



Photo by Kate Hoch

Responsibly wild: it's up to all of us to be sustainable

By **Jack Haskel**, PCTA Trail Information Specialist

I'm not going to tell you about my favorite place on the PCT. I won't post a photo. I won't mention it online. Maybe one day I'll bring my closest friends, but they'll be sworn to secrecy.

I'm a selfie-loving social media addict. But when my personal hiking videos hit 130,000 views, I killed my account.

My special place is a lake off the PCT. It's fragile. It's stunning. It's wild. I treat it with extra care.

Lots of new people are learning about this incredible trail. The beauty, the tight-knit community and a long list of other positives put this trail on travelers' bucket lists across the world. The PCT story has been breaking into popular consciousness slowly but surely for a decades. But the stunning success of *Wild* launched our trail onto the world stage and into the minds of millions.

How will this affect the trail? It's a question I'm asked a lot. I can close my eyes and see people wringing their hands. Relax. It will be OK if we're careful.

The PCT passes through many fragile places. It's important that everyone walks with care. Water sources can be polluted, vegetation trampled, trails widened. There are other fragile things too: the human component has limits. Wilderness rangers, volunteers, search and rescue, trail angels are busy already.

Trails are built to provide access to important places while also concentrating use. A well-built and maintained trail is inviting. And a great trail encourages people to stay on it. The PCT, officially designated as one of our country's 11 National Scenic Trails, is built to welcome people. Get on the trail, explore, become engaged. Use these inspiring public lands.

The PCT will always remain difficult and isolated. These intrinsic qualities keep many away. The trail won't become San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf with throngs of people passing through. Sweat, grime, effort and commitment are required in heaping doses.

Even so, we all have a responsibility in taking special care of the landscape so it doesn't become degraded. And while we're out there, we should be mindful of one another, so as not to impose on the solitude and experience being sought by our "neighbors."

Here are ways we all can be responsibly wild:

1. Internalize Leave No Trace principles

With hundreds of thousands (more?) of camping nights on the Pacific Crest Trail every year, each act has an impact. Literally, millions of people will step on the trail after you go home. Every time someone relieves him- or herself, takes a sponge bath, or heads off trail cross-country, it has an impact.

Your commitment to practicing care is critical. Memorize the principles of Leave No Trace. Practice them. You'll be a part of a community of conscientious trail lovers who are helping to preserve a wild PCT.

Start with the first principle: plan ahead and prepare. Read, watch videos, take classes and learn best practices from experienced backpackers and PCT hikers. Visit our website - www.pcta.org - for PCT-specific Leave No Trace information.

Enjoy the PCT in places, times and directions that are less crowded. There are stupendous stretches that provide significantly more solitude. Hike outside the most popular times and away from the most popular locations.

2. Be safe and prepared

There is intrinsic risk in traveling outdoors. Unfortunately, becoming sick or injured on the PCT is not necessarily rare. You can minimize most of the risk with knowledge, equipment and planning.

Since you're responsible for your own safety, take charge well before you hit the trail. You'll be in the wilderness far from doctors and clinics. Take a course in wilderness first aid. You'll practice scenarios, listen to lectures and have the opportunity to ask questions.

Be sure not to miss the forest for the trees. Often, people fear bears and mountain lions while ignoring more common dangers. A well-researched hiker will start to see threads including over-use injuries, heat illness or infection. In class, you'll learn how to deal with common illnesses and injuries that can quickly overtake people in the backcountry.

The PCT can teach hard lessons. Some warnings are better received on a day hike or short trip where the consequences may be less severe. So get out and hike. Explore your physical fitness limits, abilities and the quirks of your body before you commit to crossing a remote mountain pass or a long waterless desert. Talk to your doctor to minimize the chance that a pre-existing medical condition will turn into a serious, life-threatening scenario far from help.

And always remember to leave no trace, only footprints. 🌿

Thanks for protecting the trail! Follow these Leave No Trace principles in all your outdoor pursuits:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impact
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors

Learn more at:

www.pcta.org/leave-no-trace/



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