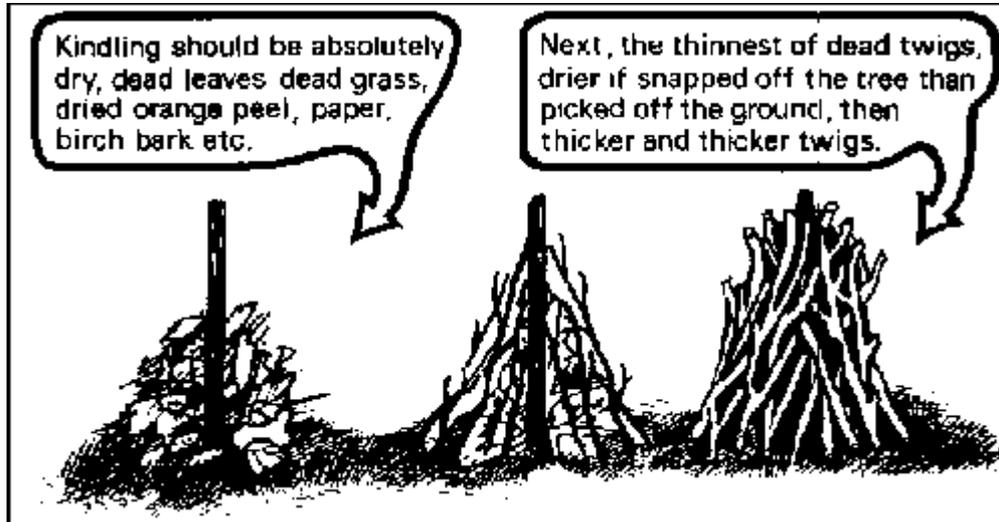


MAKING A FIRE



Probably one of the most useful things you will learn to do in Scouting is cooking over an open fire. When hiking, it means no lugging heavy stoves and gas bottles round with you, and with a little practice you will soon pick the techniques up.

Preparing the Ground

When choosing a site for your fireplace, it should be at least 3 metres away from the nearest bush or tree, on a level site, with no overhanging branches which may catch fire should your fire grow too big.

With a shovel, cut a turf about 1½ metres square, and lift it. Try to keep the turf in one piece. Store this flat, roots uppermost, in a cool, damp place, and regularly water it. There should be sufficient space around your fire, once built, not to burn any surrounding grass. The bare earth should be level, to help the fire burn. Should the ground underneath be wet, you can put a piece of tin foil down before you build the fire to give a dry base.

Preparing Kindling

The small, thin wood you use to start the fire is known as KINDLING. This is usually dead wood, which may be found on the forest floor, or on the base of bushes. If it does not snap when you try, it is not dead and should not be used. When you have a good pile of kindling wood, gather larger bits of wood. This too should be dry. Many official campsites have woodpiles with pallets on, which are fine if broken up, but be careful of nails. See the section on Saws and Axes for further information on safety with these.

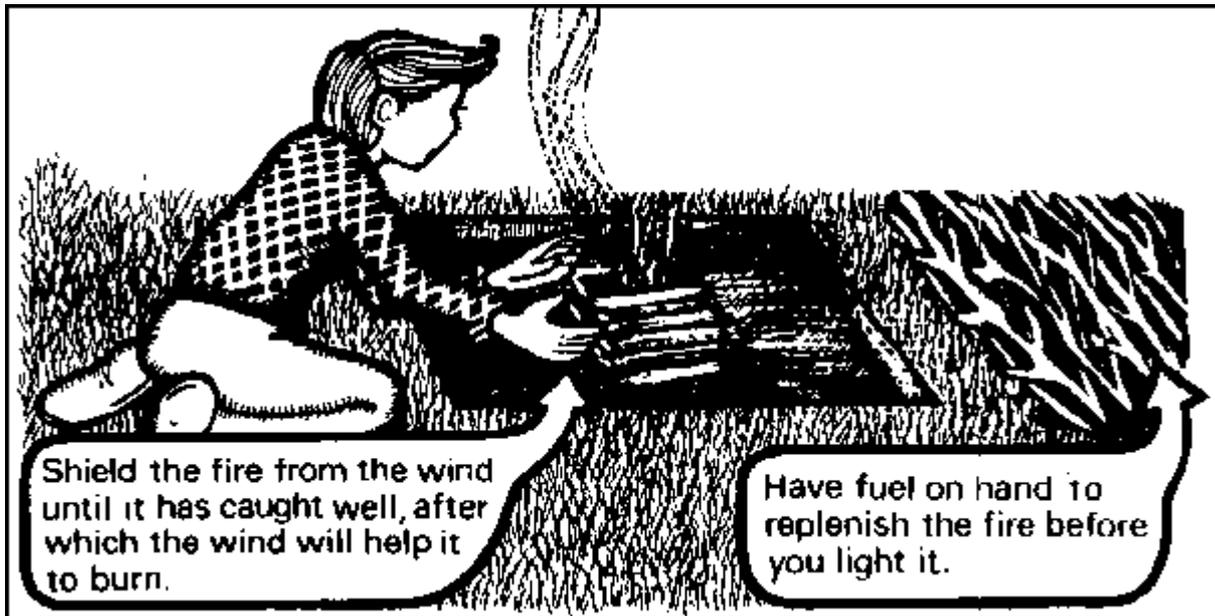
Building the Fire



First of all, stick a thin branch (1cm diameter) into the ground as above. Put screwed-up newspaper tightly around the base, or any of the things mentioned above, but most importantly of all it should be dry. Don't use firelighters, that's cheating! NEVER be tempted to use meths, petrol or otherwise to get a fire going. Then, build up your fire using progressively thicker twigs as you build outwards, making sure you have a gap you can put the match in. Before you light the fire, make sure you have a good supply of small logs and thicker wood to hand, as the thin wood burns very quickly. Sort the wood into piles of similarly sized bits so you can get the right wood to build the fire up just when you need it, rather than sorting through a big heap.

Getting it Going

Light the fire (one match should be plenty!) by igniting the paper and bits in the gap you have left. If there is a strong wind blowing, you may need to shield the small flame otherwise it may blow out; conversely you may need to blow or fan the flame gently to encourage it to blow. Only practice will teach you how much you need to use. Once the fire is going, build it up carefully using progressively larger logs - don't just heap it on and hope. Make sure someone is on firewood duty and able to go and chop wood should your reserves get low.



If they are available, two thick logs should be placed either side of the fire, to contain the heat and prevent the grass burning from too much heat.

A fire should never be left unattended. Make sure someone is responsible for the fire at all times, and a bucket of water (and fire extinguisher if possible) close by in case of any emergency. Make sure that you are all aware of the fire procedures, should any accident occur, such as grass, trees and tents catching fire.



Cooking on the Fire

Once the fire has built up well, let the fire burn down until you have a good set of orange or white embers. This is perfect for cooking on - why not try some of the backwoods recipes?

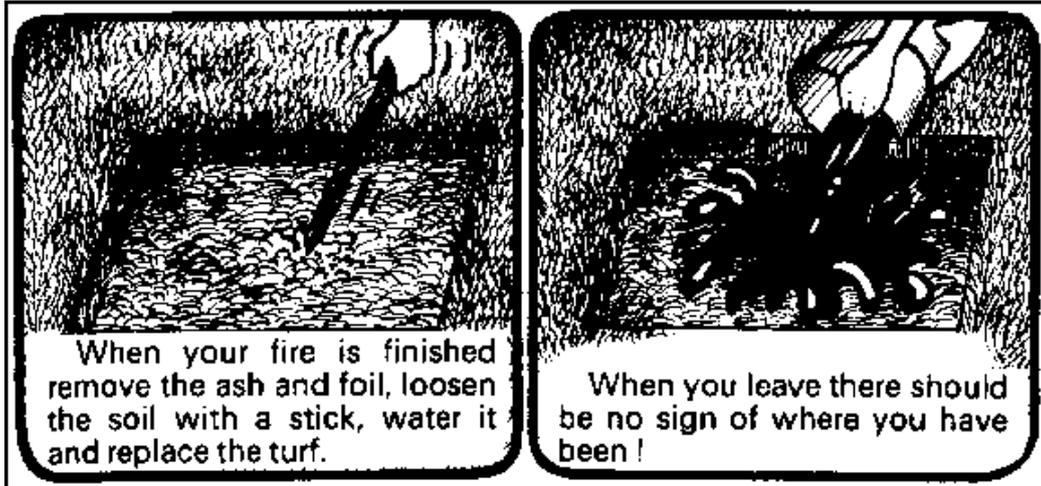
For ideas and help on cooking over a wood fire, follow the other links from the Wood Fires page.

You may need to add wood to the fire whilst you are cooking; this is not a problem. Move your pans to one end of the fire and build the other up, then let it burn back to embers and move the pans to that end and build up the other.

At the End of the Day

Last thing at night (or after use if you are going away from your site), once the final water has been boiled for a hot drink, the fire should be allowed to burn out naturally if possible. Rake the embers regularly, and this should turn the wood from orange glow into black (charcoal), although there is still plenty of heat there.. Sitting around a dying fire under a starry sky in the middle of a field is one of the greatest experiences you can have. Why not ask Skip if he knows any good 'Camp Fire Yarns'? This is also a good time to do toasted marshmallows! However, if the fire won't go out, sprinkle water on it to help. Not too much, though, as the charcoal left can be used to help get the fire going the next morning (after you have sifted it and carefully disposed of the ashes). Finally, cover your wood with an old groundsheet, if you haven't got it under a shelter already, so it doesn't get wet if there's rain or a heavy dew during the night.

Clearing Up at the End of the Camp



At the end of the camp, once the fire has burnt out (or been put out) cool using water, and remove all the ashes and lumps of charcoal to a bag, which can be disposed of at the rubbish point. Make sure that the area is flat and clear of debris. Replace the turf carefully, tread down and soak with plenty of water to help it start growing again. When you leave, there should be no sign that you have ever been there with a fire, and the only thing left should be your thanks with the landowner.