

Orientation to Black Rock Forest for Teachers and Students

Enjoying experiences in the outdoors comfortably and safely requires education and preparation. Participant orientation is an important component of the initial, in-school stage of program planning and development for educational trips to Black Rock Forest.

Though your approach may vary in sharing the following information, it is important that all of these areas be addressed in preparing students for excursions in the Forest. A student who is inappropriately dressed for the conditions, unaware of what to do in specific situations, or unprepared for natural hazards cannot safely and positively participate in educational activities in the Black Rock Forest. Be creative...this material can be effectively presented using a variety of inviting, practical, and enjoyable approaches.

1. Forest Usage Policies

The Black Rock Forest Consortium has established guidelines for safe and environmentally sound [usage](#) of the forest, including a statement of environmental ethics (at the end of this section).

2. Dress

Though the specific type of clothing will vary from season to season and day to day, the following are general guidelines.

- In general, the Forest is 5⁰F cooler than the surrounding lowlands, so in any season dress accordingly.
- Long pants are a must. Given the possibility of encountering deer ticks, pants tucked into socks are the standard, especially off-trail or in high grass.
- Dress in layers. Due to changes in weather and level of activity, air and body temperature can change drastically over the course of a day in the Forest. A shirt, light sweater, and jacket/windbreaker provide more flexibility than just a shirt and heavy jacket.
- Anticipate rain. If dressed properly, being outdoors in the rain can be safe and enjoyable. If students have ponchos or rain coats, they should bring them. Your school may want to buy some inexpensive plastic ponchos as spares, or at least bring large plastic garbage bags that can be used as emergency ponchos.
- Wear a cap or hat. Headwear is a functional addition, providing a screen from the sun and protection from insects. In cool weather, a cap or hood controls heat loss. A large percentage of the body's heat escapes from the neck and head.

- For footwear, waterproofed hiking boots or sturdy shoes are ideal, especially in cold weather. Sturdy sneakers are acceptable in warm weather; sandals, pumps, or other light-weight or open-toed shoes are not. Socks are necessary and we recommend that students bring a change of socks with them.

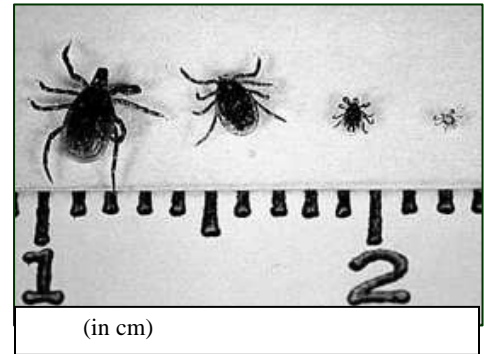
3. Health and Safety

All students participating in programs in the Forest need to be trained so that they can behave in an informed, responsible way.

- **Sanitation.** Bathroom facilities are available in both the Science and Education Center and the Forest Lodge. From April through November, there are portable toilets located near the Stone House that can be used by students and staff. Whenever possible, one of these portable toilets should be used. When these facilities are not accessible, the “cat” method of human waste disposal should be used. When using this method, an individual locates a spot at least 150 feet away from open water or wetlands. The surrounding land should be fairly high with plenty of dry leaves, pine needles, or grass as forest floor litter. Watch out for poison ivy! The individual should clear back the forest litter in a small area – approximately 8 inches by 8 inches – and then dig a hole 2 to 4 inches deep with a stick or a small trowel supplied by the staff. Only a minimum of single-ply toilet paper should be used. All paper should be buried with the waste. Tampons or sanitary napkins should not be left; group leaders should have opaque plastic bags available for disposing of and transporting these out of the Forest. The human waste and paper should be covered completely with the soil and forest floor litter. By covering the waste in this way, a mini-compost pile is created which speeds up decomposition.
- **Drinking Water.** Though the clear waters of Black Rock Forest’s ponds and streams look drinkable, they may contain natural contaminants that could make you sick. You should not drink water from ponds and streams unless properly filtered.
- **Ticks.** Not all ticks carry the spirochetes that cause Lyme disease, but it is a good idea to protect yourself from being bitten. Each institution should take steps to protect its own visitors; here are some guidelines.
 - Stay in the center of trails and paths, avoid high grass, and avoid brushing against plants, bushes, or weeds. The ticks that transmit Lyme disease are likely to be on vegetation, having dropped from the animals such as mice and deer on which they feed.
 - Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when you are outdoors in potentially infested areas. Pull your socks up over your pant legs. Wear shoes, not sandals.
 - Wear light-colored clothing because the tiny ticks can be more easily seen against a light background.
 - Wear a hat and keep long hair close to your head.

- Consider spraying your clothes and exposed skin with a repellent containing 20 to 30% DEET (Off, Cutters, Muskol, etc.).

- Check for ticks on exposed parts of your skin or on your clothing every 3 to 4 hours. Researchers have found that ticks need to be feeding for 12 hours or more before the exchange of bacteria takes place.



- Inspect your body when you return home, particularly between legs, under arms, around the navel, at the back of knees, and about the head, neck and ears. Look for crawling or embedded ticks, or signs of a bull's eye-shaped rash whenever you bathe or shower.

- Do not touch wild animals.

- Removed attached ticks carefully and immediately.

- **Rabid Animals.** In the past, rabies has been found in some wild animals in the region, including raccoons, skunks, bats, woodchucks, and foxes. Though there have been no incidents to date of groups in Black Rock Forest encountering rabid animals, safety education is a sound addition to any participant orientation. Direct contact with any wild animal must be avoided. If any wild animals are sighted that seem extremely docile, disoriented, or aggressive, the Black Rock staff should be notified.

- **Poison Ivy.** Poison ivy is plentiful around ponds, dams, and stone walls in Black Rock Forest, and along roadsides in low-lying areas. Every student and staff member should be able to recognize the poison ivy leaves, vines, and berries (pictured right). The leaves appear in groups of three: as the old saying goes, "Leaves of three, leave them be." The irritants in the poison ivy plant are still active in the root and vines in the early spring and late fall when leaves are not present. If you do touch poison ivy, wash the affected areas thoroughly.



- **Illness/Injury.** Students need to understand that they have a responsibility to report any injuries, no matter how minor, or any illness to one of their instructors. In addition to complying with their institution's procedures for logging and treating student injuries, school staff supervising groups in the Forest are required to notify the Black Rock Forest staff of any accidents, injuries, or incidents that occur during excursions in the Forest.

- **First Aid.** Each school is responsible for carrying a comprehensive first aid kit. The Black Rock Forest staff is prepared to provide assistance in contacting emergency personnel through our local volunteer ambulance corps. The Black Rock Forest truck has a cell phone. Black Rock Forest Patrol members (see below) are also trained and ready to help if in the vicinity.

- **What to Do If Lost.** Prior to participating in programs in Black Rock Forest, students and staff should discuss what they should do if they get separated from their group and lose their bearings. It is important to stress during this orientation that they should stay where they are and not wander around trying to find their way. A helpful acronym to remember if lost is STOP: Stop! Think! Observe! Plan! It is also important to stress that lost participants should try to conserve their energy. The calories and fluids used in a panicked run through the woods could be better used to stay warm and clear-headed. A search for the lost hiker(s) may continue for a long period of time, possibly into the night. The Black Rock Forest staff should be notified immediately if an individual or group is lost. They can assist in organizing a search team.

4. Food and Drink

Calorie requirements and fluid use increase significantly during active outdoor programs. Menus for day-long trips in the Forest should include high-energy foods that can be snacked on while on the trails as hunger and energy requirements dictate, in addition to lunch and other foods. These snack foods can include candy bars, raisins, and other dried fruit trail mixes. We are promoting the use of foods that are healthy (low in processed sugars, fats, and additives) and that have a minimum of packaging and therefore waste. Involving students in making a trail mix can be an enjoyable and educational cooperative activity prior to the trip to Black Rock Forest.

If food is not stored in coolers, make sure that it does not contain ingredients that spoil easily, i.e., meats, fish and mayonnaise.

Water and other fluids are the responsibility of the individual and/or the school. There are no sources of drinkable water in the Forest at this time. Typically, students will need more fluids than usual when participating in outdoor programs regardless of the air temperature. Non-carbonated juices or water rather than carbonated sodas are recommended. Small plastic soda bottles make excellent, inexpensive individual water bottles. Please...no glass containers.

5. Fire

Fire is one of the greatest potential hazards in the Black Rock Forest. Although occasional fires are part of the natural disturbance regime of any forest, humans cause many more fires than would naturally occur. These fires can rapidly spread out of control, especially during dry periods, with potentially devastating effects for natural plant and animal communities. And since Black Rock Forest has many human neighbors and frequent visitors, fire can pose a threat to human life, homes and other property.

Therefore, we have a strict rule of **no open fires at any time** in Black Rock Forest. Cooking stoves and the use of the fireplace in the Stone House may be allowed, but check first with the Forest staff. Be particularly careful in times of high fire danger – the danger level can be checked on the sign at the Forest’s lower parking lot.

In addition, during times of extremely high fire danger the Forest may be closed to visitors. Therefore, trip leaders should always prepare back-up plans in case the Forest is closed. We can suggest activities centered around Forest Headquarters property, including our natural history

workshop. The Museum of the Hudson Highlands, located just 1.5 miles from the headquarters, is also an excellent place to take classes, with many exhibits on local flora and fauna. Please call them first to schedule your group visit (845-534-7781; closed Fridays). There are many other interesting sites suitable for educational and recreational visits within a short drive of Black Rock Forest.

Under some circumstances, Consortium groups may be allowed to enter the Black Rock Forest during high fire danger periods at the discretion of the Forest staff. These groups are subject to the following specific rules and regulations.

- Trip leaders must carry an official permission slip signed by the Forest Director or Forest Manager. Members of our fire patrol will want to see your permission slip as they have the important task of keeping unauthorized visitors out of the Forest.
- No matches, lighters, cigarettes, fireworks, or sources of flames or sparks of any type will be allowed. Use of fireplaces or stoves is included in this ban unless specifically granted on your permission slip.
- All vehicles in the Forest must display an authorized vehicle permit, signed by the Forest Director or Forest Manager, in their windshield at all times.
- Minimize your use of vehicles and other motorized equipment.
- Depending on road condition, bus entry may or may not be permitted. Consider walking in or using another means of transportation.
- Keep your group closely monitored at all times. Do not let students out of your sight. Keep your group within easy access of the road system and preferably near the Upper Reservoir. We may need to evacuate your group if a fire occurs.
- Report any fire or anyone not abiding to these rules to the Forest staff and/or Forest Patrol members as soon as possible.

6. The Black Rock Forest Patrol

During your visit to Black Rock Forest, you may well see members of the Black Rock Forest Patrol traveling through the Forest. Through a special agreement with the Consortium, these individuals are all volunteers from the local community, here to watch and listen for problems in the Forest. Please treat Patrol members courteously and remember that they are here to keep Black Rock Forest a safe and healthy place for all of us.

Patrol members also help with fire fighting and search and rescue operations, and will help orient visitors who might be lost or uncertain of their location. If you see any problems arising in the Forest or any unusual activities, please report them to the Forest staff and/or any Patrol members that you might encounter.

A Statement of Environmental Ethics

As we explore the Black Rock Forest and seek ways to learn from this rich natural resource, we need to be aware and conscientiously support the following.

- Black Rock Forest is a beautiful natural environment. Litter of any kind takes away from this beauty. We can help by taking out with us whatever we bring in.
- Water is a precious resource. Since most of the ponds and streams in Black Rock Forest are part of the water supply for Cornwall and Highland Falls, we need to help protect them by not polluting them in any way, including not swimming in them. Though the clear waters of Black Rock Forest look drinkable, they may contain natural contaminants that could make us sick.
- Fire can destroy this entire Forest. We can help protect it by not starting fires of any kind.
- Many things in the Forest are very fragile and take a long time to grow. We need to respect and take care of the Forest's plants and animals, including mammals, birds, amphibians, and insects, by staying on marked trails and not picking wildflowers, breaking off tree limbs, removing nests or eggs, or keeping little critters as pets to take home.
- It is exciting to discover a place that looks like no human being has been there. We can help create this feeling for others by leaving as few traces as possible that we have been in the Forest.
- The Forest has a music all of its own . . .the sounds of birds, amphibians, insects, and other animals, and the wind in the trees, to name a few of the melodies. If we leave at home the sounds of our every day life, especially the music from boxes and the beeps and buzzes of electronic games, we will be able to hear and enjoy these natural sounds.
- Whether we realize it or not, we are part of a natural web that includes the sun, the earth, water, air, plants and wildlife. As powerful and smart as we humans seem to be, we need all of these elements to survive. All these elements, on the other hand, did fine for millions of years without us. For our sake and the sake of others yet to come, we need to respect and take care of this beautiful natural resource, and to learn what it has to teach us.

We can make a difference! Our actions – what we choose to do and not to do, individually and as a group – can contribute to a cleaner, safer, healthier environment. Many of the major changes in our environmental laws began with efforts by a few individuals who were concerned and who wanted to make a difference.