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## **‘Hey, Ben’s back!’**

After almost four months away, Ben is back at his office desk catching up on emails, reviving the dying pot-plants by his desk, and attempting to summarise his holiday in only a couple of lines after someone in the break room asks that loaded question: ‘so, how was your trip?’ From dry deserts and calm coastlines, to torrential tropical rains – Ben and his family followed the roads that scribbled their way across the Northern Territory and Western Australia. In this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, Lauren helps him unpack – from the planning and preparation process, to his fondest memories and future learnings. Buckle yourselves in for the best places to book, the tale of the floating tent, and the most unexpected way to make use of your rubbish!

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## **Mentioned in this Episode**

### **Blogs:**

[Best of Western Australia – Camping, Hiking, 4WDing & More](#)

[10 Best Things to do in Darwin, Northern Territory](#)

[8 Things To Do When Visiting Broome, WA](#)

[How to Get the Best Weather for Your Lap of Australia](#)

[Packing your 4WD – The Ultimate Guide](#)

[Are Your 4WD Tyres Up To Scratch?](#)

### **Products:**

[Portable fridge](#)

[4WD wheelie bin](#)

[Sea To Summit water bladder – 10L](#)

[Jerry can – 10L](#)

[Hiking water bottles](#)

[RV-5 canvas tent](#)

[Sea To Summit kitchen sink – 5L](#)

[Sea To Summit kitchen sink – 10L](#)

[Sea To Summit kitchen sink – 20L](#)

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[Coffee press](#)

[Stove stand](#)

[Bedding](#)

[Swag bag](#)

[Multi-fuel stove](#)

[15-amp power cord](#)

[Solar panels](#)

### **Podcasts:**

[Ep42 – Planning Your Trip to Uluru](#)

[Ep43 – Caravan Water Tanks 101](#)

### **Other**

[Are We There Yet? A Journey Around Australia](#)

[Make A Simple Bottle Mousetrap \(That Works!\)](#)

## **This Episode's Guest: Ben!**

After roughly four months on the road, Ben has returned to reality. His trip had been postponed twice since 2019, first following a family matter and the Coronavirus disrupting the second attempt. After marking their third departure date on the calendar, Ben and his wife pledged they wouldn't cancel again – there was no better time for their family to explore this part of Australia!

Over the years of planning and ambitiously attempting to cover every nook, cranny, and crevice of the country's northwest regions – Ben's trip went from potentially lasting two and a half months to almost four! Their route loosely moved up through SA into the NT, looped around to WA, and curved back homeward again.

## **Planning Process**

Within a country as diverse as Australia – why only half a lap?

Firstly, Ben and his wife agreed that the time involved to complete a full lap of Australia wouldn't be viable. Embarking on a half-lap allowed more opportunities to see and explore a

single area from border to border. For instance, Western Australia has so much to give – and having only visited Perth and surrounding areas, Ben argues that even six months in the state will still leave more to discover.

Despite previously living in Alice Springs and visiting Darwin once before, Ben was yet to explore the regions and routes that run between. Considering this, their trip began in the surrounding areas of Alice Springs and Uluru with the intention of exposing the children to some of the more iconic sights and experiences of rural Australia. Along the way, 'Are We There Yet' by Alison Lester offered some motivation on their travels as they passed some of the pinnacles and water holes described in the children's book.

Ben and his family decided to travel in the off-season when the weather was hot, avoiding the northern Kimberley region in Western Australia. From Darwin, they travelled down to Katherine and across to Broome, where they hugged the stunning eastern coastline all the way back to South Australia.

## Why Anticlockwise?

This wasn't a hasty decision – Ben and his wife pondered and paced as they examined what route was best to follow. In the end, they attempted to work with the weather – which, granted, is already an unpredictable factor!

Skidding off at the beginning of October, Ben's family explored the northern Western Australian and upper Northern Territory region at the front end of the storm season. Over the month they spent travelling up to Darwin, they found themselves loosely in the northern area during November, at which point the wet season had started to settle in and many places were beginning to close. This way, they experienced the earlier stages as opposed to the thick of the storms – an outcome that would have been far more restrictive and more likely to occur on a clockwise loop.

Despite their best attempt, there remained places that Ben and his family could not see. Very few people travel to these areas during the hot season, which leads to many places closing early on. While the heat meant necessary planning to ensure the kids were comfortable, Ben enjoyed the hot, sticky days and humid nights. With this weather came hundreds of empty campsites, and in many cases Ben's family found themselves in the company of only one other within the entire camping ground.

## Book It or Wing It?

With so many approaches to travelling off-road, Lauren enquires how Ben managed his accommodation over his holiday period. Be it marking a handful of places on the map to reach by certain times, or accounting for every overnight stay in advance – Ben instead maintained a flexible approach.

As they had made a solid commitment to visit Broome for his daughter's birthday, this was the only benchmark they set themselves. Ben had booked accommodation for five nights in a classy, safari-style tent within a resort – amused at how much they contrasted in their sweaty singlets and shorts carrying their hot, dusty tents!

While he had success in booking a place in Esperance roughly two months in advance, Ben found himself unlucky in finding last-minute accommodation within Perth which had them

instead staying forty-five minutes out of the city.

Notwithstanding their pre-booked accommodation in Broome and planning-ahead throughout Margaret River, Ben’s family booked on the go from Adelaide right through to Perth. Their ability to do so proved another advantage to travelling during the off-season, where Ben preferred the empty water holes and quiet beaches over the crowded campsites and caravan parks. The circumstances also allowed them flexibility to travel from town to town when in search of available accommodation.

## Pre-Departure Preparation

It’s one thing to pack for an off-road adventure, but it’s another to simultaneously account for the extended time away from the house and garden. Lauren queries how Ben prepared to physically depart his home in the lead-up to the four-month period.

A minimalist, Ben believes in never bringing along what he knows he won’t need, while his wife was conscious to consider what the children would require too. Ultimately, each member of the family was allocated a bag measuring roughly 50cm long x 20cm deep x 30cm wide to hold both clothing and toiletries. With only lightweight clothing and raincoats for themselves, there came more consideration and planning for their vehicle.

*A minimalist, Ben believes in never bringing along what he knows he won’t need. Credit: Ben Collaton*

After postponing the trip twice, Ben found himself servicing his vehicle at the mechanic three times, as well as replacing each tyre soon before their final departure date. Given he tends to cover all-terrain on his road trips – roughly 70% of highway and 30% of off-road – Ben tends to avoid pushing the limit with mud. About 70-80% of the roads covered on this trip were blacktop, crossing only between 50km and 200km of dirt road before they’d ride another 400km of bitumen. It’s for this reason that he saw no need for mud tyres – but after cruising a total of 19,150km recommends fixing a vehicle with a good set of tyres before embarking on a similar trip.

Most travellers tend to allow time for “trial packing” before the final loading of their luggage. This process involves multiple rounds of packing and re-packing – and while some only take a day or two, Ben’s meticulous methodology had him allowing roughly a week of tackle-Tetris! On any road trip (let alone those that last months), you’re more than likely to rearrange and rummage through your vehicle daily. Ensuring neatly packed, easily accessible luggage is an aspect of preparation that Ben deems important, especially during hot and sticky conditions that can be energy-draining. Granted, this can become tedious towards the end of a journey, when souvenirs start to spill out over the backseat and knick-knacks are tucked away in the tiny hidey holes of the boot. In Ben’s experience leaving Margaret River, times like those are when you start to just “chuck it in”!

In the lead-up to their departure, most preparation was finalised a week out with only the food to fit snug and pack tightly on top. After essentially three years of preparing for the trip, much of the equipment had already been sorted and stashed for packing.

With no pets to consider, and Ben’s brother and sister-in-law happy to maintain the lawn and garden, housekeeping arrangements fell into place easily. Paying bills in advance and tidying the house were the last of the loose ends to tie before Ben and his family finally rolled out of

the driveway.

## Food

On longer road trips, food requires thorough planning and consideration. Lauren wants to know how much Ben catered for, or whether he simply relied on access to supermarkets along the way.

Again, Ben took a varied approach by preparing food one week at a time throughout SA, the NT, and heading into the northern end of WA. When travelling back down and through WA, there were increasingly more shops to buy enough food from to last them up to three nights at a time. Generally, Ben and his wife chose a standard set of meals that they knew the children would enjoy too. Given their forty-litre fridge, there was little room for cold produce, so the meals consisted mostly of canned food.

When they’d reach a town, Ben would purchase fresh vegetables to incorporate into that night’s meal. Usually, they cooked pasta dinners with canned vegetables and found gnocchi with pesto an easy option too. Meats were often bought from a supermarket and consumed on the same night, followed by a week or so before incorporating meat into mealtimes again. This ensured they weren’t always risking heat exposure.

For lunches, Ben found the easiest, most efficient option was tuna wraps and carrot sticks. Tinned tuna was shelf-stable and easy to store, making it a regular lunchtime protein (sorry, kids!). They would dispose of rubbish effortlessly using the occasional empty wrap bag, as well as a bin bag attached to the back of the vehicle. Accumulated rubbish would then be tossed away at each town.

## Water

Without a particularly large water tank, Ben carried forty litres of water at a time across two ten-litre jerry cans and two ten-litre soft water bladders, as well as individual drink bottles in the car. He would then fill up any empty water containers as he passed through caravan and national parks, usually taking twenty litres at a time.

Often, a thirst-quenching alternative was peach iced tea. Given the relentless heat, a swim down at a waterhole followed by an iced tea would be the simple solution to handling hot weather. From tantrums on the tracks surrounding Uluru, to lasting long days under the sun – Ben and his wife eventually established how to help the kids manage the extent of the heat.

## The ‘F’ Word: Financials

Despite landing a larger home loan, Ben assures Lauren that with the kids at the prime age it was well worth making their holiday happen when they did. While his wife had accumulated long-service leave, Ben had accepted some occasional remote work to further aid the budgeting process.

A trip much the same as Ben’s involves mindfully mapping out the three inevitable costs: fuel, food, and accommodation. He recommends determining what the overall expense will be and confirming enough savings and reserves to see you through.

Despite Ben’s best efforts, the course of the trip became increasingly costly. Their approach

was to stop adding up the expenses and instead focus on becoming rich in experiences.

## Ben’s Best Memory

Over the full four months? Pull the other one...

Nonetheless Ben certainly favoured some destinations over others, including Litchfield National Park in the NT, Lake Argyle, Ningaloo Reef, and the coastline stretching along WA. Where Litchfield is dotted with waterholes along walking tracks for cooling off mid-trek, Lake Argyle in WA offers a sanctuary with nice music, good food, a great vibe – and cold mango beer! The lake was warm and calm, and tours involved food, swimming, and relaxing – a strong competitor being the previously visited natural infinity pool in Kakadu National Park. Ben and his family also enjoyed snorkelling in Ningaloo Reef and soaking in the quaint, picturesque scenes of the southern WA coastlines, where the water is strikingly blue and the sand a bright white.

## Worst Areas?

Another tough question for Ben, as he couldn’t recall a single spot.

Instead, they simply visited some of the smaller towns for shorter periods of time than others, such as Derby in the Kimberley, WA. As this was on route to Broome, the family were eager to reach their destination rather than stop over for too long in the quiet towns along the way. That said, every town encountered was unique and of its own value. For that reason, Ben maintains that there were no unpleasant places visited on their journey as they travelled from dry and humid deserts, to cold and tropical coasts.

(Okay, there was ONE sub-par feature: it got a little windy down on the WA coast!)

## The Storm Story

With a beautifully packed four-wheel drive, plenty of food and water, and the security in knowing that “Ben from Snowys” was in the drivers’ seat (literally) – there was very little chance that anything could go wrong...right?

Wrong.

Ben tells Lauren of his experience in Maguk camping ground, Kakadu National Park, which took their night from calm to chaotic.

Not as well-seasoned in the tropics as other climates, Ben was simply at ease enjoying the sound of clicking cicadas and the humidity on his skin as he boiled the water for that night’s dinner. Suddenly, a sound that mimicked trucks blaring along the main road had him pausing his dinnertime prep and wondering where it could be coming from. With a sudden crack of thunder, it began to bucket down with rain and Ben went from dry to drenched after only a whisper of warning.

As the awning collapsed, Ben hurried to keep the bedding dry as branches blew, and water began to fill the inside of the tent. The rest of the family bundled into the car, keeping safe from the rain that continued to pelt from every direction. As the water pooled beneath their set-up the tent became buoyant, floating atop the puddling mess.

When the rain began to subside, Ben assessed the inside of the tent. To his delight, his RV-5

canvas tent had kept everything within its walls completely dry. (Just a subtle flex to a Snowys product there...you can find out more about tents alike [here](#)).

With no sight of the groundsheet beneath the puddling water, Ben was scratching his head. How had he gone from boiling water on a balmy evening without wind, to staring at his tent surrounded by fallen branches and sitting almost three inches deep in stormwater?

After dragging the tent to a higher point in the campsite to escape the sodden mess of their original site, Ben was still committed to producing a hot meal for his family who remained tucked away in the car.

With the change in weather also came the invitation to various creatures and critters – including green ants, spiders, and even a snake. While green ants surged across their set-up and trickled over the tent, Ben's daughter had a terrifying encounter with a python as she made an uneasy effort to leave the car. It's possible the snake had dropped from the trees, and while it caused no harm she decided she'd rather sleep in the backseat than cross another!

The morning after toughing it out in the tent, Ben was amused at how they had endured such a chaotic and turbulent night. For the following few days, they continued to brush away the more persistent green ants that had remained riddled within the tent.

## The Trash Contraption Mousetrap

You know what they say: one man's trash is another man's treasure...and mousetrap?

Four months on the road can present more challenges than just wet weather, and Ben soon realised that a handful of green ants was nowhere near as maddening as the mice he met in his 4WD.

Given the various issues that come with finding mice in our space, Ben hoped he wouldn't have to experience it. Though during his ventures at Karijini along the Western Australian coast, he awoke one morning to chew markings on some of his equipment. After copping a gust of polystyrene to his face through the air-conditioning vents, he soon recognised there was a furry foe hitching a ride somewhere in his 4WD.

Like a flick of a switch, Ben became possessed by his hungry desire to deny this mouse the protection of his proud, well-packed vehicle. Now the mad, mouse-hunting guru of the campsite, he spent hours after sundown constructing a trap of his own using a rubbish bag as enticement, a string tugged along from the back of his car, and a water bottle to eventually trap the mouse inside.

Eyes wide and brain wired, Ben watched desperately as the mouse darted out from one side of the vehicle and then the other at what seemed to be an impossible speed. It was in this face-palm moment when he realised that there wasn't just one mouse on the loose – but two. Game. On.

Ears twitching at every rustle from the roof, Ben closed himself inside the vehicle and sat, barely breathing, waiting for the pests to surrender. As the scuttling in the dash moved from one air vent to the other, he shut the vent on one side and positioned himself next to the other – hands cupped and fingers kinked, ready to pinch.

In time, the head of the mouse came into view and its beady black eyes fixed themselves on Ben. Completely transfixed by the situation, Ben remained still and poised, engaging in what seemed to be a stand-off between himself and the tiny terror. At this point, it had been two



hours of mouse-catching mayhem – and despite his desperate desire to fulfill the deed, Ben went to bed defeated.

Mice: 1

Ben: 0

The next morning, Ben and his wife joined forces – a partnership that soon had them ruling as rodent-catching champions. [A nifty YouTube video](#) had them both referring to a tutorial on creating a mousetrap made from rubbish. After the ongoing, exhausting ordeal that had Ben struggling to catch the critters single-handedly, he was eventually convinced by his wife to manufacture a trash contraption mousetrap using an iced tea bottle, empty cereal boxes, tuna cans, and bottle caps!



*Ben and his wife manufactured a trash contraption mousetrap using an iced tea bottle, empty cereal boxes, tuna cans, and bottle caps!*

The trap worked by first smearing a small portion of Nutella at the end of the ramp, tempting the first mouse to climb the Kellogg’s Cornflakes diving board up into the peach iced tea bottle. The sea-saw-style structure was pivoted on a purple Sharpie and held in place by a milk lid. The supporting sunscreen lid, peach iced tea lid, and Coca-Cola lid were each screwed in place on a piece of board that Ben already had stashed away in the car. The weight of the mouse caused the bottle to tip, subsequently triggering the tuna lid to trap it inside. In its attempt to escape, the lid tipped back up and sealed the trap.

The second mouse was caught red-handed by Ben, who initially noticed that another Nutella portion prepared earlier in the car had disappeared. After a moment of waiting, he watched as the mouse entered the trap and sealed itself inside – crowning Ben and his wife the reigning rulers of ridding rodents!

## Summary

On his adventure, Ben went from exhausting outback mouse-catching to swimming with manta rays and sea lions, basking in warm, calm waters as the sun rose and melted along the horizon. For those sitting on the fence about a similar-style trip, these moments are the indicators to just *do it*. Financially comfortable, or not comfortable enough, Ben reminds us that factoring every dollar will always be what keeps us from taking the plunge – and with waters like those stretching along the WA coastlines, you won’t want to return to shore.

## Learnings and Future Considerations

While satisfied with his set-up, Ben admits that he would reconsider the size of the kitchen sink he brought along. Following Lauren’s recommendation to purchase the [Sea to Summit kitchen sink](#), he regretted taking a larger model as opposed to that with a [five](#) or [ten-litre](#) capacity. Despite fitting a [saucepan](#) comfortably, he realised too much filling was required of the [twenty-litre](#) option.

Only replacing it twice over the four-month trip, Ben used Shellite fuel for brewing daily [coffee](#) and [cooking nightly dinners](#). Its weight was always a maximum of four kilograms on the roof of his vehicle, along with a one-kilogram [stove stand](#), bundled [bedding](#), a [swag bag](#),



and a tent. Notwithstanding his minimalist nature, a modest forty litres of water, multi-fuel stove with four litres of Shellite, and no gas – the weight of Ben's vehicle still exceeded his vehicle's recommended Gross Vehicle Mass (GVM).

## Ben Gets Boring...

It seems that just as Ben starts to mention bedding, Lauren releases a cheeky yawn...

## Learnings Continued

Ultimately, Ben was surprised to learn that despite his understated packing approach, the combination of water, fuel, a portable fridge, and the collective weight of his family meant he still tipped over the ideal total vehicle mass. Despite his preference to not tow a separate compartment, he may either consider a box trailer in the future or simply trimming back on his belongings even more. Regarding his understated campsite set-up, Ben's only consideration would be to (reluctantly) embellish it more.

Aside from maybe unlocking a more adventurous approach to mealtimes, the last thought Ben had was incorporating a 15-amp cord into his power set-up. Having stayed for five days in some caravan parks, he found himself repeatedly unpacking and arranging his solar panels. On the cloudier days, the charging was inadequate, while driving failed to sufficiently power the portable fridge. With a 15-amp cord, Ben admits that the charging process would have allowed a more out-of-sight-out-of-mind experience.

## 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!