



It can be easy to take for granted what comes into our homes seamlessly every day. Water, sewerage, electricity, and garbage collection are all services that we expect and become fairly inconvenienced by if they fail!

However, many of us love getting out of the big smoke and hit the roads to find quieter places that give us a sense of the great outdoors. We travel to these places because they are different to our everyday environment. This requires understanding that the services we take for granted cannot always be delivered in the same seamless way we expect.



Many of us love getting out of the big smoke and hit the roads to find quieter places that give us a sense of the great outdoors. Image: BlackWolf

Water

For many outback towns, the only source of water is through bores. Some places are lucky and the water is beautiful. But in others, it can be slightly brackish and have a sulphurous smell. This water is fine for washing yourselves and clothing, but may need boiling before drinking. It's what the locals live with all the time; nothing wrong with it, just different. In towns like Coober Pedy in South Australia, the only source of water is from a bore about 30km out of town! It's too salty to use, and every drop has to be treated by reverse osmosis to be useable. This process is very energy-intensive and expensive. Paying 20 cents for 40 litres of water, or a few cents for a shower in the caravan park may seem inconvenient – but this is what the locals pay all the time!

Waste

Ever pulled into a roadside rest area only to find bins overflowing and garbage strewn everywhere? Imagine the logistics and cost of emptying these regularly, many of which involve travelling hundreds of kilometres to the nearest town.

There is a simple solution to this: take your garbage with you and dispose of it in the next town. It's great to see many 4WDs with garbage bags hanging on their spare wheel, which is an easy method of approach. Before telling all your friends how bad a place is, or rushing to social media or review sites, have a long hard think about what is causing the problem. Talk to the local people about the situation so that any comments you do make are informed and measured. Remember, once it's on the internet, it's there forever – good, bad, or ugly. Uninformed and sometimes completely wrong comments may well have a detrimental effect on other people's livelihood – so think before you speak.



When leaving your camp area, take your garbage with you and dispose of it in the next town. Image: BlackWolf



Having a durable bin bag attached to the outside of your vehicle means the inside of your car won't get stinky. Image: Aaron Schubert



Toileting

Very few small outback towns have proper sewerage systems, with many relying on septic tanks or similar eco solutions. In some places, especially campgrounds, a long-drop is the solution to this everyday problem!

Sure, sometimes there is a smell, and this often made worse by travellers emptying chemical toilet tanks into these systems. This instantly kills the bacteria that break down waste and reduce the smell. One should only ever empty chemical toilets into designated dump points or, if there is no other option, bury it in a very deep hole dug well away from any trees, water sources, creeks, or stock watering points.

Keep in mind that when these systems break down there are usually no plumbers on call!

This often results in considerable delays before repairs are carried out. The other major problem can be seen at any roadside rest area or camping spot: toilet paper and human waste scattered around the area! This results in many areas closing to campers.

Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your point of view), the days of the squat and a shovel are rapidly disappearing. This is likely due to the number of campers around, which makes it more difficult to find a private spot!

Two aspects need to be considered:

- What to do it in
- How to do it privately



Very few small outback towns have proper sewerage systems, with many relying on septic tanks or similar eco solutions. Image: Aaron Schubert



In some places, especially campgrounds, a long-drop is the solution! Image: BlackWolf

Dig and Squat

This method of toileting in the bush can still be possible in more remote areas, but it needs some consideration:

- The hole must be at least 30cm deep to ensure there is enough soil on top of what has been deposited. This reduces the chance of animals, attracted by smell, digging up the area.
- Burn the toilet paper (ensure kids are supervised and there is not a fire ban) to reduce the chance of the paper being dug up and scattered. Or, place toilet paper in a Ziplock bag and dispose of it when you next arrive at a proper garbage disposal site. Carry a container of these bags in your vehicle and RV. You only need the cheap ones!
- For those who prefer better comfort, there are toilet seats mounted on old camp stool legs, designed to be placed over the hole. A variety of these is available online. Just remember to put the lid down to keep the flies out!
- Sometimes, trees and bushes do not provide the required level of privacy. This is where a pop-up toilet/shower tent is invaluable.





The 'Dig and Squat' method can still be possible in more remote areas, but it needs some consideration. Image: Aaron Schubert

Portable Chemical Toilets

Although the Porta-Potti has been around for years, many people have not seen the need, discouraged by both the smell and the requirement to empty and clean. Well, modern portable toilets are easy to use, flush, and clean. They're available in a variety of sizes, and even feature an electric, push-button flushing mechanism. Many Councils around the country have installed public dump points for the emptying of portable toilets (look for the RV Friendly sign when coming into country towns) and most caravan parks now have this facility. So, let's see how they work.

Construction and Setup

- Portable toilets consist of an upper flushing tank and a lower waste tank that clip together and are separated by a sealed opening into the waste tank.
- Fill the top tank with water and add the required amount of flushing tank fluid. This fluid deodorises the water and gives it a degree of "slipperiness", a bit like detergent. The Thetford Aqua Rinse, for example, works really well.
- Place a small amount of water and the required amount of waste tank fluid in the waste tank. Thetford Aqua Kem Green is very effective.



A major problem can be seen at any roadside rest area or camping spot: toilet paper and human waste scattered around the area! Image: Aaron Schubert



Your tank should be emptied at a proper dump point or in a toilet on a sewerage system. Image: Aaron Schubert

Using the Portable Toilet

- Regardless of the nature of the visit, sitting down on the job is generally the best way of using a portable toilet.
- If number two's are the order of the day, a couple of sheets of toilet paper placed in the bottom of the bowl and across the opening aid in the clean-up later on. Even though specific toilet paper that breaks down easily is often recommended, there isn't a problem with using standard toilet paper.
- To flush the toilet, open the sealed separator between the two tanks and push the flush button. Or, use the pump until the bowl is clean.
- When flushing, a small toilet brush is useful to ensure proper cleanliness. If staying in one place for some time, set the toilet up in a changing tent with a container of water mixed with a small amount of waste tank fluid to hold the toilet brush.
- Close the sealed separator after use.

Emptying the Portable Toilet

This is probably the part that puts people off using a portable toilet more than anything else! Nonetheless, it need not be a major hassle. Modern toilet chemicals deal with the smell and



are very effective at breaking down solid waste and toilet paper.

- Separate the flushing tank from the waste tank.
- The tank should be emptied at a proper dump point or in a toilet on a sewerage system. As mentioned previously, never empty into a toilet on a septic system as the chemicals can kill the bacteria that allow the septic system to work.
- Always ensure that the breather mechanism is operating when emptying the tank, to avoid any 'glug'-causing splashes.
- Thoroughly rinse the tank to ensure a complete clean.
- You are now ready to add more chemicals and flushing water to set up the toilet for further use.

Ben and Lauren discuss taking care of business in the outdoor in [Episode 51](#) of the [Snowys Camping Show](#):



From rubbish collection to track maintenance, there are a few considerations when leaving no trace in a 4WD. Image: Darche

Leaving No Trace in a 4WD

Rubbish Collection & Maintenance

Once again, take *all* of your rubbish with you when you leave!

This includes cans, bottles, food scraps, and everything in between. If you are allowed a campfire, you can burn paper, cardboard, and toilet paper – but the rest should be bagged up securely and taken out with you. Cans, especially tuna, can be rinsed and thrown on the fire to burn off any residue that might either attract animals or become stinky – but remember to remove them from the ashes and bag them up to take with you.

Keep a heap of big garbage bags in your kit and when they are full, stash the load in a wheel bag on the back of the camper trailer. Then, dump it into a public bin when you next pass through a town. If the bins are full, don't leave your rubbish – the crows and other animals will get into it and distribute it everywhere.



If you are allowed a campfire, you can burn paper, cardboard, toilet paper, and even tuna cans to remove residue. Image: Barry Peters

Having a rubbish storage option that doesn't pong out your car is a critical part of doing this easily and efficiently. [Wheel bags](#) like the [Bushranger](#) or the [canvas model](#) from [Blacksmith Camping Supplies](#) are true game-changers for taking rubbish home on the back of your camper, 4WD, or caravan.

One of the bigger problems (literally) is that of larger items being discarded. Broken [camp furniture](#), [tents](#), [tyres](#), [recovery gear](#), and [vehicle accessories](#) get dumped when they are damaged or broken. Just because they are trickier to pack, do the right thing and leave nothing behind.



Boe and Kimberley from Outback Cleanups Australia, are committed to travelling from beach



to bush, cleaning up all the rubbish left behind by others. Image: Outback Cleanups Australia



Rubbish tossed at Kellys Knob. Image: Aaron Schubert

Track Maintenance & Condition

Long story, short – stick to designated tracks and drive sensibly.

If you own a 4WD vehicle, you can do a huge amount of damage when you drive where you aren't supposed to. Stay on existing tracks: stock routes, fire access tracks, and old industry trails like those from CSIRO exploration.

Be aware of areas where you need a permit, and ask permission before you enter private property. If there are no designated tracks, follow old tyre marks – if you can't see any, perhaps consider whether or not you should be driving there at all!

Not all rules are made to be broken, so obey the signs. National parks, private property, and general tourist hot spots will have rules that should be followed. If you see a sign declaring the area has restricted access, and you haven't had your movements approved by the relevant authorities, do not enter. If you pass through a gate, leave it as you found it – be it open or closed. If closed, be mindful of the way in which it was latched and ensure you secure it properly.

Stay out of areas in where you are not meant to be. Keep to the tracks that are marked and designated on a map. Have a Plan B with an alternative route mapped out, so if conditions are compromised on the day you can go another way without risking your vehicle or further damage to the terrain.

If the track is not well used and has become overgrown, navigate your way carefully. Weave around trees, and avoid damaging or clearing branches and other vegetation as much as possible. If you must remove a low overhanging branch, don't recklessly snap it off – this risks damage and disease to the tree. Use a saw instead to do the job in the most responsible way.



Stay on existing tracks. Image: Darche

Managing Different Terrain

One of the fastest ways you can wreck an off-road track is to drive without letting your tyres down. High tyre pressures will put more stress on your vehicle, but they also do unnecessary damage to tracks. This results in greater levels of maintenance and regular grading, otherwise those people driving behind will have a far more unpleasant experience. Get the right tyres for the terrain, and adjust your pressures to suit.

A bit of wheel spin is inevitable, and in many instances completely harmless – but if you are ripping up grassed areas, or driving foolishly just for the fun of it, pull your head in!

Bush

It's harsh and unforgiving, but there is a thriving ecosystem out there! Avoid driving over spinifex grasses. They may not look like much, but they trap soil nutrients and are a habitat for small creatures.

Sand & Dunes



When driving along beaches, sticking to the firmer, packed sand, close to the low tide mark, is often your best bet. However, it's worth having a quick read about the particular location so you can be aware of undulating/off-camber features and sinkholes. If you are crossing dunes, keep to tracks – or, better still, use ramps if they are available. Many animals, including coastal birds and marine life, use the softer sand found at the high-tide mark and/or dunes for nesting. Vehicles can destroy these nests, as well as the essential vegetation that hold the integrity of the dunes with their network of roots.



Let your tyres down and match the pressure to the terrain you're driving. Image: Aaron Schubert

Mud

Muddy tracks are easily cut up! Avoid making them worse by choosing an alternative route. Repairing tracks is expensive and access with the right machinery is difficult and time-consuming. As a consequence, local authorities or landowners are often forced to close a track that has suffered damage by irresponsible drivers.

You can still have fun and get your mud fix! We're lucky in Australia to have a range of private locations that are designated 4WD playgrounds, so go your hardest there.

Water

Sometimes creek crossings are unavoidable, especially in the Kimberley region. Don't cross them if you don't need to – but if you do, look for an existing ford or track. Check the depth before attempting to drive across and be aware of the aquatic life – there could be fish breeding, or a rare species.



Mud! Image: Aaron Schubert

Animals & Wildlife

The ability to travel off-road allows you to explore more remote areas and witness some pretty spectacular scenes. From racehorse goannas to inquisitive birds, mobs of kangaroos and emus, and the inspiring sight of the Wedge-Tailed eagle or its nest – be there in the moment and soak it up, but don't get carried away.

Wombat burrows litter the outback and are large enough to swallow the front half of a ute! Take it easy and weave your way through so both you, your vehicle, and the wombat's home can remain unscathed.

Most of us are familiar with 'roo-hour', and if you are still on the track (or highway, for that matter) at dawn or dusk, take extra care and stay vigilant. Maintain deep respect for the animals and their environment. Try not to travel at night when wildlife is most active, and allow animals to move off the track before slowing down and calmly passing.

Stay downwind and don't chase any animal with your vehicle. If you happen to hit a creature, always stop, check for life – both the animal and any young – and call your local wildlife organisation if help is needed.

Try to keep your engine revs low so as not to disturb or frighten any wildlife with your noise. If you must clear the path of rocks or logs, put them back once you have passed. These natural objects are their homes.



Wombat burrows can be huge and should be carefully driven around. Image: Coleman



Australia

Acknowledge Country

Australia has a remarkable history which should be respected. Be culturally sensitive and observe your surroundings. Some sites are off-limits, sacred, or have restricted access – be it because they are a reserve for remote communities, or hold particular significance to specific groups. Even in lesser-known areas, climate change and the movement of dunes has revealed ancient Aboriginal middens. This is another reason to remain mindful when driving over dunes.

Making the effort to learn the cultural significance of the area in which you are travelling is a worthy investment of your time. Leave Aboriginal rock art alone, read the information available, and listen to and respect the teachings from local elders.



The Gija and Jaru peoples are the Traditional Custodians of Purnululu National Park – home to the Bungle Bungle. Image: Aaron Schubert

Recovery & Gear

The key to 4WDing is learning how to manage challenging terrain. Mastering this skill and navigating environments that are constantly changing is part of the thrill and what attracts enthusiasts to the activity. You never know what you're going to get – but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be prepared.

Kitting out your vehicle with appropriate 4WD recovery gear makes all the difference. Not only to your safety, but also the impact you'll have on the surrounding environment if you do find yourself in a situation (especially if you get bogged).

Equipment includes recovery tracks and a tree trunk protector or blanket to wrap around the tree before you winch yourself out. Safeguard your driving lights with clear covers too, so they're shielded from stones or debris flicking up and cracking the bulbs.

If you're extended touring and need to undergo some bush mechanics, do your research. If an oil change is necessary, be prepared with some empty containers to catch the old oil and newspapers cover the ground. Find out where you can dispose of the waste responsibly – don't leave it behind, and don't allow your old oil to empty out over the earth.



Using the right recovery gear will minimise the damage you cause to both your vehicle and the environment. Image: Aaron Schubert

Weeds & Grasses

Check around your muffler, grill, and vehicle's undercarriage for any grasses or branches to clear before continuing on. This is especially important if you're travelling between national parks or conservation areas, as it prevents the spread of weeds and fungal diseases.

Mufflers get hot too, and dry grasses caught in or around may catch alight. This is a danger to yourself inside your vehicle but also a bushfire risk if the flame then catches onto other grasses as you're travelling.



All in all, before setting off, ensure your vehicle is in good shape. Check the mechanics, your tyres, and top up your kit with parts. Check and fix any oil leaks – and if you're carrying a load, make sure you are not top-heavy! Distribute the weight so it's balanced, too. A well-packed vehicle will handle the terrain more efficiently and cause less damage than one that is struggling due to an uneven load.



All in all, before setting off, ensure your vehicle is in good shape. Image: Aaron Schubert
Have fun and do the right thing. Remember to take stock of your behaviour – if what you're doing is not sustainable, the track or campsite will ultimately close and will be no longer available for off-road adventurers like yourself!

If you see someone doing the wrong thing, carefully report them. Don't put yourself in danger or confront them, just take a note of their details. Reporting is a part of keeping this great land beautiful for ourselves, each other, and future generations.

Have you got some tips to add to this list?