


Published by:

**The Countryside Access and Activities Network for Northern Ireland** is an umbrella organisation that brings together all groups which have an interest in, or are involved with, countryside recreation. The Network is tasked with the strategic development and management of countryside recreation across Northern Ireland.
Website: www.countrysiderecreation.com

**The Duke of Edinburgh's Award** is a UK national organisation which provides a wide range of personal development programmes for 14- to 25-year-olds. The programmes are delivered through partnerships with a wide range of organisations. Over 16,000 young people are involved in the Award in Northern Ireland each year.
Website: www.theaward.org/northernireland

**The Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI)** is the all-Ireland representative body for mountaineering, including hillwalking, climbing and rambling. The MCI has 8500 members made up from over 100 affiliated clubs and 1000 individual members.
Website: www.mountaineering.ie

**The President's Award** is the National Challenge Award from the President of Ireland to the young people of Ireland. In 2003, around 10,000 young people entered for the Award.
Website: www.p-award.net

Acknowledgements:

The main text of this leaflet has been printed with the kind permission of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

Funded by:



Taking waste with you

Walkers and climbers in certain areas of North America are encouraged to take all their waste with them when they leave a wilderness area. However, a lack of suitable containers and disposal facilities in Britain and Ireland are possible sources of dangerous contamination. The techniques and facilities of getting rid of waste are still being developed here but are not yet common practice.

General hygiene

It is essential to wash your hands every time you go to the toilet, so make sure you make the effort when you are in the outdoors as well, particularly before handling food. The consequences of becoming ill in remote areas are more serious than at home. If water is not available, you may be able to rub your hands with damp grass or with a tissue, perhaps using a little water from your water bottle. Wet wipes are also useful, but remember to get rid of them properly.

Diseases

There are several infections you can catch by drinking contaminated water in the outdoors. Many will cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea, but the number of people who are infected like this is still quite small in Britain and Ireland. However, in many parts of the world, drinking untreated water causes a significant amount of illness. Wherever you are, if you get diarrhoea, it may ruin your trip or your holiday, so it is important to be careful about what you drink.

Contaminated or infected water may contain a variety of organisms, including bacteria and protozoa, which may cause stomach upsets or diarrhoea. Faecal coliform bacteria, including *Escherichia coli*, are thought to be the most common organisms you will come across, but there are many other possible bacteria such as *campylobacter* and *salmonella*, which can cause diarrhoea. Diarrhoea can also be caused by the protozoon *cryptosporidium*, which comes from human waste or from domestic animals' droppings. *Giardia lamblia* is a protozoon which may also cause a stomach upset with abdominal cramps, diarrhoea and 'eggy' burps and flatulence (wind). This organism is less common in Britain and Ireland and is more common in Asia and America. *Entamoeba histolytica* is another protozoon which may cause a stomach upset with diarrhoea or even dysentery (that is, bloody diarrhoea), as may some forms of bacterial disease. You can catch all of these infections by drinking infected water. The number of cases which happen in Britain and Ireland in the outdoors is low, but it is important to remember that carelessness could result in any one of these conditions.

Most cases of diarrhoea will settle in three to five days. You may not feel like eating, but it is important to remember to drink plenty of fluids when you have diarrhoea, otherwise you can become dehydrated (particularly if you have watery diarrhoea). If your diarrhoea is not settling or if you are feeling worse, it is important that you get medical advice. If you develop dysentery, you should get medical advice and treatment as soon as possible.

Many mountaineers travel to Third World countries each year, and some of them will be carrying a stomach disease when they return. If you have just returned from travelling and still have an upset stomach, you should get medical advice and take extreme care if you go into the mountains in Britain and Ireland while still infected.

Where to go
in the outdoors!





The subject of going to the toilet in the outdoors has been neglected over the years by the authors of many of the books and manuals that explain other essential outdoor skills.

In many ways it has been a taboo subject, which is a pity because, if done carelessly, the consequences of 'doing it wrong' can be very damaging.

The Countryside Access and Activities Network for Northern Ireland, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the Mountaineering Council of Ireland and the President's Award consider the advice in this leaflet to reflect good practice, which is based on the best information available from Britain, Ireland and abroad.

The main dangers to be aware of are:

- other people coming into contact with your waste;
- human waste getting into and infecting water;
- animals eating, rolling in and spreading human waste; and
- the visual pollution and the smell of human waste, if it is not dealt with correctly.

The best way of getting rid of human waste in the outdoors is usually to bury it. However, you need to do this sensitively, and there are times when it isn't possible. As a result, we recommend the following guidelines.

Protecting and using fresh water

- Remember that a mountain stream may be the water supply for a remote house, or that other walkers or climbers may be taking water from it lower down, so make sure you are at least 30 metres away from any running water when you go to the toilet.
- When camping, always take drinking water from above your site, and walk downhill and away from water to go to the toilet. We recommend that you use water purification tablets.
- Always check for contamination over a distance of at least 30 metres above where you take the water from.
- Although urine is less harmful than excrement (poo), its smell is unpleasant. It is best to urinate out in the open. Avoid urinating in caves, at the foot of crags or behind huts in the mountains.
- When washing yourself or your dishes, carry water at least 30 metres away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter dishwater you have strained. By using grass or sand to clean dishes, you can cut down on using soap.

Getting rid of human waste

- Waste rots faster if it is covered with soil and leaf mould. This also discourages animals from digging it up. Badgers and dogs love to roll in it, and even eat it.
- Be discreet. Go to the toilet at least 50 metres from paths and 200 metres from huts, campsites and crags.
- Whenever possible dig a 15-centimetre (6-inch) hole and bury your waste. Carry a hand trowel for this purpose.
- If digging a hole is impossible, you can spread your waste in a very discreet place, using a trowel or small rock, and then cover it with soil, vegetation or rocks. Spreading the waste as thinly as possible helps it to break down naturally.
- Squashing waste under a rock will slow down the process of decomposition or how long it takes to rot. It is better to cover it with a rock in such a way that the two aren't touching. This allows air to circulate and the waste to break down.
- Avoid digging or spreading in sensitive vegetation, such as level, high ground on mountains. Either bring your waste out in bags or containers, or at least carry it off the sensitive area.
- In snow, dig down into the soil. Burying your waste in the snow is only temporary until the snow melts.

Toilet paper

- Normal toilet paper takes a long time to break down, so consider using biodegradable toilet paper.
- While it is best to burn your toilet paper, be extremely careful not to start a fire in dry grass or in a forest. If you are not sure, take it with you. You should only bury it as a last resort.

Female sanitary items

Burying tampons and sanitary towels is not effective because they take a long time to rot. Animals may also dig them up. Use a secure container, such as a self-seal bag, and take them home.

Toilets

- Never miss an opportunity to use a proper toilet.
- Dry or composting toilets are used in remote places in many other countries and are now being introduced to some huts. If you find these, it is important to read any instructions and follow them clearly. If you don't use them properly, they don't work.