

We'd headed up to the far north in our 4WD and had made it to the lookout where I stood at the top admiring the truly magnificent scene. There I am, soaking up the stunning view and my attention drifts down towards the bottom of the rocks, where my heart just about stops. There are more cans, drink bottles and rubbish than I'd ever seen in the bush. We were remote and yet the scars from previous visitors had been left behind. I immediately felt the anger welling up. This isn't Leave No Trace!

So, how do we LNT when 4WDing?

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

1. Rubbish collection and maintenance

It should go without saying but evidently, there are too many people not doing the right thing. 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, then 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 make sure you remember to remove them from the ashes and bag them up to take with you. We keep a heap of big garbage bags in our kit and when they are full, we stash the load in our Bushranger bin bag on the back of the camper trailer, or in our firewood box. We can comfortably last a week or two collecting all of our rubbish, and then we'll dump it into a public bin when we next pass through a town. If the bins are full, we don't leave our rubbish and neither should you. The crows and other animals will just get into it and distribute it everywhere.

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 our Bushranger or the canvas one 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, vehicle accessories etc. are getting dumped when they are damaged or broken. People are too lazy to take them out because they are trickier to pack. Just do the right thing and leave nothing behind!

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

2. 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, then follow old tyre marks and if you can't see any, then 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, and they 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, then be mindful of the way in which it was latched and make sure you secure it properly.

Stay out of areas where you aren't 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 that if conditions are compromised on the day, you can go another way and not risk your vehicle or further damage to the terrain.

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



Yes, it's fun to get your beast muddy, but avoid making the track worse in the process!

Image: Aaron Schubert

3. 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, or the 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 you should 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 and 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.

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. Don't worry, you can still have fun

and get your mud fix! We're lucky in Australia where we have a range of private locations that are designated playgrounds, so you can 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, then 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 rare species.



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

4. Animals & wildlife

Being able to go off-road allows you to explore more remote areas where you'll likely 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.

We are all familiar with 'Roo-hour' and if you are still on the track (or highway for that matter!) at dawn or dusk, then 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 you slowly and gently pass.

Stay downwind and don't chase any animal with your vehicle. If you do happen to hit a creature, please always stop, check for life – both the animal and for 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, and if you have to 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

5. Acknowledge country

Australia has a remarkable history and it 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 they hold particular significance to specific groups. Even in lesser-known areas, climate change and the movement of dunes has revealed ancient Aboriginal middens – 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, listen to and respect the teachings from local elders. If they ask you to not do something, then don't.

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


6. 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 like recovery tracks and using a tree trunk protector or blanket to wrap around before you winch yourself out. Safeguard your driving lights with clear covers so that they are shielded from stones or debris flicking up and cracking them.

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 spread out to 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*

7. Weeds & grasses

Check around your muffler, grill and vehicle's undercarriage and clear any grasses or branches before continuing on. This is especially important if you are travelling between national parks or conservation areas to prevent 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 it also creates a bushfire risk if the flame then catches onto other grasses as you're driving.

 *The region around Esperance is currently tackling declared weeds such as Prickly Pear Cactus and Caltrop. Image: Aaron Schubert*

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

Have fun and do the right thing when 4WDing. Remember to take stock of your behaviour - if what you're doing is not sustainable, then whether it's today, tomorrow or next month, ultimately the track will close and will no longer be available for your off-road adventure! If you see someone doing the wrong thing, you should be carefully reporting them. Don't put yourself in danger or confront them, but make a note of their details. Reporting grubs is a part of keeping this great land beautiful for ourselves, each other and for future generations.



Have you got some tips to add to this list?