



Ministry of Water, Land
and Air Protection



INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WHO WISH TO HIKE IN STRATHCONA PARK

The Paradise Meadows/Forbidden Plateau and Mt. Becher areas of Strathcona Provincial Park receive a large amount of use from local schools. These areas serve as incredible outdoor classrooms and can form a great curriculum in outdoor education, ecology, geology and all other forms of learning.

There have been a number of situations arise over the last few years which, with a little knowledge, can be alleviated. Some of these situations include members of groups becoming separated, garbage and litter being left in areas, several schools arriving at the same destination on the same day, vegetation being picked or trampled and wildlife fed or harassed.

The following information will hopefully alleviate these problems, help the teachers and students in trip preparation, and provide a base of knowledge for the teachers and students so the trip is a learning experience as well as a fun outing.

Trip Scheduling

All teachers anticipating a trip into Strathcona Park should review this information package and [register their hiking group](#).

Please note, this registration is NOT for safety purposes. Groups are not monitored for safe returns. Registration is primarily for statistics and to provide us an opportunity to contact you should we feel there is a need. This information should also be distributed and discussed with all teaching assistants and accompanying parents. Individual schools should be limited to 2 classes on any given day. We have had instances in the past where 3-4 hundred students have arrived at Paradise Meadows on the same day. Bookings will be on 1st come 1st serve basis.

Trip Preparation

This is a critical stage in the planning of an outing into the backcountry. Remember for any hike in the wilderness that you must be prepared for unforeseen circumstances.

Specific items include:

1. **appropriate clothing** - all participants should be instructed to dress in layers and have some rain gear. Fabrics such as polypropylene and fleece should be encouraged while cotton clothing should be discouraged.
2. **food and water** - ensure that everyone has appropriate food and enough water/drink for the outing. It is wise to encourage nutritious snacks and drinks;
3. **first-aid kit** - appropriate to the number of participants and the level or length of trip; and
4. **survival gear**. Appropriate survival gear should be in leaders' packs. All students should carry a garbage bag and whistle. Pre-trip survival training such as "Hug-a-Tree" or "Lost in the Woods" programs should be considered for all participants.

Leader's Responsibility

All leaders should discuss their plan for the trip prior to leaving. The quality and cohesiveness of the leaders will reflect on the trip.

1. **First-Aid.** At least one leader should have appropriate first aid ticket or knowledge.
2. **Leadership Skills** Ensure leaders have the necessary skills to lead a group into the backcountry?
3. **Map and Compass.** Leaders should have a map and compass as well as an appropriate level of map/compass knowledge for the area they will be visiting.
4. **Communication.** Good communication should be established prior to the trip (how, when and where communication will take place), and leaders should communicate frequently throughout the trip keeping all leaders informed of the members of the group. Radios and cell phones should be carried by the group in case of emergencies and to ensure group cohesiveness.

Safety

Safety is the largest concern when taking school children out at any time. When in the backcountry, options are limited for help so you must be prepared.

1. **Weather.** Weather extremes can occur at any time in Forbidden Plateau. Check with the local weather office prior to departing (339-8044). Remember that local weather in the mountains may not be the same as the local forecast. **BE PREPARED.**
2. **Itinerary.** Leave notice with school administration and parents of when you are departing, where you are going and when you will be back. Have an EMERGENCY PLAN in case something goes wrong and be able to communicate to those waiting for your return (even if it is only late arrival).
3. **Bears & Cougars.** There are a lot of bears and cougars in the Forbidden Plateau area. You will, however, be lucky if you see them. Black bears and cougars are not normally a problem but you should take precautions just in case.
 - All food should be sealed in plastic bags so food smells do not permeate clothing or packsacks and attract bears.
 - Never feed bears or any wild animals (this includes the fearless Whiskey Jacks).
 - Keep alert for bear signs such as fresh digging, scat or carrion and avoid those areas if necessary.
 - Keep groups together (10 to 15 per group)- don't let children hike by themselves.
 - Make noise while hiking, particularly when hiking into the wind, near streams, blind corners, and berry patches.

Group Dynamics

Taking a group into the backcountry is a large responsibility. In order to ensure safety, and fun you should take the following into consideration.

1. **Group Size.** Groups should be as small as possible (maximum -10 to 15) Impacts on vegetation can occur in large groups.
2. **Leader/Student Ratios.** Our standard leader/student ratio for groups hiking is 10 to 1. There should be a minimum of one leader for every 10 students.
3. Always have a buddy system.
4. Make frequent stops to ensure the group and all members stay together and do not get spread out.
5. Hike as fast as the slowest member of the group.
6. Have a leader at the front **and** rear of group.

Hiking

The following guidelines will help you in controlling your groups while in the park, and assist BC Parks.

1. Stay on trails (even if wet and muddy). Avoid field trip if conditions will encourage people to walk off trail.
2. Don't shortcut on switchbacks.
3. Walk single file on trails.
4. Obey all posted signs and rules and regulations.
5. Plan breaks at impacted or hardened areas to avoid impacting new areas.
6. Be courteous by allowing faster hikers to pass on trail and respecting others solitude in the backcountry.
7. Leaders should be at front and rear of all groups and head count should be done frequently.

Human Waste

Have students use washrooms prior to leaving on trips. Use outhouses provided where-ever possible. If outhouses aren't available, cat holes (shallow holes) should be dug for human waste. These should be located at least 50 metres away from any water source, trail or campsite. Holes should be appropriately covered with removed material after use.

Garbage

ALL GARBAGE SHOULD BE PACKED OUT. Pack out what you pack in. Assign members of the group to do a garbage sweep of each rest stop as the group is leaving. Please pick up any garbage regardless who has left it (small items such as straws, fruit peels, tissue, candy wrappers etc) are commonly found. Ask the children not to bring items such as shelled peanuts, pistachios or sunflower seeds. All these shells are considered garbage and should be cleaned up. Apple cores, peels, & other biodegradable items are garbage. Pack it out. You can really help us have a clean wilderness by following these basic rules.

Trail Etiquette

Please minimize your disturbance while in the park. Avoid harassing or bothering any wildlife, including Whiskey Jacks (inform students that while these fearless birds are experts at begging, it is not appropriate to feed them intentionally). Keep your group well controlled. Don't allow open music and consider banning walkmans. Students are there to experience the wilderness environment with all senses. Keep all yelling and screaming down to a dull roar. Please don't roll or throw rocks over cliffs or ledges - someone may be below. Do not disturb plants, rocks, moss bark or other natural items. They all form part of the ecosystem and we as visitors should have the least impact possible.

We hope this list provides you with details that will help you prepare for your outing. A trip to any area within Strathcona Park can be an incredible experience for all members of your group. By following some of the above rules and guidelines, your field trip will not only be fun, but impacts will be kept to a minimum, ensuring magnificent similar experiences by future groups.

PLEASE USE IT CAREFULLY, BE SAFE AND HAVE FUN!