

If you get the feeling you are playing Tetris when it comes to packing your 4WD, you're not alone. Getting it just right can be tricky. But, hopefully, this article helps you make it easier. The two primary issues with packing a 4WD for a camping trip are space and weight capacity. Did you know your 4WD comes with a maximum load carrying capacity? You need to be under this at all times, and no matter how good you are at Tetris there's only so much space available.

Over the years, we've learned a few tricks in packing our 80 Series Toyota Land Cruiser for long trips. Last year, we spent three weeks on the [Gibb River Road](#), and aside from water and fuel pickups, had to be 100% self-sufficient.

So, how can you make packing your 4WD for a camping trip easier?

1. Pack the important stuff first

It's not possible to take everything you *might* want to use when heading away on a long camping trip. There has to be a selection process where you prioritise what's essential and what's not. First and foremost, you should carry gear that is essential to your travel. Then, if there's room, anything else you might want to take.

We have a spreadsheet that lists our essentials and we remove anything from the 4WD that isn't required. What you pack in your vehicle should be personalised to where you are going, who you are going with, and the time frame you are away for.

But, what's essential?

The right clothing and personal hygiene

Yeah, it might seem obvious, but I've lost count of the number of people who don't look at the weather forecast and take the wrong clothes. We always take at least one set of clothes to suit an unlikely extreme - so a set for if it is really cold and wet, and a set for if it is really hot. Personal hygiene items come down to personal need - toilet paper, soap, shampoo, towels, toothpaste and toothbrush, a shovel, deodorant, and so on.

Quality sleeping and cooking gear

When you are camping, quality sleeping and cooking gear are some of the most important bits of gear you'll carry. A tent that isn't going to blow over or leak water, a comfortable mattress and pillow, and a warm sleeping bag, are non-negotiable. Likewise your cooking equipment. Being able to cook and heat food is important. We always carry a [spare burner, which screws directly onto an LPG bottle](#), should our stove fail, which it has in the past.

Our neat and organised campsite at Mt Elizabeth Station on the Gibb River Road in Western Australia.

Tools and spare parts

No matter what you drive, you should have a basic tool kit and spare parts. These should be personalised to your mechanical knowledge, how far you are travelling, and what you know is

likely to go wrong. Most cars have their quirks. I have a drawer in our Land Cruiser that is full of filters, tools, bearings, nuts and bolts, electrical cable, fuses, tape, WD-40, grease, brake fluid, cable ties, tie wire, and several types of oil.

If you break down remotely, you can be in pretty big trouble! Having some tools and spares will get you out of trouble in most instances, and could well save your special trip.

Recovery gear, first aid kit, maps, PLB

Recovery gear, rated recovery points, and an understanding of how to use them safely is vital. 4WDs by nature allow you to get away from the crowds but getting stuck can happen. We carry a huge range of recovery gear, and it does get used. Again, personalise it to where you are going, what is likely to happen, and who you are with.

A first aid kit is really important too and should be set up specifically for your given trip. They start at about \$40 and work their way up, and are worth their weight in gold should anything go wrong.

Maps, in both electronic and paper format, are important if you are heading anywhere you might get lost. Which is anywhere, really.

It's also worth packing a PLB for extra safety. You never know what might happen and whether you'll have mobile coverage should you need it to call for help. A PLB is a worthwhile investment for anybody heading off the beaten track, for your own sake and to help your rescuers.



We keep our tools and spares in one of the built-in drawers in the back of the Land Cruiser. Easily accessible, and low to the floor for good weight balance.

Water, food, fuel

You won't get very far without water, food, and fuel. We usually factor in about a 30% reduction in fuel efficiency when four-wheel driving, and take 10% more fuel than we need. Fuel includes LPG for your cooking. A 4kg gas bottle lasts us at least three weeks cooking every day.

As for water, there are hundreds of variables. The usual guide is anywhere from 5-10 litres of water per person per day, but it entirely depends on how warm it's going to be, what you intend on doing on a daily basis, and whether you have access to other water for personal hygiene and dishes. Water is a massive priority, if you do get stranded, it's the thing you will need most. Don't skimp on water.

Food is relatively simple – you add up the number of breakfasts, lunches and dinners, and you arrive at the right number of meals. Adjust what you eat each day based on what you feel like, but this way you know you have enough food for the trip. Here's a bit of menu planning advice, and some pointers on eating without having to lug heaps of fresh ingredients. Some excess tinned food (such as baked beans and spaghetti) are brilliant to have in the back of the car just in case.



Other important gear

A tarp, matches, fire starters, quality rope, sunscreen, a hat, insect repellent, medication, and cash are all equally important. If it affects your safety, you should consider taking it! From there, we take our fishing and diving gear, photography equipment, electronics, and anything else that is going to be used regularly when away and that enhances our enjoyment. If you're not sure it will be used (unless its safety-related), don't take it!

2. Ensure the essentials are easy to access

Items that you use on a regular basis need to be easily accessible. If you've got to stop and empty half of the car just to open your fridge, the appeal of travel soon fades. Quick stops should be just that - quick, easy, and fuss-free.

Organisation is imperative

You can tell a lot about how organised someone is by the time it takes them to set up camp. A well-organised vehicle means you can access what you need quickly and easily. You know what they say - *a place for everything and everything in its place*.



Remember, if you're going to use a roof rack only store lightweight equipment on it. You'll see here we have our Oztent RV, solar panels, fishing rods, and recovery boards.

I try to organise our gear in sections, so nothing has to come out of the car that isn't going to be used immediately. Our camp chairs, mattresses, sleeping bags, clothes, and tent are all easily removed from the vehicle without having to pull out jerry cans, solar panels, tools, and everything else that isn't immediately needed.

The easiest way to get organised is to have tubs and a drawer system. Being able to put your gear away in drawers is fantastic, especially things that live in the back of the vehicle (tools, spare parts, and those emergency rations).

The order in which you pack is very important too. Not only do you need to be able to fit everything in, but it should be packed in a way that items you need often are easy to get out, and those that you may use once in the trip, are stowed away.

Use the nook and crannies

There are stacks of little areas inside your 4WD that can be used for storage. Under each seat, above the wheel wells, roof consoles, and behind the seats are all spots where you can store appropriately sized gear. I keep occy straps under my seat, old shoes under the passenger seat, rain jackets and rope in the wheel wells, and anywhere else there is a bit of unused space.

Rubbish bin bag

I'll make a special note of this, as it's one of our favourite mods to our Land Cruiser. You can

purchase bin bags that mount to your spare tyre, which make brilliant rubbish bins. It keeps the smelly stuff out of your vehicle and works well for wet clothes and recovery gear too. Ours is a Bushranger branded one and has been faultless.

All packed and ready to roll at Israelite Bay, Esperance, Western Australia. Note the type bin bag on the spare.

3. Safety is paramount

I've seen some pretty foolishly packed 4WDs over the years. If you don't pack with a bit of thought, you put the lives of those around you in danger. When packing your 4WD, keep safety at the front of your mind.

Fit a cargo barrier

If you have gear behind the driver or passengers, you need a cargo barrier. These are designed to stop your gear coming forward and injuring people if you find yourself in an accident. Even lightweight gear can kill someone if the vehicle is involved in an accident. These also help with packing - you can push your tubs and gear up against them, and be confident that it isn't going to move. Cargo barriers are usually steel with mesh, but you can get net versions as well.

Tie any heavy items down

If you have heavy items in your 4WD, they should be restrained. Things like jerry cans, tubs, recovery boards, and water tanks are very dangerous in the event of an accident when unrestrained.

I often carry a couple of jerry cans of water in front of the cargo barrier, and just use a ratchet strap around the seat mounting points. That way, if something does go wrong, you aren't going to have a 20kg chunk of plastic smash into the back of your head.

Make sure your car fridge is accessible.

Don't overload your vehicle

I'll touch on this a little more below, but the basics are pretty simple. A 4WD that is carrying more than it is designed and rated to is dangerous for both you and those on the tracks around you.

4. Keep the weight down

The number of 4WDs that are out and about every day with weight issues is staggering. Two things to consider - you need to keep your weight down low in your 4WD, and also ensure that you aren't overloading your vehicle.

This is not only important from a reliability perspective, but if your 4WD is overweight, your

insurance company can decline the claims you make, and you can get in serious trouble with the law if you hurt anyone.

Centre of gravity

The more weight you put up high in a 4WD, the higher your centre of gravity. This, in turn, means the chance of your 4WD tipping over is dramatically increased along with the more obvious handling issues.

Roof racks are probably the number one misused bit of gear when it comes to weight. Most 4WDs have a roof capacity of 100kg (a few go to 150kg). This is due to the design of the 4WD □ the roof is only designed to carry 100kg. Some steel roof racks weigh up to 65kg, which would give you a capacity of just 35kg on the roof racks.

Roof racks should be used for lightweight gear, like tents, camping chairs, tables, solar panels, fishing gear and the sorts. To find out your roof loading capacity, have a look at your owner's manual.

It's important to consider where the heavy items are located in your vehicle. Things like water tanks, jerry cans, tools and anything else heavy should be as close to the floor as possible, and as close to the rear axle (or in front of it). The further the weight hangs over the back of your 4WD, the more likely you are to do chassis damage (just look up 'bent 4WD chassis' on Google!).



A closer look at what's in my built-in drawer. Spares, tyre compressor, first aid kit...

Overweight 4WDs

Every vehicle has a given payload, which is the maximum amount of weight you can add to the car. This is specified by the manufacturer and is based on safety and reliability of your vehicle.

Have a look at your owner's manual (or jump on [Redbook](#) and look up your model) to check your payload. Most 4WDs range from 600kg to 1000kg. Any weight you add to your 4WD takes away from the payload. This includes passengers, fuel, vehicle accessories, additional tyres and anything else you put inside (or outside).

If you have access to a weighbridge, this is the best, and the most accurate way to work out what you are dealing with. If you don't, sit down and work out an estimate of the weight of everything in and on your 4WD. You'll be surprised, I bet. It's very easy to be overweight! Remember also, if you are towing something, this needs to be deducted from your payload.



Camping in the Collie River, Western Australia.

Share the load

If you are travelling with other vehicles, plan ahead, and share the load. Anything you can share with another vehicle (where appropriate) is weight and space saved. There's no need to carry a comprehensive toolkit in every vehicle.

Our tool and spares kit for remote travel would easily weigh 40kg. Obviously, your spares



may not be interchangeable, but tools and basic repair items are. Things like gazebos, gas cookers, portable toilets, showers, fish smokers and a whole range of other things can be shared among groups of people. The more space, and lighter the vehicles, the better! You'll get better fuel economy, reduce the strain on your 4WD, and have less to pack and unpack!

5. Practice really does makes perfect

Above all, the best way to learn to pack your 4WD is to do it over and over again. When I started camping, I'd often jot a list down, when I was sitting around the campfire, of things that I should have taken along, and things that I'd rather have left at home.

The more you do it, the better your packing becomes, and the easier it is. Sarah and I were a bit rusty at the start of our five weeks in the Kimberley last year, but after 32 nights of camping, we got pretty good at packing and unpacking.

I can sit here and write about different techniques, but the bottom line is you need to practise as much as possible, and that's best done by just getting out there and going camping!

Do you have any packing tips or tricks to add? Comment below.