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Maybe they used to fight over the TV remote.

Maybe they used to nick food from each other's plate at the dinner table. Maybe they still call dibs on the front seat of the car.

Sibling antics aside, founders of Blacksmith Camping Supplies Laine and Erin have demonstrated how hard work, collaboration, and a shared love for the great outdoors can foster a successful Australian family business. In this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, we unpack what Australian-made products mean to them. In that, Lauren and Ben query the challenges they've faced, the feedback they've embraced, and the production process from design to dispatch.

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Mentioned in this Episode:

Sites and Pages:

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – Home](#)

[Snowys Outdoors – Home](#)

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – About Us](#)

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – Shop All](#)

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – Our Materials](#)

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – Contact Us](#)

[Adelaide Annexe & Canvas – Home](#)

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – Facebook](#)

[Blacksmith Camping Supplies – Instagram](#)

[Snowys Outdoors – Blacksmith Camping Supplies Brand Page](#)

Blacksmith Camping Supplies Products:

[4WD bags](#)

[Camping tent bags](#)

[Wheel bags](#)

[Hose bags](#)

[Power cord bags](#)

[Drawer / storage bags](#)

[Camp oven bags](#)

[Pipsqueak / small storage bags](#)

[Peg and tool bags](#)

[Gift cards](#)

[Sand peg and tool bags](#)

[Dash organisers](#)

Introducing Laine and Erin

As founders of [Blacksmith Camping Supplies](#), Laine and Erin are not only brother and sister but the children of [Snowys Outdoors](#) Director Richard. Outside this interview, Lauren and Ben address Laine as their boss – but not today! Our podcast hosts take the reins.

History

After Snowys was established in Adelaide during the mid-90s, Laine and Erin found they became increasingly familiar with camping, 4WD, and outdoor equipment. Leading up to 2019, the general feedback from customers presented the opportunity for Snowys to supply and stock Australian-made products. This was when Laine and Erin decided to mirror their father's ambition and create high-quality, Australian-made outdoor gear. In [building their own brand](#), they identified an opportunity to control the process from start to finish – from sourcing material, hardware, and products within Australia, right through to quality control. In this way, they maintain a genuine sense of pride in the production of their [canvas camping bags](#).



Sourcing Aussie-Made Materials

Given the already limited supply of Australian-manufactured materials, our podcast hosts query how important Laine and Erin considered the sourcing of these, as well as how they approached obtaining the supplies they were satisfied with.

After a lot of research, Erin can clarify that while Blacksmith Camping seeks Aussie-made materials, there's also a regard for the process they undergo – for example, canvas interwoven with Queensland-grown cotton. While they've been offered canvas materials fabricated offshore, the quality of such is both insufficient for their product purposes and lacks relevance to the harsh Australian conditions.

Despite Australia's deficiency in some materials – like zippers, which Erin instead sources from Japan – Laine confirms that Blacksmith Camping has been relatively lucky within the outdoor industry. As their products are synonymous with the history of the swagman, their roots are Australian and so have had them benefitting from enough supply options.

Products

Blacksmith Camping Supplies stock canvas bags for 4WDs and camping, including those for wheels, hoses, power cords, general storage, camp ovens, smaller items, tools, and more. The main construction materials are canvas and PVC, with both UV and rot protection. While these are sourced from around Australia, the zippers, Velcro, and some hardware need to be sourced from overseas. With even their webbing obtained from Victoria, the foundation of Blacksmith Camping's canvas bags is Australian-made.

Ben reminds those who seek 100% Australian-made products that it's virtually impossible to achieve this. Most products will boast roughly 80% of Australian materials with the remaining 20% physically unable to be sourced from anywhere other than overseas.

As mentioned, deeming a product as Australian-made involves covering more factors than the materials alone. Some brands of Australian products may use Australian materials, though their manufacturing takes place offshore. Erin confirms that Blacksmith Camping produce every bag onsite in their humble, Adelaide-based workshop – with four exceptional sewers operating behind her as she speaks!



Blacksmith Camping Supplies stock canvas bags for 4WDs and camping. Credit: Blacksmith Camping Supplies

Machinery and Equipment

For Laine and Erin, the mission around Australian-made products extends past materials to the machinery and equipment used in the manufacturing process – including repairs and servicing.

The Pathfinder fabric-cutting machine, requiring two full-time, permanent employees, was sourced from Victoria. Machine operators will service the system physically when they can make it across the border, as well as remote into the machine itself from interstate. Erin sourced her sewing machines from Queensland, and has accepted substantial assistance in their setting up and servicing. That said, her Diploma in Textiles and background in sewing has granted her a profound understanding of the machinery.

While it isn't their driver, sourcing infrastructure from around Australia is a bonus for the Blacksmith brand. Navigating the equipment has proved a steep learning curve, where the support they've received – even from competitors – has helped pave the way. Nonetheless, no one pushed harder for the Pathfinder cutting machine than Laine, who in the lead up to its arrival had spent every night flexing his forearms by hand-cutting fabric with scissors!

Blacksmith Camping's Point of Difference

While there are many, high quality and durability are the two most distinctive brand qualities.



Blacksmith Camping develops practical designs that their customers claim to need, acknowledging and understanding their requests for useful products that last a lifetime.

Humble Beginnings

Circling back to Laine's massive forearms – Lauren and Ben ask where it all began, and at what point the two of them graduated to more efficient equipment.

In 2019, Laine and Erin huddled into the back room of the Snowys' Adelaide store to mesh both their love of the outdoors and experience in the industry. With ever-bulging forearms and a single sewing machine, Laine cut the fabric that Erin sewed, producing the first Blacksmith bags to sell through Snowys. Their days lasted 12 hours, where 9am-5pm was spent working at Snowys before moving into the backroom for four hours of building their business. This would continue into the weekend too.

Like Harry Potter's cupboard under the stairs, their initial cranny of creation served as a test in determining whether this was the industry they wanted to pursue. Beyond their blistered, callused hands, Laine and Erin were still convinced, oblivious that their Blacksmith brand was about to boom.

A Rapid Progression

With such a substantial progression over the last three years, Laine is grateful for the opportunity to have initially leveraged off Snowys. Access to their customers and demographic not only further enhanced Blacksmith Camping's brand awareness, but encouraged customer and staff feedback in the interest of future designs and styles.

The First Employee

As the business developed, Laine and Erin sought a fulltime sewer who could maintain the ideal level of quality while considering customer demand. Until this point, all roles and responsibilities had been monitored by Laine and Erin to a very particular standard – so handing over the sewing machine to their first employee was like handing over a newborn baby to a stranger. They were now expected to teach and train, which for Erin meant drawing from her teaching background.

Amid planning a wedding, Laine found it a personal challenge to build a team larger than their brother-and-sister-band. That said, hiring staff meant Laine and Erin established a quality control process which allowed them to determine whether more training was required, and which area demanded it most.

When You Know, You Know

It was after hiring that first staff member that Laine and Erin established a sense of confidence, dedicating more time to listening to and developing trust with their customers. Their Blacksmith Camping Supplies website launched in early 2021, from which they now ship products to countries all over the world including the United States, Canada, the United



Kingdom, New Zealand, and Japan.

Be it receiving a photo from a little girl in Japan happily holding her new bag, to noticing an online order coming in from New York – the thrill of knowing their product is sought from anywhere overseas is a feeling Laine and Erin can only humbly describe as ‘pretty cool’. Ultimately, their success has stemmed from identifying a market for bags complementing camping supplies that don’t yet have a storage option, such as sharp tools.

Initial Challenges

Given the big benefits brought to you by Blacksmith bags, the initial challenges that Laine and Erin encountered were a small workspace and minimal machinery. One can only manufacture so many bags in a day and, without the adequate cash to fund machinery in the early stages, efficiency was an issue the two of them hoped to improve as their business blossomed. With a greater rate of productivity, time no longer becomes a substantial factor in the cost of production, further helping to maintain low selling prices.

New Designs

From designing to dispatching – Lauren and Ben want to know how Blacksmith Camping identifies a new product opportunity.

It starts with the customer. Using their request as an aid, Laine and Erin design what they think both aligns best with the current market and what could be well-received. After asking Snowys staff to trial, test, and thrash about in the scrub, they progress these ideas from prototypes to final products.

Erin expresses how much she loves receiving suggestions from customers via e-mail. A benefit of being a small business is how quickly they can physically respond to a request for an extra feature, such as a pocket.

Cost

What comes first – the product, or the price?

Laine explains the importance of meeting the ideal level of quality and practicality while still prioritising Australian-made materials. In regard to cost, he circles back to efficiency, where prices will simply reflect the effectiveness of the manufacturing process.

Inspiration from Competitors

In the instance of their wheel bags, Laine and Erin first sourced five or six from competing brands to establish what works, why they’re popular, and how Blacksmith Camping could produce a better design. Despite having made customer review-based changes over time, the Blacksmith Camping Supplies wheel bag is one of their most successful products.



The Process from Design to Dispatch

From the initial sketch to the final product – the complexity of a design determines the overall length of the manufacturing process. In the interest of perfecting its design, a product will usually begin as three or four prototypes. After assessing its overall form, the team move it into the production stage. The entire process lasts between three and four months. The cutting machine is operated by a program called Pathfinder that enables an easy, efficient, digital creation of patterns. Considering this, the production aspect of a new design is quick, where most of the time is allocated to determining whether it's a good fit for the brand and the current market. From the paper, to the calico, and finally to the canvas – the level of thought devoted to creating a product is greater than a customer may consider, be it the direction of a zipline or the size of a pocket.

Knock-On Effects

From their exploding success, there have been unavoidable knock-on effects. The Coronavirus, now in its third year, has impacted businesses all over the world on varying points of the scale – particularly concerning the supply of materials. Blacksmith Camping fortunately avoided the heavier impacts, launching prior to the peak effects of the virus. With the subsequent increase in travel within our own backyard too, locally-made products became even more attractive to avid 4WD tourers and adventurers. During this period, sourcing supplies from within Australia was even more of an advantage than doing so internationally. Utilising Australian canvas made from cotton grown nationally meant fewer interruptions to border and trade restrictions overseas. That said, the demand for Aussie-made materials was higher and Erin was met with difficulties in obtaining canvas from their usual manufacturer who simply couldn't fulfill the demand at their usual rate. Ultimately, the challenges they inevitably faced had Blacksmith just as vulnerable as every other business of their kind. With the rising price of steel proving it no longer viable to sell via retail, Hillbilly Camping Gear has made the tough decision to discontinue selling wholesale. Laine states that Blacksmith can both sell direct to a customer and share profit on their income with Snowys. In the case of Hillbilly, their only option now is to remove the middle man. That said, the high demand for their long lasting, top quality, and quintessentially Australian gear simply reflects the increasing support for Australian manufacturing.

Maintenance of Machinery

Sewing machine mechanics may be scarce – but they're out there, and Erin confirms that Blacksmith have been very lucky! Sewers themselves tend to be hidden gems too, especially when considering who best fits the Blacksmith brand and expectations. Nonetheless, local mechanics like [Adelaide Annexe & Canvas](#) – specialising in caravan awnings – are always willing to lend a hand, which Laine claims is a true reflection of the outdoor industry.



Quality Control

We've established that Erin and Laine are relatively particular individuals...so it won't surprise you to know that every finished Blacksmith Camping product is placed on a shelf and reviewed thoroughly before it's dispatched.

From a loose thread to an imperfection in the fabric itself, Erin scans for consistent back-sewing and even stitching. Any bag that fails the first test is sent straight back to the sewers, where products with only minor faults earn their place on the 'seconds' shelf.

The Importance of Aussie-Made

Initially, Erin was of the belief that all canvas was the same. After almost three years of sourcing supplies and materials for Blacksmith Camping, she can confirm that the quality of Australian canvas is superior.

The construction of offshore canvas tends to skip a few steps, be it bleaching or washing, which can lead to the fabric breaking down or rotting. That said, this doesn't necessarily deem it poor – only insufficient for harsh Australian conditions, manufactured instead to suit its local climate. Australian-made canvas features UV resistance and other qualities allowing it to withstand unique Aussie environments – a hearty fabric that lasts forever.

Furthermore, in choosing to purchase Australian-made products, one also chooses to support Australian jobs and the national economy.



Australian-made canvas features UV resistance and other qualities allowing it to withstand unique Aussie environments.



Credit: Blacksmith Camping Supplies

What's on the Horizon?

Continuing to expand the Blacksmith team is a mutual goal for both Laine and Erin. Regarding products, they hope for their visions of tool rolls, additional organisers, and jerry can bags to become a reality. With the success of their 4WD wheel bags, the siblings also plan to design a Ute bag for a tray, and a 4WD system where every Blacksmith bag has a place in your boot.

Laine and Erin also hope for more machinery and thus better efficiency, in the interest of continuing to lower their prices.

Find Out More

Aside from the Contact Us page on their website (BlacksmithCamping.com), Blacksmith Camping is also active on both Facebook and Instagram, currently monitored by Laine. Of course, products can also be viewed and purchased through Snowys Outdoors.

Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our Facebook group and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.

Catch you out there!