



Toilet stops in the field: An educational primer and recommended best practices for field-based teaching

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Purpose

Many institutions do not have guidelines surrounding toilet stops on field trips, and the topic is rarely discussed. This document is intended to educate staff and students about toilet stops and menstruation in the field. This document also contains a set of recommendations for field work and field trips with the aim of minimising stress and anxiety for all parties.

Educational Primer

- **Many students will never have urinated outdoors before, and may not know this is expected on some fieldtrips.** For people who squat to urinate¹, there is a 'technique' to master and no one wants to learn in front of their peers and lecturers.
- **Inadequate (or inadequate communication about) toilet stops causes stress and discomfort.** Do not underestimate how much staff and students worry about toilet facilities on field trips, or how much energy staff/demonstrators may be already spending trying to anticipate and prevent problems.
- **It is not uncommon for people to manage their fluid intake to avoid needing to urinate outdoors.** This choice is not unique to students – some highly experienced staff do so as well. It is particularly common for people who need to squat to pee, on trips with minimal toilet facilities, on trips with large groups, or in landscapes that provide little cover. Restricting fluid intake is dangerous, and can lead to dehydration and urinary tract infections. Managing fluid intake is not a sign of ignorance, but reflects how much anxiety and stress is associated with field urination for some people.
- **Toilet stops are not just for urinating.** Menstruating individuals need to change pads/tampons at least every 4-8 hours, depending on their flow. Leaving a tampon in longer, using super absorbent tampons to compensate for infrequent toilet stops, or changing tampons with dirty hands all increase the risk of [toxic shock syndrome](#). Some people may want privacy to take medicine or injections. Some medical conditions, stress, or having your period can also affect the urgency and frequency with which one needs to defecate.
- **"This problem seems to be getting worse every year."**
No – it isn't. Awareness of the problem is getting better as there are more field scientists who are feeling more able to voice their experiences and concerns publicly.

Recommendations

General departmental policies:

- **Plan your itinerary.** Include regular toilet stops on your field trip. If you think this is impossible on your trip, re-read the educational primer and consider carefully whether your preferred itinerary is worth the resulting anxiety and distress. Keep in mind that students who are preoccupied worrying about toilet stops will not be active, engaged learners.
- **Field guides and field trip briefings should address urination and menstruation 'kit' in the same level of detail that you cover field gear like boots, compasses,**

¹ Note that people who squat to urinate includes most women, but also may include trans men, non-gender binary, or intersex individuals. Likewise, 'women' and 'people who menstruate' are not synonymous.

warm clothing. Young people may still be experimenting with options for managing their periods. Field guides can mention period products such as [Diva Cups](#), [Wuka/Thinx](#), as many students will not be aware of them. [Shewees](#) are an option for field urination while standing, although anecdotally, very few field scientists recommend them. There is a technique to master and, understandably, few will wish to engage with trial and error on group field trips. These products should not be used as an alternative to regular toilet stops.

- **Field guides and field trip briefings should state general policies about toilet stops.** General policies should include encouraging people to ask if they need an unscheduled toilet stop and a protocol for peeing in remote localities. For remote localities, our informal suggestion in house is to take a buddy or two to keep watch and find somewhere discreet to pee. Students should inform a member of staff when they peel off and when they return. This is preferable to group ten-minute-pee-breaks, which may leave people squatting in front of dozens of other people, which may be distressing. Students should also avoid splitting groups by perceived gender when announcing toilet stops (e.g. 'women to the left, men to the right'), as this can cause discomfort to trans and non-binary students.
- **Field guides and field trip briefings should highlight strategies for hydration.** Strategies to 'complement your hydration regime' besides drinking water might include [rehydration sachets](#), eating fruit, avoiding salty foods, but students should consult with medical professionals for more specific advice.

To do ahead of time for each field trip:

- **Itinerary.** Include a detailed itinerary in your field guide. List which stops have toilets (and approximate arrival time at each stop). At any stops where toilet availability is 'iffy' (e.g. seasonally closed or need to call ahead to ensure permission) this should not be left to chance. Call ahead and make sure the field guide is accurate. List coinage for coin-operated toilet facilities. Schedule ample time at toilet stops such that those that 'could pee, but don't need to' or wish to change a tampon or pad don't feel pressured to abandon the queue or skip the pad/tampon change. Flag supermarket stops so students know when they will have a chance to purchase (e.g.) sanitary supplies. A sample field stop itinerary from our Year 1 trip to Co. Antrim, NI, is at the bottom of this document.
- **Coach hire.** Hire coaches with toilets whenever possible even if you have planned toilet stops. Coach drivers sometimes discourage use of these toilets because they need to be emptied. You may wish to stipulate with the coach company that the drivers are dispatched with information on nearest sites for waste disposal.
- **Field trip briefing.** Explicitly discuss the toilet situation at each day/locality and lay out contingencies (e.g. whether you will be in easy driving distance of an emergency toilet or protocol for peeing in the field).
- **To bring.** As with medical or first aid kits, staff should carry a supply of pads and tampons (particularly important in places where students can't simply make their own way to a drug store or supermarket), toilet paper, rehydration sachets, hand sanitizer or wipes, and plastic baggies to dispose of tampons/pads/toilet paper if there are no rubbish bins. On trips with coin-operated toilets staff should bring proper coinage.

To do on each field trip:

- **Attitude/environment.** Students must never be made to feel remotely ashamed or guilty if they ask for an extra toilet stop or if they get dehydrated. Based on the experiences of ourselves and our colleagues across multiple institutions and in multiple countries, this is often not the case and likely *the* single most important and effectual change you can make.
- **Each stop/each day.** Field trip leader announces toilet situation and, where applicable, reminds students of the protocols for peeing in remote localities. Field trip leaders remind the students to continue to hydrate through the evening.

To do post-field trip:

- **Solicit feedback.** Often undergraduate students will be more comfortable approaching demonstrators/PhD students, so academic staff may be unaware of issues that arose. Ask them what they picked up on.

Sample front page for one stop on our Yr 1 field trip:

Day 1 - Location 2: Portrush Sill

Location	Ramore Head, Portrush, Grid ref: C 85538 41276
Habitas link	http://www.habitas.org.uk/escr/site.asp?Item=60
Main rock types/features	Dolerite, mudstone, hornfels, chilled margin, igneous layering, ammonites
Objective	Understand contact relationships between igneous and sedimentary rocks and consider the structure of igneous bodies
Activities	Examining igneous rocks focusing on mineralogy, grain size and texture. Also examining sedimentary rocks and considering the effect of magma emplacement.
Assessment	Observations and interpretations will feed into a model that will include other localities on this trip, so an evening sum up session will consolidate the observations of today
Logistics	14 miles (29min) from accommodation. 20 miles (40 min) from previous stop. Toilet facilities at locality: YES Time on section: approx. 2 hrs Walking: minimal, some across rocky foreshore Return 5.30 pm
Safety notes	Rock surfaces will be slippery when wet. Coach stops in a car park.
Relevant modules	Earth Systems, Structural Geology, Petrology, Volcanology and Geochemistry, Igneous and Metamorphic Petrology
Economic/applied	Magmatic systems carry metalliferous ore deposits. Sills in sedimentary basins affect the hydrocarbon system. Igneous bodies control geothermal systems while the magmatic system is active and form major structures in hydrological models.

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