



There's nothing better than hopping into a 4WD that's packed and ready to go, and driving off into the sunset. Australia is one of the best places in the world to have a 4WD adventure, but what you pack can make or break your trip.

Those who have travelled extensively know that you need to be a bit of a minimalist when it comes to packing a 4WD. It's easy to throw heaps of gear into the back, so in this post, we look at what you can do to minimise your weight and gear for 4WD adventures.



More weight means your 4WD works harder.

If you haven't ever taken the time to weigh your 4WD, you should. There are a lot of 4WD's in Australia that are overweight in one way or another, and this has some very nasty ramifications especially if you have an accident. Beyond this, weight is the enemy for 4WDing. It makes everything work harder, increases the chance of something breaking, makes your 4WD less capable and uses more fuel. This should be the basis for reducing weight and gear.

I've seen some 4WD's so loaded up with gear that it's almost impossible for everyone to get inside, and that's not comfortable, safe or how you should be travelling. At the end of the day it's a fine balance between taking what you need to have an enjoyable and safe trip, and not overloading your vehicle, or taking so much that it becomes troublesome to travel.

The more you travel, the better you get at this, but there are some simple things that can be applied to assist to begin with.



The more gear you take, the more fuel you use.

What sort of travel are you doing?

There's a lot of different styles of 4WD adventures. If you are just towing a caravan around this great country on the occasional gravel road, your weight and gear options are greatly increased. If you are doing remote travel through the deserts for weeks on end and not towing anything, then you have to be a lot smarter as your vehicle works harder and has less payload.

Match your style of 4WD adventure to the level of gear that you take, and where possible, minimise your gear.



Take no more than you need.

You can't take everything

Let's start with a simple fact; you cannot, and should not take everything with you that you'd like to. Unless you are an amazing minimalist, there's a pretty good chance you will have to make a choice when it comes to what gear goes, and what stays at home.

If weight isn't the reason for having to leave it at home, often space is. Struggling to repack your gear back into the 4WD every time you want to move is a problem you want to avoid.

Every bit of gear on, and in your 4WD should be divided into 2 categories; 'must-have' and 'nice to have'.



The more you take, the harder it is to pack.



Must-have gear

I consider must-have gear to be directly related to safety and comfort. You need water, food, fuel, comfortable clothing and bedding, shelter, tools, first aid gear, spares and a way to communicate. I'm not suggesting for a second that you shouldn't be comfortable when camping, but there are varying levels of comfort that you want to think about, and you shouldn't expect the same 5-star luxury when on a 4WD trip as you'd get in a fancy resort!



4WD recovery gear is non-negotiable.

Nice to have gear

This category is probably controversial, but at the end of the day, there's a heap of gear on the market that you really don't 'need' with you. Camping has evolved so much over the last few decades that you can now literally take anything with you including the kitchen sink, and this goes against minimising your weight and gear!

Where people would be happy to take an icebox, swag and a few tins of food, the standard camping setup today is much more extravagant. I'm not going to complain about this, as it makes camping much more enjoyable, but it does certainly come at a cost, and it's not possible to take all this wonderful gear on some of the more challenging 4WD adventures. Things like coffee machines, diesel heaters, microwaves, multiple fridges, and huge battery systems are not 'must-have' gear – they are nice to have but you can live without them.



Sorting through the gear in our Dmax.

Other ways to reduce gear and weight

Aside from literally leaving gear at home that you really don't need, there are a few other ways to reduce weight and space:

Take multipurpose items

The older generations regularly say they won't take something with them if it doesn't perform more than one role. A little hatchet is good for cutting branches, banging in tent pegs and it doesn't take up much room. A stainless steel bucket can be used for everything from boiling water for a shower to storing gear, cooking in, building sandcastles, putting caught fish in and collecting water from a river. A quality tarp can be used for extra shade, protection from the rain, collecting water or to lay on under your vehicle to inspect and do repairs.

If you can take items that double up in use, you are essentially halving the gear you need to bring and that's a win for everyone. Ever wondered why the Leatherman is so popular?!



The humble stainless steel bucket is great for so many uses.



Prioritise by importance and chance of use

When you go to pack something into your 4WD, have a think about how important it actually is, and how often you might use it. Taking the time to physically hold each bit of gear you pack in is a great way to sort out what's important and what isn't.

I know after several trips in our 4WD I have to do a cleanout, as you get a build-up of all sorts of random gear that finds its way into the vehicle and never leaves! I always find far too many ratchet straps, kids' toys, bottles of water, cans of food and random bits and bobs that I've forgotten about. If you don't use them for several trips and they aren't related to safety, take them out!

Don't skimp on items that you might rarely use, especially if they relate to your safety. Things like first aid kits and recovery gear might not be used often, but are absolutely essential. On the other hand, taking a rooftop tinny along on a trip that is 90% desert and 10% coastline might be something you can do without.



Rooftop boats may not be an essential for you.

Substitute heavy for light and big for smaller

There are so many ways you can substitute items that you need with lighter ones. Everything is getting smaller, lighter and easier to use, which works in your favour. Instead of a giant, heavy canvas tent, you can now get them featherlight. Looking at the gear used for hiking shows this point very well.

Instead of a cast iron camp oven, you can get spun steel ones. Instead of a giant old school Maglite torch, you can get tiny LED torches which are substantially brighter. Camping chairs are becoming more compact and lightweight, as are fire pits, gas burners and lots of kitchenware.



The Oztent RV5 is great but certainly not light or compact.

Anything that folds, squashes up or packs away neatly is fantastic for camping. We have just upgraded to a set of lightweight square pots and pans for cooking on our burner, and they have removable handles and stack inside each other, making it super-compact.

We have also just gotten a fantastic beach shelter that covers around 3 x 3 metres, only weighs around 4kg and packs up super small. Compare that to a big, heavy gazebo and you've saved a bucket load of space and weight, not to mention the ease of assembly.

4WD gear is also getting lighter – Dyneema winch rope, soft shackles, snatch ropes, snatch pulleys, lithium batteries and the list goes on. You can dramatically reduce the weight and space consumed just by substituting heavy and large items for light, smaller ones.



Our new Breezy Shade shelter which is amazing.

Pick your 4WD accessories and modifications wisely

Some of the heaviest additions to a car relate to modifications, recovery gear and accessories on a 4WD. Bar work, in particular, adds a huge amount of weight. Bullbars, scrub



bars, roof racks, side steps and rear bars will eat into your payload. If you walked into your local 4WD store and decked your vehicle out with everything in their catalogue, you'd probably drive out overweight, with no ability to add any gear inside!

Pick your modifications wisely, knowing your total payload, what is important and how you load your vehicle. A winch is a great modification, but if you aren't ever going to need one, that's 20 - 50kg of weight saved. Aluminium or plastic bull bars can save a heap of weight too.

If you aren't doing rock crawling, you can get away without rock sliders, and whilst rear drawers can be super handy, they too take up a lot of room and weight.



Plastic smart bars are super light.

Consider a trailer

If you can't reduce the weight or are running low on space, a great option is to spread it out with a trailer. They do have some downsides, but it's better to spread the load more evenly than to overload the rear axle of your 4WD, for example. When our little boy came along, we [moved to a camper trailer](#) as it just wasn't legally possible to fit everything in for our 4WD adventures.



Lots of modifications can work against you off-road.

Final words

There are lots of different styles of 4WD adventures out there, but no matter what you are doing its extremely easy to throw too much gear on and into your 4WD. Really think about what you need to take so you have what you need, and no more!

What other weight and space-saving tips do you have?!