



Watching the sun go down when you are camping is one of the simple pleasures in life. However, as the sun dips, so does your ability to see; which makes having suitable lighting solutions for when you're camping imperative. Struggling to see a metre in front of you is not only an issue for your safety, but can be incredibly frustrating too.

Fortunately for us, technology continues to develop at a rapid rate, and lighting for camping hasn't been one to miss out. Today, you can comfortably light up your campground from a huge range of technology that is inexpensive, easy to use and economical to run. Camping should be comfortable, and if you are finding a lack of lighting solutions is taking away from that, this post will help you to be better prepared.

What's changed over the years?

I recall sitting by the river as a young boy, next to a gas lantern, and struggling to see what everyone else was seeing only a few metres in front. They are big, awkward, require fuel, damage easily, and children can burn themselves easily (as I found out!).

Today, lighting for camping is more affordable, durable, brighter, easier to use and more compact than ever before. Batteries have also improved, along with the introduction of LEDs, and the advancement of solar power technology. Remember the old dolphin torches you'd lug around? Now, you can get a torch that will blow them away in both battery life and light output that's a quarter of the size and weight.



Our camp lighting set up along the Gibb River Road, Western Australia. Image by Aaron



Schubert.

Improvements in LED Lighting

When it comes to lighting, the biggest advance over the years has been LED technology. Otherwise known as Light emitting diodes, they are bright, use very little power and last substantially longer than their counterparts. As time goes on they've become more popular, to the point where they are very affordable.

Almost every light designed for camping today uses LEDs. Some are just bright enough to see inside a tent, and others are powerful enough to see several hundred metres in front of you. I kid you not, some of the tactical torches and headlamps on the market are brighter than vehicle headlights.

Advances in Battery Technology

Today, just about every power tool on the market can be purchased as battery powered – even battery powered chainsaws! Fifteen years ago, people would have laughed if you had suggested that. We've come a long way from the standard AA batteries. Batteries are now more compact, can store more energy and last a greater number of cycles.

12V Compatible Lighting

If you have a 4WD or vehicle set up with decent 12V power (a dual battery system is perfect) your options for camp lights are endless. Whether it's an LED flood light, strip lighting or compact lights, being able to connect to 12V power gives you huge potential.

LED Strip Lighting

One of the most common lights you'll see when camping these days is LED strip lighting. It's a length of LEDs in a row that are mounted inside a waterproof film. They are low-cost, bright, draw little power and can be installed by virtually anyone. You can cut them every 10 or so centimetres, join them easily and stick them to pretty much anything. Some stores sell pre-wired LED strip lighting with a cigarette lighter plug on one end, or you can make your own up.

Solar and Wind-up Lights

One thing that can be a right pain regardless of which pathway you go, is changing batteries. There are a heap of torches and lanterns on the market today that you don't have to change batteries on. Some require you to wind a handle around to generate power, and others charge via inbuilt, or separate solar panels. Of course, these can bring in their own series of problems, but used for the right purpose, they are fantastic.

The wind-up ones, in particular, are great; if you have no light, just wind it up a bit and you



are good to go again. For the lower light output lanterns (like what you'd use in a tent) the solar ones are a great option too, providing you remember to leave them out in the sun on a clear day. Keep in mind that if you're camping in cloudy or rainy weather - you might need a backup option!



*Adding some quality lights to your vehicle is a great way to illuminate your area at night.
Image by Aaron Schubert.*

What should you look for in a camping light?

With more options on the market today than you could ever need, it becomes important to buy a camping light that is going to do what *you* need it to do. Make sure the light suits your purposes; there's no point buying a flood light if you can't connect it to 12V power. Likewise, if you want a light to read a book in your tent at night, perhaps a top of the range tactical torch is not the wisest of ideas!

1. Size, Weight, and Comfort

Lights these days are compact and lightweight, even when you start moving into the high-performance options. Steer clear of anything big and heavy; they are awkward to use and a waste of space. Make sure you are comfortable with the light, especially when it comes to headlamps. There's no point having a nice light if you hate wearing the thing!



2. Useability

If you are tossing up between a handheld torch or a headlamp, then the headlamp will beat it every time as these are just so much more practical. Having good quality light is one thing, but being able to use it easily is another. A torch is better than nothing, but it can be annoying trying to work in the dark while one hand is tied up pointing the torch in the right direction. When you've got both hands-free, you'll find cooking, stoking the fire, working on your 4WD, setting up tents or whatever you need to do simple and easy.

3. Economical Battery Supply

I have a big Maglite in my drawer at home. It needs four D size batteries and eats them for breakfast. It hasn't been used in years because replacing the batteries (or getting rechargeable ones) is not economical (plus it weighs a tonne!). Have a think about your battery supply - what will it cost to replace the batteries? Can you carry a spare set easily? Can you recharge them? How will you do it when camping?

4. Modes

There are so many torches and lanterns on the market that you can choose from, but when you're doing your research you might want to check that the one you've picked has a dimming function. Some units will have a couple of different brightness modes, or the better torches have the ability to push a lever or turn a knob to dim the torch. For general camping, you don't need a torch that shines all the way into the distance. These torches use more power and can be annoying to your fellow campers, so go for a model that gives you a couple of different brightness modes.

5. Power Consumption

The more power you use, the faster your batteries need charging. Look for something that is bright enough to do what you need, and no more - or it will chew through your battery supply!

6. Colour

One thing to pay attention to when it comes to lights is the colour temperature. You can get everything from cool white to yellow, or red. Cool or blue light colours attract insects much quicker than warm or yellow LEDs, so have a think about colour before you delve in.

7. Remote Control Compatibility

For lights that you are mounting somewhere when camping, a remote control is a fantastic option. You can often get dimmers included, so you can turn it on, and dim the light down without having to walk through the dark to find it!



8. Quality

They say a poor man buys twice, and despite being well aware of this I've been bitten many times when it comes to camping lights. Three dollar lights are worth just that, so don't waste your money. I've been through several of them!



Our campsite blindingly lit up with 12V 4WD lighting. Image by Aaron Schubert.

What do I use in my 4WD and camping setup?

I run a dual battery system in the back of the Land Cruiser, and power for lighting is no drama at all. A flood light is used on the back of the 4WD, along with LED strip lighting on the top tailgate and upgraded LED globes for the two interior lights.

A flood light easily has enough output to light a whole camp area up, which is fantastic when you arrive at camp in the dark – and the LED strip lighting is perfect seeing in the back of the 4WD. If you struggle to find what you want in the dark, upgrade your interior lights. You can buy replacements for a couple of dollars online, and the difference is literally night and day. I also use a headlamp for around camp, and a small LED powered light for inside the tent.

Technology has put camping lights in a fantastic position today. If your lights for camping are a bit dim or costing a fortune in batteries, check out what's available – you'll be pleasantly surprised for sure.



Do you have any lighting solutions that never fail you when you're out adventuring? Sound off in the comments below.