop trampling over vegetation.

Here is some information to discuss with your group:

### 1.) What is a durable surface?

- Durable surfaces can consist of established trails, campsites, rock, gravel, and dry grasses or snow. Many places can get compacted by thousands of footsteps every day. Trails help minimize this impact by concentrating it to one area protecting the ecological health and the visual beauty of the surrounding environment. The concept of durability is an important one for all travelers to understand.
- **Rock, sand, and gravel:** These surfaces are highly durable and can tolerate repeated trampling and scuffing. (However, lichens that grow on rocks are vulnerable to repeated scuffing.)
- **Ice and snow:** The effect of travel across these surfaces is temporary, making them good choices for travel, assuming reasonable safety precautions are followed and the snow layer is of sufficient depth (6 inches or more) to prevent vegetation damage.
- **Vegetation:** The resistance of vegetation to trampling varies. Choose areas of durable vegetation or sparse vegetation. Dry grasses tend to be resistant to trampling. Wet meadows and other fragile vegetation quickly show the effects of trampling. Fewer than 25 passes over sensitive vegetation can create a trail and permanently damage sensitive plants. If you must travel off-trail, spread out to avoid creating a path that encourages others to follow. Avoid vegetation whenever possible, especially on steep slopes where the effects of off-trail travel are magnified.

- **Living soil:** Referred to as cryptobiotic crust or crypto, living soil is often found in desert environments and is highly vulnerable to foot traffic. Living soil consists of tiny communities of organisms that appear blackish and irregularly raised crusts on the desert floor. This crust retains moisture in dry climates and provides a protective layer, preventing erosion. One single footstep can destroy this fragile soil. Travel across living soil should only be done when necessary. Walk on rocks or other durable surfaces if you must travel off-trail. In broad areas of living soil where damage is unavoidable, it is best to follow in one another's footsteps so the smallest crust area is affected, precisely the opposite guidance for traveling through vegetation.
- **Desert puddles and mud holes:** Water is a precious scarce resource for all living things in dry climates. Don't walk through desert puddles, mud holes or disturb surface water in any way. Potholes are also home to tiny desert animals.

## 2.) How to choose a campsite

- Try to choose an established campsite whenever possible. This limits the impact on further areas. Be sure to choose a campsite that is large enough to accommodate your group and gear.
- It's important to keep campsites as small as possible, and not to expand on the area of use, called "site creep." Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
- Make sure to protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams. This allows wildlife to access water.
- Try to remember that good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.
- Walk single file in the middle of the trail even when wet or muddy.
- Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Avoid places where impacts are just beginning, instead opt for campsites that are so highly impacted that further careful use will not cause additional impact.

## 3.) How to travel on trails.

- Know your group size and where everyone will be traveling (Ex: Keep groups small and dispersed to avoid excessive clustering of people.)
- Stay on designated trails whenever possible. Trail restoration is expensive, takes a long time, and is extremely hard work! Sticking to trails is a way to say "thank you!" to trail-builders.
- When hiking, keep within the trail's width by walking single-file in the middle of the trail, even through muddy areas. When people walk in larger groups, or venture off the sides of trails, they can eventually become up to 10 ft wide and look like mud pits.

#### 4.) Traveling off the beaten path.

- Undesignated trails (also known as social or user-created trails) suffer from poor design, which leads to greater erosion, poor drainage, and damage to sensitive plants and habitats.
- “Social” trails near rivers have led to increased bank erosion, channel width, and sediment transport.
- Shortcuts are often less safe than the designated trail, increasing the chances for bruises, bumps, and twisted ankles.
- Animals quickly learn that trails are not good places to build homes or protect their young and will avoid them. Traveling off-trail can frighten wildlife away from vital food and water sources and cause them to abandon their young.



Source: <https://betweenthepine.com/leave-no-trace-elopement/>