

Simply One Page-Leave No Trace

This piece was created from my own reflections and vision. I used ChatGPT as a tool to help shape the text from my original concepts and structure. The final form is the result of thoughtful revision, my own editorial hand fueled by my one page intent. Mike Haddorff, 2516

The phrase *Leave No Trace* began as part of an outdoor-ethics movement promoted by the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service in the 1960s. As more people began exploring public lands, rangers encouraged hikers and campers to enjoy nature responsibly, to pack out what they packed in, minimize campfire scars, and leave the landscape as untouched as possible. The message was simple and good: respect the places that hold our wonder.

Dwelling on that phrase, I've begun to wonder if it's even possible.

When I step into the Poudre River, especially in the quiet stretches where the current rests, I can still see a thin dark film resting on the substrate, remnants of the 2021 flood. The water is clear and cold, but the silt beneath holds memory. Each time I wade in, even carefully, I stir the bottom. A gray cloud drifts out around my boots and slowly collects fading downstream.

That small moment tells a larger truth: I cannot move through this world without leaving a trace. My presence always has an effect, on the river, on the people I meet, on the places I pass through. To imagine otherwise is to deny reality. The question is not *whether* I leave a mark, but *what kind* of mark it will be.

When I am unaware, my movement stirs confusion or harm. But when I am present, attentive to where I am and who I'm with, my impact can bring clarity, healing, even peace.

Jesus modeled this kind of presence. He was never hurried, never careless. Wherever He went, people were seen, touched, restored. His trace was unmistakable.

So maybe the goal isn't to *leave no trace* after all. Maybe it's to move through life awake to the fact that we always do and to live each moment aware of the kind of mark we're leaving behind.

Reflection question:

What trace are you leaving behind in the places you walk today?