

ACTING ENVIRONMENTALLY

RESPONSIBLE ON TRIPS

When planning your trip consider where you will be able to dispose of your rubbish. If all your accommodation is in caravan parks and towns then rubbish bins will most likely be provided however if you are bush camping and traveling through remote areas then you will have to plan how you will store and carry rubbish for numerous days, and possibly weeks. In many outback regions, a public rubbish pit may exist on a station property and be your only rubbish disposal point for hundreds of kilometers. Do not access station property unless public signage invites you.

Some useful tips when traveling:

- use containers and transfer everything out of boxes and packets the day you purchase them - use rubbish bins located in supermarket car parks
- plan how you will carry rubbish and carry it with you until you find a bin or tip no matter how long it takes. A large vinyl lined laundry bag with a drawstring can be used to store smaller plastic bags of rubbish individual knotted (e.g. shopping bags) and can be put on a roof rack. There are also various inventions such as canvas bags that can be slung over your vehicle's spare wheel on the rear of the vehicle that might be suitable for your needs.
- never leave rubbish unattended in plastic shopping bags - crows will peck at the bags and spill rubbish everywhere. This is a common problem.
- never bury rubbish. If having a campfire it is acceptable to burn small pieces of waste however do not leave food scraps in a fire overnight. Most food requires a much hotter fire to break it down and remaining scraps may attract dingoes and other wildlife. Incorrect use of campfires is a big problem in the outback - refer to our tips for fires.

The easiest thing we can all do as a recreational community is to consider how we can minimise our impact and the effect our visit will have on the conditions of tracks we use.

Think about it - stay on designated tracks, obey private and park signs and be aware that what we do today, impacts on where we can go in the future.

Obey "road closed" signs. The reason why roads are closed may not be always be obvious to you, but you need to obey these signs. Failure to do so can result in fines and penalties for those who don't comply.

Stick to designated roads and avoid making your own tracks. Where possible, try to avoid 4WD driving when the conditions are really wet and muddy as this can cause serious damage to unsealed roads often making it impassable for others. Sticking to designated tracks will reduce the spread of weeds and plant infection such as Jarrah dieback.

On sandy tracks, always use reduced tyre pressures to avoid "cutting up" the track. If towing trailers also reduce the tyre pressures in the trailer tyres - this will cause less drag and make travel easier too. On some desert tracks you are not permitted to tow trailers such as sections of the Canning Stock Route in Western Australia. In the Simpson Desert travellers are strongly urged not to tow trailers.

Rubbish

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- never throw fruit or vegetable scraps out into the bush thinking that the animals will eat it. Many animals in the outback, including smaller marsupials are actually carnivorous and will avoid such food, preferring to catch small insects.

A number of dedicated organisations exist to investigate, educate and encourage people to be responsible with their rubbish. See [environmental groups](#).

Toilets

The increased volume of travelers has put a significant strain on bush toileting. When traveling, plan to use toilets where provided as much as possible, such as in roadhouses, service stations and public rest areas. When nature calls and there are no toilets available, you will need to be prepared to execute suitable bush toileting. This involves using a spade to dig a hole for your toilet waste, and either bagging your used toilet paper to dispose of later, or the more popular method of burning your toilet paper in the hole you've used. If using this method, you will find a long-handled gas lighter to be more effective than matches (and this leaves no further waste), however you must wait and ensure that the toilet paper is completely turned to ash else the procedure is useless in minimising rubbish.

There's nothing worse than finding a great spot that has been ruined by people not burning their toilet paper! Unfortunately, many holes will be dug up by animals no matter how well you cover the hole so burning the paper ensures that it is not dug up and then caught by the wind.

Long-drop (or pit toilets) also require a certain "skill" to use effectively, the most important of all being how to reduce flies - its pretty simple really - NEVER LEAVE THE LID OPEN, and ALWAYS CLOSE THE DOOR. If you use a pit toilet do what you can to keep it clean for others. If there is no toilet paper provided, then leave some for the next person. If something is broken, fix it. Some areas have particular issues so follow any specific suggestions for use.

Composting toilets work by using lime or other substance to assist in the breakdown of human waste matter for long-term recycling into composting material that can be put back into the ground. This process must not be contaminated so please observe all signage about the correct use of the composting toilets you use.

Some bush campgrounds in delicate environments now regulate that travelers must be equipped with their own composting toilets. Portable toilets of this nature are available from camping stores and may be the way of the future.

Waterways

A major attraction for campers is water! Whether its camping by the ocean, a lake, river or waterhole of some kind, we need to be aware of our impact on unpolluted water.

Soap, detergents and shampoo are a real major source of pollution. If you need to wash, cart the water to your camp not the soap to the water! Many people don't realise the effect of soap in unpolluted water, particularly for those animals living in it.

Set up camps well away from waterways, for environmental reasons but also safety!

Fires

(this section is duplicated from our [Travel Etiquette](#) article)

One of the most devastating things you can do in the Australian outback is leave the remains of your campfire. The number of travelers in our outback is increasingly dramatically and every one of us must make a dedicated attempt to cover up any sign of our campfire, toilet pits etc. Campfires are particularly bad because wind picks up remaining ashes and can spoil the area by spreading black ash through the soil. There is nothing worse than camping on dirt or sand that has been stained by black ash!

Firstly, when you select a campsite try to reuse any existing fire pits left by other campers. This helps reduce the number of black pitted holes in the area. Be sure you are aware of any fire restrictions or bans in the area and always only create a fire that is sufficient to cook your meal. Large bonfires are extremely unacceptable. Obviously, take note of signs regarding fires as in National Parks (and other areas) they are only allowed within certain times of the year and often you will only be able to light a fire in fireplaces provided.

To build a campfire, scrape out a divot in the ground for your fire pit - DO NOT pile up kindling and wood directly on top of the ground. By scraping out a hole for your fire you will have some soil to use as a wind break around the edge of your fire (be wary of using rocks for a windbreak as they can explode when hot), and you will be able to cover up your fire pit when you're gone leaving a more environmentally and traveler-friendly campsite for other visitors.

When you leave, extinguish the fire and carefully cover the hole with the fresh dirt you kept aside (gently place the dirt on top of ashes to avoid ash mixing with the fresh dirt) and pat down to leave the ground appearing as if a campfire had never existed, rather than leave an unsightly mound!

Buried ash and coals will break down over time if covered up this way and this will help to regenerate the area for future users.



Gathering of firewood is also something that you'll need to consider carefully. Old logs and vegetation are a vital component to the bush cycle and in many areas restrictions or bans will mean you will not be allowed to collect wood from nearby your campsite. Most National Parks now request that you bring your own (from outside of the park boundaries) or they will supply you with firewood as an additional fee or included in your camping fee. If in doubt, use a gas cooker instead of lighting a fire. See tips for Campfire Cooking in our [Food and Water Article](#).

Native Animals

Free-grazing stock or wild animals are part of the great Australian outback experience. If you see animals near the road edge, slow down - they have a habit of darting across in front of vehicles. Be particularly wary of sheep, cattle, emus and kangaroos. Try to avoid traveling along unfenced road at dawn, dusk and night.

DO NOT FEED native animals. This is becoming an increasing problem so much so that there have been recent culling of animals that have lost their fear of people. Under no circumstances should you feed animals particularly around campsites. Make sure your food is properly packed away and secured to avoid possums, dingoes and birds helping themselves. This really is a big problem and as cute and cuddly as they are, we are not helping wild animals by feeding them!

Another issue that has recently become apparent is that some species of wildlife are particularly threatened by discarded aluminum cans because the opening is just the right size for the most common species of monitors, goannas, barnys or bungarras to get their head in. Jake Zahl, the Campaign Manager for Clean up the Kimberley, advises us that five years of statistics gathered from the Kimberley Clean Up have shown that the most common form of rubbish or litter in the Kimberley is aluminum cans.

This animal was found stumbling blindly down the middle of the Gibb River Road with a can on its head. A herpetologist from the Australian Wildlife Conservancy advises that a favorite tucker of many goannas is the big hairy spiders (mygalomorph) commonly called tarantulas. These large spiders live in burrows and holes in trees and provide a hearty meal for a goanna. Most monitors will dig the spiders out of their holes however the gutsy little spiny tailed monitor has learned to stick its head as far into the spider's hole as far as it can to extract its meal - the aluminum can being a nasty trap for the unsuspecting goanna.

Pets

Bringing your pets will severely reduce the places you can go. Pets are not allowed in any National Park (for obvious reasons) and a lot of caravan parks etc don't allow them. Please respect signs regarding pets, as they are a real threat to native animals.

You will find places that will permit pets and these are detailed in the following publications.

Environmental Groups

For more relevant information about how you can learn ways to be environmentally responsible when you travel in your vehicle and camp in the great outdoors, please contact the following organisations.

Leave No Trace Australia Ltd. is a not for profit initiative that promotes essential minimal impact skills and ethics to those pursuing recreational and traveling experiences in natural and cultural heritage areas, in both remote and residential locations. Leave No Trace Australia has recently merged with Tread Lightly! Australia to promote outdoor ethics in a coordinated manner and Tread Lightly Australia no longer exists as an independent organisation. See www.lnt.org.au



Established in 1996, **Track Care WA Inc.** is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the care and preservation of four wheel-drive tracks and their environs throughout WA. Its committee is comprised of volunteers from private organisations and government departments while its membership is made up of concerned four-wheel-drivers from right around Australia. See www.trackcare.com.au

Clean Up Australia is an organisation that works with the community, government and business to provide practical solutions to reduce the amount of rubbish in our environment by encouraging reduction and waste avoidance through practical actions and the uses of innovative technologies. Clean Up Australia has made Clean Up Australia Day the 'Biggest community participation event held in Australia' but also has ongoing campaigns targeting issues such as:

- Littering of rubbish items such as cigarette butts, plastics (including plastic shopping bags) etc.
- Illegal dumping of tyres, car bodies and building rubble; land contamination
- The impacts of current waste management practices such as landfills, tip levies and container deposit legislation
- The potential to improve waste management through innovative practices and technologies such as waste to energy, recycling, resource recovery and composting
- The future of packaging and the impact of the National Packaging Covenant
- Rubbish in remote places
- Electronic waste, including mobile phones

See www.cleanup.com.au

Clean Up the Kimberley is an annual project that engages rural and remote communities and aims to reduce rubbish in Australia's great Outback. See www.cleanup.com.au