

CAMPING AND TRAMPING VERSUS CAMPING AND NATURE CONSERVATION

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Abstract

Staying in a protected nature area in one place associated with stay features, such as pitching tents and shelters, preparing food, sleeping overnight, building fires and the associated waste production, can have a negative impact on the objects of nature conservation. In the Czech Republic, we are seeing an unprecedented increase in travelling with caravans and overnight stays in them outside official campsites in parking areas originally intended for day parking only, often without respecting the rules of nature conservation. Wild West-inspired camping, known as tramping, which has a long history in the Czech Republic, even contravenes the Czech Republic's nature protection legislation when it comes to staying in protected nature, and its future is in great doubt.

Key words: Laws, education, respect, fire, influence

Introduction

At the beginning it is necessary to say what is meant by camping. There is no legal definition of this term. Most of us understand camping as staying in the countryside in one place, usually overnight, using a shelter or tent, preparing food and making a fire. It is therefore a set of activities, and it is also understood as a set of activities by the Agency for Nature and Landscape Conservation of the Czech Republic. In detail, I list the activities characteristic of camping as follows: sleeping, preparing food, eating, washing dishes and washing people, toileting, littering and discharging waste water, building and using seating (tables, chairs, chairs, etc.), in particular evening seating, possibly with the aid of recorded music or music production, the erection of shelters and tents, may be supplemented by the lighting of fires and the driving of cars off roads, local roads and designated car parks. It is not necessary to comply with all of these features, but only with some of them. The assessment of the concept of camping is a matter for each individual ranger or conservation officer in relation to the negative impact or risk of negative impact or direct damage to nature. It is not the purpose of this paper to specify the interpretation of the terms tent, shelter and fire making.

Caravanning

During the covid epidemic, many people found that spending their leisure time and especially their holidays in a caravan was very attractive. Moving around in a motorhome or caravan allows a huge amount of flexibility in the choice of where to stay and especially where to stay overnight. Many people choose to spend the night in a car outside of caravan parks in secluded car parks where they are surrounded by nature. The purchase of caravans and the conversion of small vans into campervans and the proliferation of caravan and motorhome hire companies has taken off with covid, which has continued on an upward trend even after the end of the covid epidemic. Even now in April 2023, rental and dealership owners are reporting on the evening TV news an unrelenting interest in motorhomes ahead of the 2023 summer season. Before covid, caravanning was more or less kept to official caravan parks. With and after covid, it is expanding more and more into the open countryside, with motorhome travellers craving solitude, romance and proximity to nature.

In a narrower sense, we understand caravanning as camping hidden in a vehicle, i.e. in a caravan or motorhome. In a broader sense, it is camping or sleeping in any vehicle or trailer, but always inside. However, where activities typical of camping are concealed in a vehicle and there is no contact with the external natural environment and there is no or minimal risk of impact on it, the Nature Conservancy does not currently consider these activities to be camping within the meaning of the Nature Conservation Act.

Therefore, if a traveller spends the night or stays in a vehicle and does not carry out activities outside the vehicle that are typical of camping, then they are not camping for nature conservation purposes. It is true that caravanning is not camping.

The problem arises especially in specially protected areas, if the traveller in the caravan does not respect the nature protection rules for the area. For example, the car park at Skalní mlýn in the Moravian Karst Protected Landscape Area is surrounded by a national nature reserve, where visitors are not allowed to enter outside the marked paths. Some travellers from caravans park at the edge of

the car park and use the toilet in the NNR, and an unprecedented case is entering the NNR on the bank of the Punkva River and spilling the contents of a chemical toilet into the Punkva. In one instance in this parking lot, the RVs formed a square with a courtyard in the middle where travelers had tables and chairs and ate their meals, creating an image not unlike a car camp.

If several vehicles are parked night after night in a car park in the countryside, then there may be both noise and light disturbance to the site. To give an example of the occupancy of the two main car parks in the Moravian Karst Protected Landscape Area: in the interval 12-31 August 2022 (20 days), a total of 36 vehicles spent the night at the car park Skalní mlýn near Kateřinská jeskyně and only 4 of these nights were not spent at the car park; in the interval 10-31 August 2022 (22 days), a total of 60 vehicles spent the night at the car park near the Macocha abyss and only 5 of these nights were not spent at the car park. It is still the case that if motorhomes are only overnighing, i.e. spending the night in the car park with no other activities outside the car, then from a conservation perspective they are not camping and cannot be penalised and banned.

In the Moravian Karst we would like to prevent the problem of disturbance or damage to nature associated with overnight stays in car parks. Restricting or completely banning overnight parking is currently only possible through the operating regulations of car parks by their operators or through municipalities and their public ordinances.

Education seems to be essential. Travellers who spend the night in their cars outside official car parks need to be informed about the conservation rules both on the internet through entries on specialised websites and directly at the car parks concerned. The rule that caravanning is not camping and that simply sleeping or camping in a vehicle must not turn into camping outside the vehicle must be visibly emphasised.

Even so, it will be up to the Nature Conservancy to consider all the risks associated with caravanning in the open countryside on a site-by-site basis and find a way to regulate or eliminate caravanning as appropriate for the Nature Conservancy.

Tramping

is a movement that is unparalleled in the world apart from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with its characteristics and history, but the roots of Czech tramping go back to the beginning of the 20th century. It has a close inspirational link to scouting, generally outdoor activities inspired by the American Wild West, and also to tramping from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is simply a free and unorganised leisure time in nature, or camping almost always associated with making a fire. Although the tramp movement declined after November 1989, it did not disappear and still lives on in its traditional places to a lesser extent.

Many natural areas have long been associated with tramping and have a rich history in it. Often these are valleys or rocky areas with meadows decorated with totem poles for gathering and for tents, with rock overhangs for sleeping, and with tramp cabins and huts. It should be noted that tramping areas have retained their unique natural values despite many years of tramping and some have been designated as protected under the category of Specially Protected Areas for these values. As tramping is associated with being outdoors, including sleeping in the countryside and making fires, these activities are increasingly coming into conflict with nature conservation.

The Czech legal system does not give tramping any special status, it is probably not perceived by the majority of the public as a historical tradition and therefore its historical existence in a given protected locality cannot be used to justify any exceptions to the law for camping and fire lighting, although many would certainly like it and although there may be some understanding for it.

Even tramping must respond to the demands of modern times and recognise that the flame of a fire blackens rock, that the heat of flames can damage rock, that smoke from a fire can disturb animals, that ash can affect soil chemistry, that the light of a fire and the sound of speech and song in the depths of the woods disturbs animals. Furthermore, in the context of drought climate change and the bark beetle calamity with last year's fire in the Bohemian Switzerland National Park, fire in nature is also a major fire risk.

Tramping has its bases in big cities and its typical areas for Prague are, for example, the Bohemian Karst, Brdy, Kokořínsko and others, now protected as protected landscape areas. The Moravian Karst is surprisingly not a tramp area near Brno, where the position of the tramps has been replaced to some extent by cavers and the interesting figure of the karst hermit. The Brno tramps occupied small valleys to the west and north-west of Brno in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, typical of which are the valleys of the Oslava and Chvojnice rivers, now protected as national nature reserves and nature reserves.

Currently, the situation in the Kokořínsko Protected Landscape Area (CHKO Kokořínsko) has escalated, where we can observe very conflicting discussions on the Internet about the relationship

between nature protection and tramping. There is talk of illegal tramping cabins in this MPA, over 100 unauthorised campsites with fireplaces often under rock overhangs, blackened sandstone cliffs and destroyed archaeological sites in the sediments under sandstone overhangs. It is alleged that the tramp movement has been completely displaced from the Bohemian Switzerland National Park by the functioning park guard service, which has caused an increase in the number of tramps in Kokořínsko. It is not the aim of this paper to assess this, but it is quite clear that a functioning guard service is an important and effective factor in the enforcement of nature protection law.

Conclusion

Finding a compromise between tramping (camping and making fires in areas with a historical tradition of tramping) and nature protection is very difficult and in fact impossible. The nature conservation authorities are bound by the Administrative Code and the principle of equality of persons and the Act on Nature and Landscape Protection of the Czech Republic and must always justify their decisions. Why allow a hut for hikers and not for the father of a family of four. Why allow a tramp to camp and build a fire and not a school class on a trip.

Speleologists in the Moravian Karst are not allowed new huts in the countryside and the old ones are left to live out their lives as temporary structures in exclusive connection with the permission of speleological research as a working base. It is difficult to imagine a similar justification for a tramp cabin, although on rare occasions a tramp group may have legal personality and may work for nature conservation in a protected area. Thus the log cabin could be a work base. However, this will not apply across the board, but exceptionally.

A special case is the valley of the Oslava River below Náměštl to Vlčí hill west of Brno. A long tramp history. Few tramp cabins. Few campsites with totems on the river bank in the forest, not under rock overhangs, which are not present in the valley. One tramp settlement with legal personality publishing a tramp magazine Oslavské boudy with overlap from the region to the country. Meadow leased by this tramp settlement as the largest regional occasional campsite. The settlement regularly organizes various events for the tramp movement, including the annual cleaning of the banks of the Oslava River and its valley slopes, which no one else does here. There is a plan to build a dam in the valley, which the entire local tramp community opposed with their friends and supporters, including musical groups as one man, and their power and voice was heard far and wide. The area had been protected as a nature reserve since 1974, allowing the tramps to move freely. Territory re-designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in 2019, which brought a major change in that only marked paths could be used in the NNR. In doing so, tramps could have fought against the NNR designation as actively as they did against the dam, but instead they cooperated with the Nature Conservancy in preparing the NNR designation documents. Is it now appropriate to eliminate tramping in the valley in the NNR? Is it even possible to find a legal way to preserve the status of tramping in this valley, with permits for trail entrances, with permits for fireplaces, and with temporary permits for log cabins to gradually catch up? Of course, it all depends on the assessment of any requests for exceptions to the law and the justification for them.

In the Kokořín region, the situation with log cabins and campsites was unbearable and the nature protection there proceeded to the gradual destruction of log cabins and campsites. Tramping with its bonfires and log cabins in specially protected areas current legislation aims to eliminate, but the authorities' course of action remains open. This paper could not cover all aspects of the issue, such as the perception of tramping in neighbouring villages or by landowners, which tends to be tolerant, its extent, which is different in each area, its danger to fires and the degree of its risks to disturb or damage nature, which in turn will be different in each area. Even in the case of tramping, there will be no single template for the authorities' decision-making.

It will be up to the Nature Conservancy to consider all the risks associated with tramping in the open countryside in each specific location and find a way to regulate or remove tramping as appropriate to the needs of the Nature Conservancy.

Souhrn

Táboření je souhrn činností jako je např. stavba stanů a přístřešků, příprava stravy, nocleh, rozdělání ohně a s tím vším spojená produkce odpadů. Pokud nejsou dodržovaná pravidla ochrany přírody, může mít táboření negativní vliv na předměty ochrany přírody. Ve zvláště chráněných územích České republiky je táboření omezeno zákonem o ochraně přírody a krajiny (dále jen „zákon“). Caravanning chápeme jako táboření zkruté ve vozidle a v takovém případě nedochází ke kontaktu s vnějším přírodním prostředím a riziko jeho ovlivnění není nebo je minimální. Pak ochrana přírody caravanning v současné době za táboření ve smyslu zákona nepovažuje. Pokud však dojde k projevům táboření mimo vozidlo, půjde o táboření, které mimo autokempinky může být v rozporu se zákonem. Tramping

je táboření inspirované Divokým západem a skautingem a jedná se zjednodušeně o volný a neorganizovaný volnočasový pobyt v přírodě téměř vždy spojený s rozděláváním ohně. V případě pobytu v chráněné přírodě obvykle je v rozporu se zákonem. Bude na ochraně přírody, aby posoudila a zvážila všechna rizika spojená s caravaningem nebo trampingem ve volné krajině na každém konkrétním místě a podle potřeby ochrany přírody v souladu se zákony našla cestu k ponechání, k regulaci nebo k odstranění caravaningu nebo trampingu.

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