

GOOD DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP OUTDOORS

By Michele Whiteaker and Diana Graber



Research before, share after. The time to use technology to enhance your nature experience is before you go and after you get back. Of course it's okay to make some time and space to snap a few photos while you're out, but otherwise turn that selfie stick into a walking stick, put your smartphone in your pocket and be present in your nature experience.

Turn off the sound and look around. Part of the nature experience is silence and wild sounds.

No one wants to hear the click, click, click of texting or taking photos. If you'd rather hear music on the trail, wear headphones. Nature is a sacred place to those who are enjoying it and the wildlife that calls it home. Do your best not to interrupt their experience.



Don't trample the woods to share your goods.

Getting that one-of-a-kind shot to share with your "friends" doesn't mean you have permission to trample or deface natural resources to get it. Recent events of graffiti at national parks shared on Instagram or ex-Scout Leaders knocking over ancient rock formations to shoot a video show the extent people will go to "share" their experience with others.

Tech is not terrible, but how you use it may

be. Technology is often vilified and placed into

opposition with nature experiences, but it can be a handy tool. Use it for identification, research, or how you would use a book (remember those?) to enhance your outdoor experience. But remember, you don't have to know the name of something to enjoy it.



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Don't be driven to distraction. Ask yourself: Is your tech helping you see things or is it making you miss the moment? If your goal is time in nature to balance your tech, give nature 100% of your attention. There are tales of a whole class missing the breaching of whales during a coastal hike or others who missed a deer smack in front of them because they were distracted by their devices.

Let "why" be your guide. Always ask yourself if what you are doing is worth the time or distraction. Do you NEED to do it? (Are you sharing with friends? Blogging to inspire others? Keeping a nature photo album? Telling a story? Doing research? Do you need it for navigation?) If the answer is "no" – then save your tech time for later and enjoy the moment.



Nature is its own best teacher. The real value of nature comes when we can experience it for what it is. When you see something occur in nature that you've never seen before and may never see again, that's the wonder that makes it so beneficial and just a small dose of what author Richard Louv calls "Vitamin N" can help us navigate struggles and makes us healthier, smarter, and happier.

An hour away is more than okay. Always, always, always leave time for enjoyment and the purity of the moment. Don't let the constant beeping of text messages, tweets, and waiting Snapchats get in the way. They will be there later. As you get out more, you'll get better at this. We promise.



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