



# NATIONAL FOUR WHEEL DRIVE CAMPING and TOURING GUIDELINES

for Minimal Impact Camping.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This document contains guidelines recommended for use when camping and touring across Australia. These guidelines have been produced to develop an awareness of the environmental impact of these activities, and to enhance the enjoyment of this country by all visitors, now and in the future.

It is recommended that all tourers, particularly those in four wheel drives, become familiar with these guidelines, however it should be noted that a degree of flexibility may be required in some camping and touring situations.

Extra care should be observed when travelling through protected areas such as National and Conservation Parks and other reserved lands, which have been set aside because they have an intrinsic environmental value worthy of preservation for future generations. Visitors have a responsibility to ensure that such assets remain intact and undamaged.

May your touring and camping in Australia be a pleasant and memorable experience.

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- multiple uses of Parks is promoted and therefore visitors should not regard these Parks as their exclusive domain.
- pre-plan your trip (see below) in conjunction with local staff from agencies such as State Departments of Environment and Natural Resources, National Park & Wildlife Service, Forestry Departments, indigenous land managers and friends of parks.
- do not create unnecessary and undue noise; respect the rights of others and their comfort. Be considerate of others and take particular care with children. Remember,

when touring or visiting Parks and other areas, there is a duty of care, not only to the environment but the rights and safety of others.

- observe all regulatory and advisory signs, they are there for your protection as well as the protection of fragile areas.
- when travelling through fenced properties with gates, be sure to leave all gates as they are found. Gates, particularly on pastoral properties, are used to control stock movement.
- don't leave your vehicle parked in front of a gate or in a fire prone area. Allow emergency vehicle access to trails at all times.
- try to take the time to provide feedback to the land manager on the details of your trip and your experiences, such as writing a Trip Report. These are always welcome. The simple courtesy of expressing your appreciation to land owners/managers for their permission to visit their property should never be overlooked.
- always keep in mind the sensitivity and fragility of the area through which you are travelling.
- prior to departure, try to leave the area as if no one had been there, in the same or better condition as found.

### **PRE-TRIP PLANNING**

- obtain access details and permits from the relevant authority.
- obtain information about the area that you plan to visit, eg are snow chains required, or are there any natural or cultural features that are likely to be of interest.
- if planning a trip through remote or difficult areas, inform a responsible person, such as the local police officer, of your itinerary. Inform the person of your arrival at the other end of the trip.
- if in an area requiring the use of HF radio for communication, set a "communications schedule" prior to departure.
- if travelling in a group of vehicles, it is recommended that such a group not exceed ten vehicles and that these vehicles be formed into a "convoy", with pre-planned organisation so as not to inconvenience other road users. By forming a group into a convoy, this allows for controlled and safe passage of the group. Ensure sufficient space is allowed between vehicles for other road users to safely overtake.
- for safety reasons, when travelling by vehicle in remote areas, it is recommended that you travel with another vehicle. Also adequate supplies of food, water and fuel, allowing for unexpected delays of up to three days, should be carried.
- all vehicles should be equipped with basic spares (radiator hoses, fan/alternator belts), a first aid kit, fire extinguisher and basic recovery equipment suited to the vehicle and required purpose.

### **CARE OF TRACKS**

In rural and remote areas, vehicle tracks are the supply and lifeline for those who reside in what is commonly referred to as the "OUTBACK". Mail, food, supplies, stock produce etc, are moved by road through these areas. Track damage through irresponsible use, particularly when wet, can cause tracks to become hazardous or even force their closure if deemed to be unsafe. Damage to tracks can seriously impair the ability to move vital goods and equipment as well as emergency services, such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service, to residents in those affected areas. Moreover the cost of repair and grading of the tracks is borne by the property owner

Modern four-wheel drive vehicles are capable of successfully negotiating difficult, slippery and muddy terrain with relative ease. Those who drive four wheel drive vehicles for recreational touring should not attempt to "push on" or "try to make it regardless" in the more difficult areas without due consideration of the damage that could be caused to track surfaces and resultant damage to the environment. All track users should be conscious of the limitations of their vehicles and the condition of the terrain over which they will drive, as well as the likely impact of the vehicle upon the track surface.

Tracks also provide access to environmentally sensitive areas. Care must always be taken to protect these tracks from damage as careless use of tracks may result in denial of visitor

vehicle access on both public and private lands, further restricting entry to areas of great beauty, archaeological, historical and cultural significance.

- only use designated vehicle tracks when driving and do not drive on walking or horse riding trails.
- observe all advisory and regulatory signs with regard to track/road closures, as well as restrictions (including campsite and fire).
- obtain permission/permits for access, track use and camping on public, aboriginal and private lands.
- do not travel on wet, unsealed roads or tracks, where such action is likely to cause damage to the road/track surface.
- if conditions are such that there is cause to consider road/track damage, question the need to proceed immediately or to wait until conditions improve. *Significant fines can be imposed for damage to roads/tracks.*
- always seek advice from local residents in areas that are unfamiliar.

### **DRIVING IN THE BUSH**

No matter what means of motorised transport that might be used when travelling through the parks and remote areas of Australia, all vehicles should be well maintained, serviceable, registered and roadworthy.

Vehicles in poor mechanical condition are dangerous to their owners, other road/track users and the environment by:

- oil leaks, which may contaminate watercourses and land, particularly during prolonged stops.
- excessive exhaust emissions fouling the air.
- leaking fuel.

To ensure the comfort of yourself and others on your trip take steps to:

- have your vehicle mechanically checked, serviced and tuned.
- have an understanding of basic mechanical maintenance for your vehicle.
- carry adequate fuel, water, oils, basic spares and tools.
- if recovery of a vehicle is required, consider **safety**, and the potential to damage either the environment or track surface. Repair any damage caused by a recovery operation.

The driving style employed on unsealed roads and tracks to conserve the environment is most important.

- drive only to the limits of the track surface and conditions, rather than to the ability of the driver and vehicle.
- do not leave the road or formed track without permission.
- where possible, remove any obstacle from the track and do not create a new track by driving around an obstacle.
- do not widen tracks by cutting corners or bends, turns or junctions.
- parking vehicles under trees should be avoided to prevent soil compaction, which restricts natural irrigation of the tree root system.
- select and remain in four-wheel drive when appropriate. Avoid prolonged wheel spin as this damages the track surface through rutting, which in turn causes erosion in times of heavy rainfall.
- take time to repair any track damage whether you have caused it or not, in the interests of safety and track conservation.
- be aware of surface conditions, such as sand and mud, which may require reduction in tyre pressures to improve traction and minimise surface damage.
- on unsealed surfaces, be courteous and safety conscious. Slow down when passing other vehicles (in either direction) so as to minimise possible damage from stones and other debris thrown up from the wheels.
- on dusty surfaces, travel slowly near homesteads, outbuildings, campers and other road/track users, thereby reducing danger and discomfort caused by the dust.

- in areas with long grass, regularly check under the vehicle for gathered grass to minimise the risk of fire.

### **DRIVING IN SAND**

Driving in sand requires flotation gained through momentum and gear selection. When on beaches, you should be aware that most beaches are designated roadways and normal road rules apply. To safely negotiate sand tracks, (beach, bush, desert or river), it is recommended:

- tyre pressures be reduced consistent with the weight and type of vehicle, the weather conditions and the type of terrain, as it will assist in minimising the impact on the environment and aid both flotation and momentum.
- vehicle speed **MUST** be reduced when tyre pressures are lowered. It is relatively simple to roll a tyre off the rim when turning with low pressure in tyres.
- use only the necessary power to maintain momentum; this will assist in avoiding track "scalping".
- use only designated entry and exit routes on beaches. Do not drive over vegetated sand dunes as this could cause erosion of the dune.
- when driving on beaches, drive on the "hard pack" below the high water mark- Do not drive too close to the water as soft spots or holes are concealed by the wet sand. Keep a sharp lookout for washaways caused by run-off from creeks.
- respect other beach users and do not travel at unsafe speeds.
- when driving on beaches, be aware of tide movement and times.
- in any sandy area, do not drive over the crest of dunes without knowing where the track is.
- do not descend any dune by driving across it. Always drive down in as straight a line as possible.
- re-inflate tyres as soon as possible after leaving the sand.

### **FLORA and FAUNA**

All native flora and fauna are protected under law, and many of these are rare species that can only be found in remote and environmentally fragile areas. Disturbance or removal of flora, in particular, can result in severe disruption of the ecology in the immediate area.

- do not pick wildflowers or chase wildlife.
- do not feed wildlife with scraps of food. Food consumed by humans is not suitable for native animals and could be life threatening to them. Also, as there is almost always living bacteria in the food we consume, there is also the possibility of passing disease on to native animals through food scraps.
- domestic pets are banned from most National and Conservation Parks. Always check the restrictions on domestic pets with the relevant authorities. If in doubt, do not take domestic pets into any area.
- remember, wildlife, have the right of way across tracks and roads.
- avoid the spread of disease and introduction of species of flora that are foreign to the area by ensuring that vehicles, shoes, clothing and camping equipment are clean and free from seeds and built up soil between campsites.

### **HERITAGE SITES and BUILDINGS**

Heritage sites can be of geological, archaeological, cultural or historical significance, attracting international interest. These sites are to be preserved, without interference from visitors, particularly with regard to artefacts and geological items such as stones or fossils. Historical buildings are a record of our early explorers and pastoralists as well as progression through European settlement. Many buildings have, in and around them, items of significance or utensils such as pottery, crockery, bottles, machinery and equipment as well as clothing. All these items provide the ability to obtain a detailed knowledge of the life and times of those early occupants not available from any other source and should be left in situ. Preservation of these sites and buildings is essential to the recorded history of Australia and its settlement.

Many important archaeological and heritage sites, such as middens and occupational deposits, exist in sand dunes and arid areas. Rock engravings and stone arrangements are found on rock outcrops along ridgelines. Always stay on the road to avoid disturbing the artefacts.

### **CAMPSITE SELECTION**

The pleasure of visiting areas of natural beauty is that they are pristine and unspoilt. To protect these areas of natural beauty, we have a responsibility to ensure that those who follow may also enjoy the same experience. This is achieved by you leaving nothing but footprints when you depart.

- dispersed camping is recommended so as not to compact the ground surface and inhibit grass growth or regrowth.
- use established campsites. Where these exist, do not create new campsites.
- ensure that the area is not so sensitive that your presence will leave a permanent impact
- do not dig trenches or gutters around tents/swags.
- do not locate your camp where dead or rotted trees (*or live*) may fall on your campsite.
- do not camp within 500m radius of a dam or constructed stock watering point.
- do not camp in a creek bed or watercourse. Such a practice is extremely dangerous as flash flooding can, and does occur.
- do not camp near any natural waterhole, creek or river in such a way that you may prevent native fauna and station stock from gaining access to water.
- do not camp within 1000m of any building without permission (Pastoral Act).

### **CAMP WASHING**

- when camping, washing points should not be located within 50m of any creek, stream, river or waterhole to prevent contamination of such waters.
- a cleaning agent to be used for both personal and general hygiene should be pure soap made from natural animal or vegetable oils with no additives as it biodegrades quickly leaving no toxic residue.
- plan meals to avoid greasy foods where possible, as the disposal of grease or fat residue can be harmful to native fauna.
- when disposing of waste water, spread it across the ground to enable natural filtration. Do not use wastewater to feed the root systems of native flora, as the residue contained within the water could be harmful.

### **RUBBISH DISPOSAL**

Rubbish around deserted campsites is unhealthy, unsightly and inexcusable. Adopt the practice of "leave no trace" camping, and take out what you bring in. Dispose of rubbish in designated rubbish bins or dumps.

- rubbish to be removed from a campsite can be reduced by burning combustible rubbish, but remember to check the ashes prior to departure for those items which may not have burnt away completely.
- carry a sealable rubbish bag in which to place non-combustible items such as tins, bottles, plastics etc. (Do not burn plastics in fires as this leaves highly toxic residue).
- nappies and sanitary napkins should not be disposed of in a campfire. These items give off a foul odour and rarely burn away completely. They should be placed in a lined, sealed container and disposed of in the appropriate manner as soon as the opportunity occurs.

To assist in campfire rubbish management, the following is recommended.

- remove unnecessary packaging prior to departure on trips.

- avoid carrying high rubbish potential items such as bottles, cans and plastics.
- carry suitable containers in which to store rubbish and re-use where possible. Burn tins and food scraps in the fire, then remove all remains including bones. This eliminates odour and accelerates decomposition. (cut both ends off cans as they will squash flat easily).
- check ashes thoroughly to ensure that nothing remains to attract native animals.

### **CAMP FIRES**

Campfires are a traditional part of the camping experience. There are times however, mainly in the summer, when fire restrictions are imposed and campfires are not permitted.

Tourists and visitors should always check for fire restrictions in the area they intend to visit. Fire restrictions are imposed for a number of reasons other than fire danger and local authorities should be consulted.

Remember, a Total Fire Ban is applicable to all types of fuel, other than electricity, so be prepared and take alternative sources of energy for cooking, such as solid fuel, liquid fuel or gas cookers.

Fire management and safety is paramount as bushfires are easily started by one simple careless act.

- never leave a burning fire unattended.
- remember that a campfire is not a bonfire and should not exceed 1m in diameter and 0.5m in height.
- separate cooking fires may be permitted if fuel is in abundance, but should be kept to as few as possible.
- set a time at which combustible rubbish, food etc, may be reduced in the fire.
- when breaking camp, ensure that the fire is completely extinguished as residual hot embers not only present a fire hazard, but also are likely to cause injury to animals.
- dispose of cold ashes around plants, as these will liberate nutrients in the soil.

Wood as a fuel is being consumed at an alarming rate, leaving many areas bare of this fuel. Alternative fuels such as Heat beads, shellite, gas and unleaded petrol used in appropriate cookers are recommended.

When selecting a site for your campfire, it is recommended that:

- an existing fireplace is used where possible.
- it is a requirement that the area surrounding *and above* any open fire be clear of vegetation for a radius of 4m.
- spare firewood is to be kept a minimum of 3m from a fire.
- do not use stones in the construction of a fireplace. Many creatures reside under stones and should not be disturbed. Stones are also prone to exploding from the heat of the fire, sending dangerous shrapnel in all directions.
- if a fire pit needs to be dug, try to remove the topsoil as a sod and place to one side. When the fire has been extinguished and not to be used again, replace the sod over the cold ashes.
- use only dead fallen timber for fuel, do not cut away at standing trees as these are usually habitats for small animals or birds.
- do not use hollow logs for fuel, as they are also the habitat for small creatures.

### **BUSH TOILETS**

Bush toilets can come in various forms, but all have in common the need for correct use in the environment in which they are used.

- use properly constructed toilets where provided.
- individual toilet holes should be as deep as practical, minimum depth of 30cm, to prevent excavation by animals.
- self made toilets should be not less than 100m distant from campsites and water courses/water holes.
- toilet paper should be of the unbleached, dye free type that is free of chemicals.



- do not attempt to burn toilet paper in toilet holes. Large and damaging bushfires have been started by this practice.
- as animals frequently dig out toilet holes, it is advisable to remove used toilet paper and place in an appropriate bag or container. It may be burnt in the campfire but be aware of the odour that it will emit.
- faecal waste contains the seeds of foods eaten and may contribute to the spread of unwelcome feral plants. Exclude blackberries, tomatoes and other seed bearing fruits and vegetables from menus where possible.

Chemical toilets should be used in those areas where the ground surface prevents digging adequate toilet holes or the soil is of a type that is not suited to such a purpose. They should also be used in those areas which have a sensitive environment and ecology and which are easily disrupted.

Waste from chemical toilets should be disposed of at authorised sewerage points.

### **QUARANTINE**

Be quarantine aware when travelling

- check quarantine rules for the areas you intend to travel or pass through before planning meals for a trip.
- keep quarantine brochures in the vehicle to assist in recognition of exotic pests and diseases.
- plants, seeds, fruit and vegetables, livestock, birds and animals, honey, soil, and used fruit and produce containers all have quarantine rules in some areas.
- in the north of Australia, report any unusual “fishing boats” or cruising yachts.
- check with Dept of Agriculture or Dept of Primary Industry in areas to be travelled.

### **FIREARMS**

- native animals are protected.
- all firearms must be licensed.
- all hunting requires a permit, and written permission (within 6 months) from the landholder.
- possession, use, or carrying of firearms, explosives or fireworks are prohibited in National and Conservation Parks and other reserved lands unless written permission has been obtained by the relevant management authority.

### **GENERATORS**

- generators are noisy. Be considerate of others and keep their use to a minimum.
- ensure adequate vegetation clearance around the generator to prevent sparks or fuel leakage igniting the vegetation.

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## **Trip Rules and Procedures**

1. BE ON TIME - To depart for trip- make yourself known to the trip leader on arrival.
2. Make sure YOU sign the attendance (TRIP) sheet -Your responsibility, no one else's.
3. All vehicles MUST be road registered and in a roadworthy and safe condition.
4. All Members vehicles MUST be securely fitted with at least one tow hook both front and rear, and carry a Snatch-Um Strap & 2 Bow Shackles.
5. The Driver in front is totally responsible for the vehicle following, and MUST wait at all intersections, where the convoy turns, for the following vehicle. (Please use common sense, as we don't mean every little sidetrack.)
6. In Hilly country or water crossings or other type obstacles, you MUST allow the vehicle in front to clear the hill or obstacle and the track is clear before you can proceed. Don't follow too close.



7. Vehicle in front must notify by radio the vehicle following, when the track is clear
8. Members Vehicles MUST be fitted with either an AM or UHF, - working CB - radio for safety, before starting a trip. NO RADIO-NO TRIP-NO EXCEPTIONS
9. Always leave Gates as you find them. The 2<sup>nd</sup> vehicle to open and close the gate and then rejoin the convey in front of Tail End Charlie, unless otherwise directed by Trip leader.  
(please pay the gate opener as you pass)
10. Always pull off to the side, and leave tracks clear, where possible.
11. Visitors are welcome, however you are responsible for your visitor.
12. Never leave the convoy until you have informed the Trip Leader or Tail End Charlie and they have responded.
13. Domestic Animals must not be taken on a trip or run if we are entering a State Forest or National Park area.
14. Club radio channels are 12 on both AM & UHF CB radios.