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## **Many resources lead the way to the best campsites in our outback-yard,**

be they paperback maps scribbled with the curves and contours of rural Australia, or online platforms for following the footprints of fellow adventurers across beaches, base camps, and bucket-list locations.

In this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, Ben and Lauren detail the various modes by which to identify, plan for, and book into the campsites that best suit your off-grid getaway – from the bayside campsites along sandy coastlines, to Station Stays beneath the pink skies of the bushland.

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## **Mentioned in this episode**

### **Podcasts:**

[Ep18 – Camping, Waste & Leaving No Trace](#)

### **Products:**

[Camps Australia Wide Camping Guide \(11th Edition\)](#)

[Hema Maps](#)

### **Other:**

[National Parks and Wildlife Services, South Australia](#)

[YouCamp](#)



[Station Stays South Australia](#)

[Outback Beds](#)

[Station Hoppers](#)

[Wiki Camps](#)

[App Store: Camps Australia Wide](#)

[Hema Maps: Mobile App](#)

[HemaX: CamperX app](#)

[Mad Paws](#)

[All Trails](#)

[Petrol Spy](#)

[Avenza Maps](#)

## **Finding a Campsite**

This used to be a fairly straightforward process. Rock up, set up, present that little envelope at the entrance with the payment fees, and stay for as long as you like.

However, with the growing interest in outdoor adventuring and substantial rise in camping over the last couple of years, the campsites marked with an inky star in our guidebooks are filling up faster – and often already full when we arrive.

With this change has also come a shift in payment methods, where expenses once paid in cash are now done so via online bookings. Prior to these systems, Lauren describes how one could pull into a camping ground on a Friday (possibly a Thursday on a long weekend, with the anticipation that sites could be busier), and score an available site effortlessly. Now, with the option to book far in advance, some campers are booking the same site between three and 12 months out.

With this change in approach, camping trips for the most part require far more planning – excusing some of the more remote locations in their off-peak seasons. When Ben embarked on his half-lap through Western Australia and the Northern Territory, he chose to do so in the hot season when fewer people were travelling. This meant he had a greater chance of landing a campsite with little notice.

On the other hand, given it's not a first-in-best-dressed scenario anymore, it's recommended to plan well in advance if your trip is scheduled for the busier time of year.

## **Planning**

On that, thorough planning simply starts with jumping online, navigating the necessary park websites for suitable sites and costs, and planning your itinerary.

That said, planning also involves maintaining a level of flexibility. For example, those wishing to book somewhere one night and drive 200 kilometres the following day may not find a free campsite – in which case, that 200 kilometres must come either before or after whatever the distance is to the next rest spot!

## Sharing Your Campsites

Ben and Lauren receive a lot of questions surrounding how to find the best campsites. Lauren admits that sharing or broadcasting favourite campsites with others shouldn't be something to form a habit of, unless done so between close family and friends.

Public campsites and spaces are available to everyone, be they via online sources or doggy-eared in a travel guide. That said, the more they're spoken about with others the less likely they'll remain that quiet, ever-available site that was once your special, go-to place.

With this in mind, Ben and Lauren share the options that they use and rely on to identify the best campsites – so you can too.

## Word of Mouth

It's common to hear of a particular campsite through friends or family members who camp regularly and are happy to share their experiences.

When this happens – treasure that campsite. Just like every campsite you visit, look after it well and leave no trace.

## Books and Websites

Ben and Lauren recommend the Camps Australia Wide Camping Guide (11<sup>th</sup> Edition).

Complete with maps and photographs, this resource is also online – though the book remains a clever companion in your centre console for the moments when you have no reception (or a headache from too much screen time).

In addition to Camps Australia Wide, Lauren notes Make Trax: Free Camps Australia, detailing most to all free campsites around the country including those suitable for fishing. Another brand is Hema, offering stacks of travel books, local guides, and maps from the scenic seashores to the red dirt and rubble of the outback.

Purchasing the current or latest edition of guidebooks today doesn't necessarily mean they'll be out of date tomorrow – the updated versions simply include the new sites that have developed since the previous edition. For example, if in using a two-year-old Camps Australia Wide book the caravan park you've called to book into has since closed – Lauren suggests simply putting a marker through it. The rest of the book is still comprehensive and valuable!



*Hema offer stacks of travel books, local guides, and maps from the scenic seashores to the red dirt and rubble of the outback. Credit: Shutterstock*

Other useful resources include the National Parks websites, where South Australia offer a full list of national and conservation parks on their main site, managed by Park SA – including PDF maps of campsites, online booking, and more. The booking system indicates price per site, while the equivalent website for Western Australia specifies cost per person via a slightly different payment portal. The simplicity of the South Australian site is beneficial, as campers simply pay one fee for one site – boding well for group camping. That said, both sites offer the same service.

Those staying somewhere that falls under a national or conservation park will find that the campsites are dispersed across a large area. Before heading home, Lauren tends to take a

detour to each vacant site to keep notes of their respective site numbers and general features. This serves as a helpful reference for when she visits next time and saves her searching time on arrival.

## Other Online Resources and Databases

As well as the National Parks websites, [YouCamp](#) is an online platform where people display their private properties for others to camp at on their getaways. Lauren once visited a place near Robe, listed on YouCamps. The camping space was located up in a grassy field of somebody's farm, just past the sandy shore to offer a sense of beach camping. While it remains important to be respectful of these private properties, this system is great for those looking for a more out-of-the-way camping experience.

A similar concept is offered by [Station Stays](#), specific to SA. Ben speaks highly of the organisation, through which farms with an abundance of space have allocated camping sites with basic facilities, such as long-drop toilets and prepared timber for fires. Offering more of a bush-camping experience, [Station Stays](#) was an initiative developed in 2009 by a handful of tourism businesses in the Flinders Ranges and outback regions of SA. The equivalent in Queensland and New South Wales is [Outback Beds](#), offering similar facilities for farm stays and bush camping.

Lastly, [Station Hoppers](#) is a generic database website that covers similar camping experiences to those mentioned above, as well as access to remote campsites and camping grounds.

## Wiki Camps

A community-based database, [Wiki Camps](#) offers a platform for campers to both submit and find a range of free or low-cost camping grounds, parks, and backpacker hostels – as well as dump stations, visitor information centres, bathroom facilities, and more. The program also enables campers to leave active reviews and feedback for public viewing, mostly found to be useful, thorough, and accurate. The benefit of this real-life user feature is that it enables adventurers to access up-to-date feedback on each campsite, even extending to how accessible the site/s are to caravans and 4WDs.

So...surely there's a catch?

There's a fee, isn't there? There's *always* a fee.

Yes, there's a fee. A whopping eight dollars – paid only once, for a lifetime! With those eight dollars, you receive an awful lot in return. Other features include filtering, which makes identifying free camps, campsites with toilet facilities, campsites with dump sites nearby, and even dog-friendly campsites – to name only a few – a very straightforward process. Bookings are made directly through the respective campsite's website, via a link on Wiki Camps.

This said, Ben clarifies that one wouldn't rely on Wiki Camps for navigational purposes.

Instead, the [Camps Australia Wide](#) app is subscription-based but free to download with the purchase of the book itself. [Hema](#) also offer apps, including [CamperX](#) – all relatively expensive in housing both high-quality and high-resolution maps for all intents and purposes. Through Wiki Camps, one can book multiple sites and view a rough trip plan. That said, Lauren has visited some of the sites recommended and later discovered they weren't legal

camping spaces. With this in mind, she suggests looking for photos and plenty of reviews instead of merely trusting a pin on the map. Just because people have camped there previously and subsequently listed it as a campsite... doesn't necessarily mean it's genuine! Ben has also explored the New Zealand-based app Camper Mate, but confirms it didn't offer the same positive experience as the others – especially Wiki Camps. Unlike Hema, Camp Australia Wide, and other resources alike, Wiki Camps is user-generated. No, Snowys do not have any association with the database... Ben and Lauren are just huge fans!

## Council Sites

Many councils run their own campsites within their local areas. These can be found in Camps Australia Wide and on Wiki Camps, operated by their local communities and usually more maintained than other sites listed.

Ben clarifies that while they're often nice places to stay, most of them are used for convenience. According to relative reviews and photographs, quite often these sites are set up for layovers or overnight stays as opposed to week-long holidays.

## Social Media

In Lauren's humble opinion – social media is fantastic for identifying suitable campsites. On Instagram, she recommends following both state and local tourism bodies, which will often present great places to visit or – at the very least – attractions to see and cool activities to partake in. Most of the time, these locations are regional.

For the Facebook-ers new to camping, and keen to learn the top tips and hot spots – Lauren suggests joining the relevant Facebook groups. There are at least seven or eight groups that post information specific to free camping alone, each home to a minimum of roughly 30,000 members! Simply use the 'search' function within the group to key in where you're looking to go, and Facebook will present every post in which someone has discussed the location.

Searching aside – if push comes to shove, post a question yourself and watch as the hot tips, tricks, and comments rack up!

Every member of these Facebook groups is there for the same reason. As well as exchanging experiences and advice, this method is beneficial for encouraging a level of social responsibility, including reminders about Fireban seasons, campfire logistics, and rubbish. Lauren notes of a recent spotlight cast on Perlubie Beach – a stunning location where it often blows a gale, though allows for camping right up on the sand and a pleasant spot for the locals who take responsibility for how well it's maintained. In this area, camping isn't permitted within 50 metres of the shelters. Despite this, it's often found packed with cars and camp set-ups from end to end. With much discussion around the possibility of the beach closing down, Lauren recommends researching this location (and others) before heading there yourself – namely the relevant Facebook groups. Get to know the site, what you may be in for, and any alternative locations as potential back-ups.

## Ben's Process

...is a simple one.

A fan of Wiki Camps, he uses the map feature as a starting point, zooming in on roughly where he aims to reach by the end of that day. Then, he taps on three or four suggested campsites in the area to read their basic outline, eliminating those that are already booked out.

When he finds a suitable campsite, he books immediately – saving him the hassle later on, and allowing him to unwind in the meantime with the reassurance that he's secured a site. He may also choose to navigate some of the previously mentioned Facebook groups to establish where others have been before, and their experiences.

Lastly (and rather importantly), Ben recommends considering what you'll likely be taking to your chosen site. Some campsites nowadays request that campers are fully self-sufficient – that is, taking food scraps, rubbish, and *everything* else (yes, even toileting business) when departing the area. In fact, some station and property stays ask that visitors arrive with their own portable toilets to carry waste away in.

## Apps

In addition to the trip itself, Lauren likes to use a selection of apps in the preparation stage. Firstly, Mad Paws is both an app and a website that offers 'doggy daycare' or pet-sitting services. Those who are happy to mind another's pet while they're holidaying can put themselves out there on the app for others to find. Better still, the app allows you to identify pet-sitters local to the national park you plan to stay in.

A shout-out must go to Bernie at Mount Dutton Bay on the Eyre Peninsula, who Lauren affirms is a fantastic dog-sitter. With the help of her husband, Bernie cares for the animals beautifully – where some have even travelled all the way from Perth simply to have their pets cared for by her!

Another app Lauren enjoys is All Trails. Like Wiki Camps, this app is community-driven, though more centred around the various walking trails and hikes available in the areas relative to where you're camping. Covering tracks and treks nationwide – the app isn't specific to signposted, pre-established routes, but also combinations of trails and loops that someone may have freely walked themselves.

## Petrol

Lauren recommends Petrol Spy, or applications alike that provide fuel maps. Petrol Spy lists petrol stations on a map and indicates their respective fuel prices. Wiki Camps offers a similar service without the price markings, though remains a useful tool when planning where to fill up heading both to and from your destination.

## Other Sources

Ben occasionally uses Avenza Maps, an offline GPS map that overlays where you are with the



map of a particular area. Its geo-locator places you on the map and helps to keep you on the right track – literally!

Simpler still, the National Park websites house maps that are free to download from the website onto your device.

## **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!