



# Eco Trekker

**A**n outdoor trek can mean anything from a walk in the woods to a long-distance hike. As an eco trekker, you will discover your important role in nature and find an environmental issue to explore. You will become responsible for the choices you make outdoors. You will learn how to conserve, preserve, and protect, and then share your knowledge with others.

## Steps

1. Learn how to make minimal impact on a trek
2. Plan an eco trek with a purpose
3. Practice an eco skill on your trek
4. Make a difference on your eco trek
5. Make a difference after your eco trek

## Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll have learned the skills for minimizing my impact on the environment while planning and taking an outdoor trek.



Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

## STEP

# 1 Learn how to make minimal impact on a trek

In Girl Scouting, you've pledged respect for nature by being considerate and caring and using resources wisely. Leave No Trace is a group aligned with those beliefs. They created Seven Principles that will help you leave minimal impact on the land. Let Leave No Trace be a lifelong guide in your relationship with nature.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Interview an experienced outdoor enthusiast.** Talk to someone who regularly enjoys the outdoors—like a hiker, kayaker, or mountain climber. Go over the Leave No Trace Seven Principles with them and find out why they think they are important. Find out what they do to protect nature. What does a hiker do when forced off a trail? What happens when a climber encounters wildlife? Get the stories and tips that will help you on your outdoor trek.

OR .....

- ☐ **Visit a local environmental conservancy group.** Find out how they practice the principles in the outdoors and get tips to help you on your trek. Learn what land, air, or water concerns there are in your area.

OR .....

- ☐ **Take the Leave No Trace Online Awareness Course.** Go to [www.lnt.org/learn/online-awareness-course](http://www.lnt.org/learn/online-awareness-course) for a 30- to 60-minute course that includes questions about Leave No Trace practices and techniques. (Note: The course doesn't work on a mobile device.) Learn about the Leave No Trace history and mission, find out about visitor-created impacts in recreational areas, and understand how to apply the Seven Principles on your outdoor trip. You can print a certificate when you complete the course.





## Nature, Defined

In Sweden, the word **gökotta** (pronounced zyohh-koh-tah) means “rising in the early morning to watch the birds or to go outside to appreciate nature.”

In Japanese, the word **komorebi** means “sunlight that filters through the leaves of trees.” Can you think of English words that celebrate nature?

## Leave No Trace

Learn and be prepared to use the Leave No Trace Seven Principles to help protect the environment as you explore. **The principles are:**

- 1 Plan Ahead and Prepare:** Do what it takes to accomplish your trek goals safely and enjoyably, while also minimizing damage to the land.
- 2 Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** Avoid travel damage, which occurs when surface vegetation or communities of organisms are trampled beyond recovery. The resulting barren area leads to soil erosion and development of undesirable trails.
- 3 Dispose of Waste Properly:** Carry out what you carry in—never dump anything on a campsite or into a water source. Bury solid human waste at least 200 feet from water, trails, and camp—and at least 6–8 inches deep.
- 4 Leave What You Find:** Don't collect or take anything from the outdoors.
- 5 Minimize Campfire Impacts:** If campfires are not allowed in certain parks or protected areas, pack a lightweight cooking stove and lantern.
- 6 Respect Wildlife:** Only check them out at a distance. Never approach, feed, or follow them.
- 7 Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** Remember you're not alone in the wilderness. Keep your voices down and let nature be the loudest sounds you hear.



## STEP 2 Plan an eco trek with a purpose

**Start by deciding where to spend your time in nature—do you have a park nearby? Trails you want to explore? Make sure to plan what you'll eat and wear, depending on the weather and the amount of time you'll be outdoors. Use the buddy system by trekking with others, never alone. Always let an adult know where you'll be.**

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Talk to an experienced hiker or outdoor retailer.** Find out where you can take an outdoor trek in your area and what land, air, or water issues you might find on the trail. Make it somewhere you haven't been before so you can see nature with new eyes. Plan ahead to address one issue you learned about.

OR

- ☐ **Visit a water source or water treatment plant in your community.** Learn about water conservation or water quality efforts being made for your area. Plan a boat trip on a lake or river, or hike a trail that goes along a waterway to explore one water quality issue you learned about.

OR

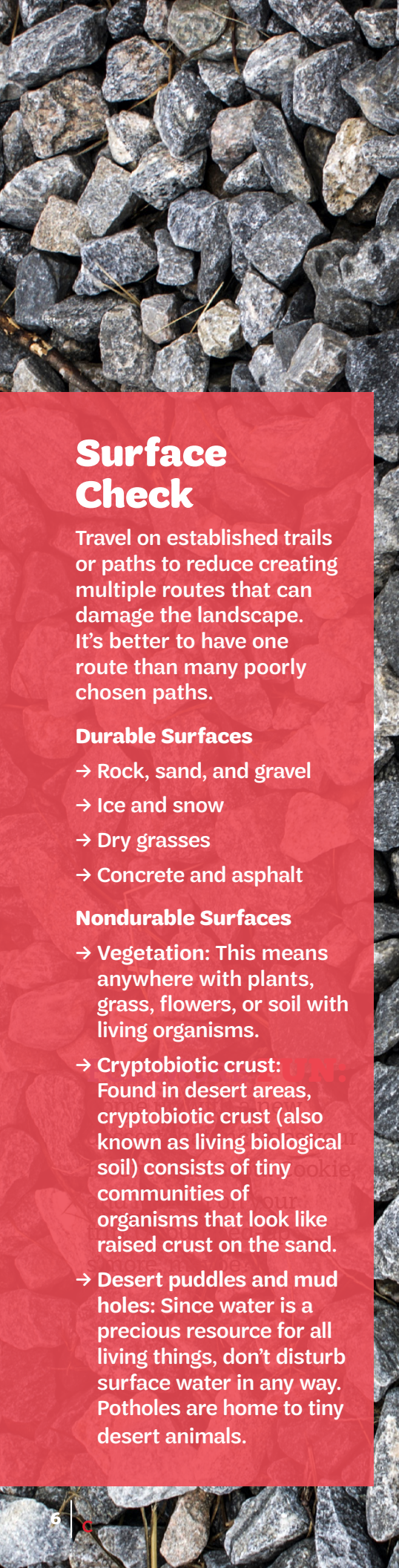
- ☐ **Learn about invasive plants, aquatic life, or other species in your area.** Find out how you can help prevent invasive species from being introduced into the area. Make a plan for an outdoor trek where you can explore an invasive species.



# More to Explore: National Parks

Many national park websites include volunteer programs that offer Girl Scouts a chance to get involved in short- or long-term projects to improve and protect park resources and facilities. Check out what might be available for you and your troop!





## Surface Check

Travel on established trails or paths to reduce creating multiple routes that can damage the landscape. It's better to have one route than many poorly chosen paths.

### Durable Surfaces

- Rock, sand, and gravel
- Ice and snow
- Dry grasses
- Concrete and asphalt

### Nondurable Surfaces

- **Vegetation:** This means anywhere with plants, grass, flowers, or soil with living organisms.
- **Cryptobiotic crust:** Found in desert areas, cryptobiotic crust (also known as living biological soil) consists of tiny communities of organisms that look like raised crust on the sand.
- **Desert puddles and mud holes:** Since water is a precious resource for all living things, don't disturb surface water in any way. Potholes are home to tiny desert animals.

## STEP

# 3 Practice an eco skill on your trek

**Before your trek, do the research and make a plan to practice an eco skill. While on your trek, do one of these three things—or all of them!**

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Identify durable surfaces.** One Leave No Trace principle is to travel and camp only on durable surfaces, like rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow. A surface is durable when it can tolerate repeated trampling and scuffling. (You can read more in the box on this page.) Check the surface on your path—and off it—to identify the different properties. Bring a map and make notations of areas where the path might be compromised.

**OR**

- ☐ **Find a source for water and purify it when you get home.** Find a safe water source and collect the water. When you get home, purify it. (Read more in the box on page seven.) You don't have to drink it, but if you can, test the water before and after for impurities.

**OR**

- ☐ **Build a minimum-impact mound fire.** With an adult in a safe setting, follow the instructions on page eight and build a mound fire at a campsite or in a park. Make sure to check for permissions and fire regulations beforehand.



## Water Sources

### Good:

- Clear flowing water from a stream without signs of pollution can be collected.
- Snow and ice, if eaten, can lower your body temperature, so let it melt in a container before purifying it. Do not consume snow or ice until purified, and never start with discolored snow. It should be white and fresh.

### Not good, unless you have proper purification or filtration:

- Still water that is stagnant and doesn't move, such as that from lakes or ponds, can have bacteria.
- River water is typically polluted.
- Seawater is not good but if it's all that's available, boil it, collect the steam with a plastic sheet or bag, and drink that.

## Purify It

- 1 First, filter your found water. Run it through a coffee filter or even a clean T-shirt.
- 2 Next, boil it. The safest way to kill bacteria and viruses in water is to bring it to a rolling boil for at least 60 seconds.
- 3 Do a taste test. Does water from a found source taste different from bottled water?



## How to Build a Mound Fire

The advantage of a mound fire is that it can be built on flat exposed rock or on an organic surface such as litter, duff, or grass. You will need:

- **Garden trowel**
- **Large stuff sack**
- **Ground cloth or plastic garbage bag or tarp**
- **Coals**

- 1 First, make sure it's OK to build a fire. Check regulations in the area.
- 2 In your stuff sack, collect some mineral soil, sand, or gravel from an already-disturbed source, like the root hole in an upturned tree.
- 3 Spread out your ground cloth on a flat surface that will have the least impact on the land, away from any vegetation.
- 4 Dump your soil into a circular, flat-topped mound at least 6-8 inches tall and 18-24 inches wide. The thickness of the mound protects the ground below from the fire's heat. The ground cloth or garbage bag is important because it makes cleaning up the fire much easier. Keep the circumference of the mound no larger than what you need to spread the coals for the size of your fire.
- 5 Spread your coals and light the fire. Make sure to always keep an eye on it.
- 6 Put out your fire—burn the coals all the way through until they become ashes that are cool to the touch. Sprinkle the fire with water but never pour water on a fire because it turns to instant steam.
- 7 Once your fire is out, dispose of the ashes and soil by scattering them. Fold the ground cloth up so it's ready to use again. Return leaves, twigs, and other natural materials to the place your fire was located so the area is back to normal.

## Campfire Safety Tips

- Make sure the fire building area is clear of overhanging branches, steep slopes, rotted stumps or logs, dry grass and leaves, and anything that could burn, like litter or pine needles.
- Watch for flying sparks! Tell an adult if you see any, and have them help you put them out right away.
- Make sure you have a bucket of water or sand near your fire.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Don't wear anything nylon or plastic, like a poncho, near an open flame.
- Remove any scarves or loose clothing.
- Tie back long hair before starting a fire.

## STEP

# 4 Make a difference on your eco trek

Now is your chance to act as an environmentalist explorer. Select the issue that means something to you, whether water, land, or wildlife—and do research before your trek. On your trek, take notes, observe, and come up with possible solutions to help. You'll put your ideas into action in the next step.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Explore a wildlife issue.** The best way to protect wildlife is to give them space and distance when you trek into the natural environment and help protect the habitats they live in. Find out what wildlife you should expect to find on your outing and the ones that are endangered. This can include marine life, birds, insects, butterflies, squirrels, and other critters. How are they being protected? How are they being threatened?

OR .....

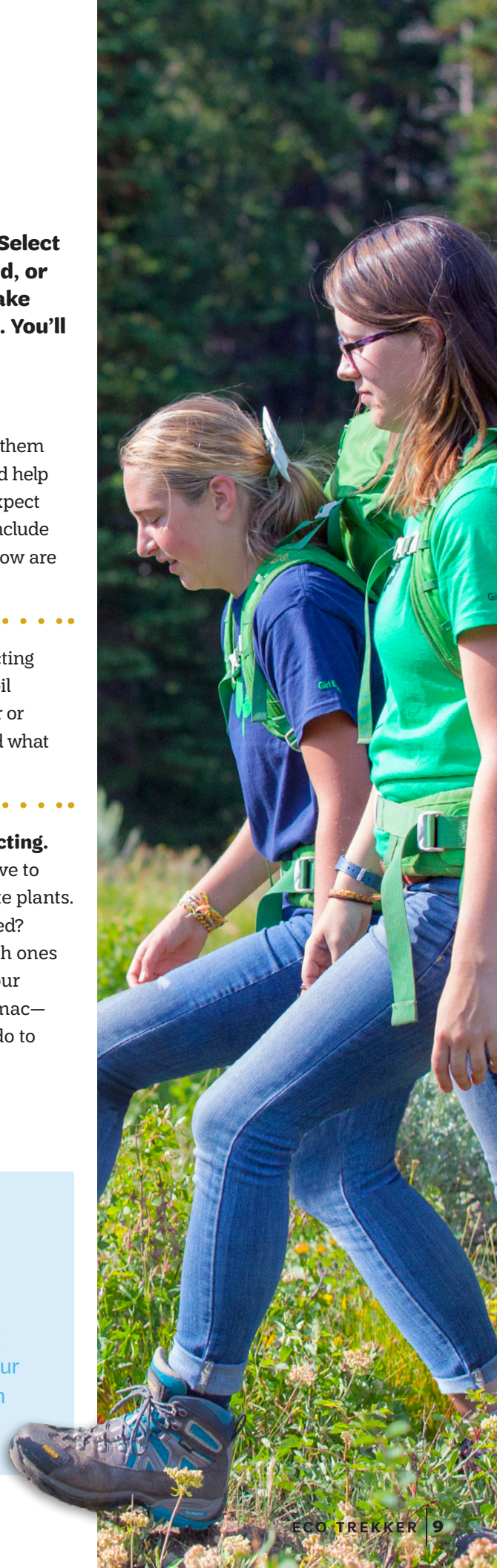
- ☐ **Explore a water issue.** Is there a drought in your area that's impacting plants and wildlife? Or has rain and snow caused mudslides and soil erosion? You might discover a polluted water source, such as a river or pond. Or see traces of tar from an oil spill along a sand bank. Record what you see and think of solutions based on your research.

OR .....

- ☐ **Explore species in your area that are native and need protecting.** Before your trek, find out what plants, insects, or animals are native to your area. Native insects, like bees or butterflies, can help pollinate plants. Are any of these native plants or wildlife threatened or endangered? While outdoors, check to see which species are thriving and which ones are not. (Before you go, learn which plants you need to avoid in your area—like poison ivy, poison oak, stinging nettles, and poison sumac—and keep a close eye out for insect nests.) Find out what you can do to protect any species that need help.

## Give Boots the Brush

Before and after hiking the Appalachian Trail in Tennessee, hikers use a boot brush to scrub mud and debris from their boots. Help avoid the spread of invasive species by brushing your own soles to remove dirt and seeds before and after your trek. Also take the time to remove dirt, plants, and bugs from your clothing and gear.





## STEP

# 5 Make a difference after your eco trek

You completed your eco trek—hooray! Now make a difference by creating awareness and inspiring others about your issue.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

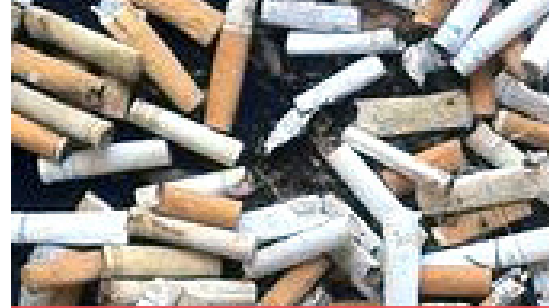
- ☐ **Make a video of your eco trek.** Put together a short documentary of your trek and the environmental issue you explored. Share it with your troop, school, family, and friends. Get a discussion going after your presentation to talk about possible solutions.

OR

- ☐ **Make an art installation.** While on your eco trek, collect human-made, littered objects (while wearing gloves!) you find along your journey. Create a sculpture or art presentation with these objects. Display your work at school or a community place to inspire others.

OR

- ☐ **Start an awareness campaign.** Create awareness to get the word out in your school and community about the environmental issue you explored. Create a flyer, write a blog, or design a newsletter.



## Museum of Litter

An online museum shows art made from trash found in nature. What do you think the number one trash item is? (Yep. Cigarette butts!)





## Going on a Journey?

### Do some badge work along the way.

On the *Breathe* Journey, you learn how to improve your personal air space and make a difference in Earth's air. You become aware of everything around you and examine your attitudes and behavior. Use these same skills and reflections as you work through each step of your Eco Trekker badge.

### Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Adopting a troop of younger girls and taking them on an outdoor trek to show how to have minimal impact on the environment
- Making my home wildlife-friendly by, for example, making sure garbage cans have locking lids, placing decals on windows to prevent birds from crashing into them, and recycling
- Volunteering at a local wildlife refuge or park to do cleanup or other type of service

I'm inspired to:

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