

Respect the Bush

- Good drivers leave less impact
- Choose your route on the day, depending on conditions
- Pick your way, don't bash the bush
- Stay on tracks if you can; drive so you don't widen them
- Follow old tyre marks if there are no tracks
- Weave between trees, don't knock them down
- Don't squeeze through densely grown areas; this damages plants and your vehicle
- In the outback, avoid driving over spinifex hummocks; they grow slowly, animals live in them, and they trap soil nutrients
- On beaches, stick to flat sandy sections at low tide; burrowing animals live in beaches, especially in dry sand near high tide mark, and vehicles crush them
- If you have to cross dunes, do so on a ramp or well-worn track where possible; a number of bird species nest in coastal dunes, and vehicles can crush their nests and eggs, and destroy stabilising vegetation
- Even if vehicles only drive the parent birds off the nest for a few moments, gulls kill eggs and chicks
- Where safety and good handling allow, keep your vehicle's revs down; this saves fuel and reduces noise and wheel spins
- Animals live even in apparently flat and barren areas, and vehicle noise can disturb or deafen them
- In dunes or desert, don't drive over layers of shells which may be Aboriginal middens
- On private lands or pastoral leases, avoid disturbing livestock or watering points, and leave gates as found
- Respect the rights of other users on tracks and campsites

Getting Out of Trouble

- Best to stay out of trouble, but everyone gets stuck sometimes
- Keep the right tyre pressures: high over sharp rocks, low in soft sand; pump tyres up again when you're out of sand
- If you do get bogged, lower your tyre pressure: you can often drive away with little or no impact
- At low tyre pressures, keep speed down and avoid sharp turns and heavy braking
- If you can, winch between vehicles, not to an anchor
- If you have to winch from a tree, protect the trunk with a tree protector and slings, an old blanket, or even deadwood between the trunk and your winch cable

GREEN GUIDE FOR 4WD TOURS

best-practice environmental management for 4WD and off-road tours



ISBN1 876685 395
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4WD for Work and Play

Recreational 4WD and off-road driving is not all the same. There are private trips, off-road parks, 4WD clubs, tagalong tours and full commercial tours where clients buy a seat in a company 4WD vehicle driven by a guide. Vehicles range from lightweight ATV's and RV's to 4WD utes and station wagons, 6WD unimogs and custom 6WD coaches. Most of these vehicles spend most of their time on sealed or sheathed roads or clearly-defined dirt tracks, and not much time completely off road. Even in remote forest and outback areas, most recreational 4WD travel is on existing tracks, such as old logging roads, stock routes, and oil exploration lines. Some beaches are also used extensively as off-road highways. Different sections of these guidelines may apply in each case. They are written for commercial off-road tour operators, but may also be useful for private recreational off-roaders. This *Green Guide* is to help you save the bush and the beaches. Of course, you also need to know about safety and handling, but there are other guides for that.

More Info

- Australian National Four Wheel Drive Council, 1999, *National Camping and Touring Guide for Minimal Impact Camping*, and *Four-wheel Driver's Code of Ethics*.
- Western Australia, Conservation and Land Management, *Nature Base: Four-wheel Driving*, www.calm.wa.gov.au
- Tread Lightly!, 1998, *The Tread Lightly! Guide to Responsible Four Wheeling with Minimum Impact Camping Tips*.

Thanks To:

- Jan Scudamore, Treadlightly! Australia; David Moon, 4WD Australia; Wayne Schmidt, WA CALM; and Graham Aniel, Forestry Tasmania

Plan Your Trip

- Most commercial tours follow the same route every trip
- For new tours, one-offs, expeditions, clubs and private trips, good planning cuts impacts as well as risks and costs
- Most tourists are happy on roads and tracks, so why increase wear and tear and running costs by taking them off-track?
- Whether on- or off-track, get permission from the landholder or land management agency
- Many national parks, state forests, beaches and Aboriginal reserves have restricted access for vehicles, including 4WD's
- Where access is allowed, commercial tour operators and organised groups such as clubs may need special permits
- Plan to stay out of trouble: getting bogged is a hassle, and digging out makes a mess and delays clients, so plan your trip within the capabilities of your vehicles and drivers
- Take enough time: panic drives and shortcuts mean trouble
- Watch the weather: rain can turn a track into a mudhole and a slope into a slide, drought can turn a forest into a fire trap, snow can turn a mountain pass into an avalanche hazard
- Check the tides: if you're planning to drive on a beach, do it at low tide and check you have enough time
- If you've travelled through areas with weeds or dieback fungus, clean your vehicle before you go into a park or forest

Get Your Rig Ready

- Make sure your machine is built for what you want it to do
- Get the right tyres for the terrain: it's a critical choice
- Don't overload and don't travel top heavy
- A well set-up rig with the right tyres, power and gear ratios, and a well-balanced load, will generally have less impact than a vehicle which is struggling with the terrain
- Make sure you have the equipment to get out of trouble
- Check that grass and twigs can't easily catch in your muffler mountings, where they could catch alight and start a fire
- Clean your vehicle so you don't carry weeds and soil fungi
- Check and fix any oil leaks
- Check your muffler is working well to keep noise low
- Adjust headlights to point along the track, not off to the side

Get the Right Gear

- A jack that works in the outback as well as the carpark
- A winch you can run from outside the cab if need be
- Basic recovery gear: snatch strap and shackles
- A sand or mud anchor for the winch, or tree protector and slings, depending where you're going
- Spade or shovel where you can get at it
- In outback spinifex country, a wire screen over the radiator and a wire brush to clean it
- Tyre pump, tyre gauge and tyre repair kit
- Fuel stove, fire pit or fire blanket for low-impact camping
- Trowel and/or portable toilet for a bush loo
- Sealable garbage bags to pack out trash and avoid litter
- Ashtray, if you smoke; cigarette butts cause litter and start fires
- Fire extinguisher, first aid, CB or HF/WHF radio

Crossing Creeks

- Getting caught in a creek damages the environment as well as your vehicle
- Don't cross creeks if you don't need to
- Choose an existing ford or track crossing if possible
- Otherwise, choose somewhere with easy access and exit to avoid cutting up creek banks
- Where possible, choose somewhere where you can drive straight across, not along the riverbed
- Don't cross within 2km upstream of a water-supply intake
- Don't cross streams which are important for rare species, fish spawning or fish breeding
- Check the creek depth before crossing
- On wide gravelly rivers, there are often crescent-shaped gravel beds which can provide a shallower crossing
- For deep crossings, keep a bow wave just ahead of the vehicle

Wildlife Watching

- Watch wildlife from a distance that doesn't disturb them
- Drive slowly and quietly and don't rev the engine
- Stop the engine when stationary, keep voices low and stay in the vehicle
- Stay downwind, move slowly and don't chase wildlife
- Never surround an animal or group of animals, and don't get between animal parents and their young
- Put logs and rocks back where you found them
- Don't feed animals; they can become dependent on human food and are more likely to get hit by a car

Wildlife Safety

- In areas with wildlife, drive for wildlife safety
- This will often be much slower than road conditions would otherwise allow
- Take note of all wildlife warning signs
- Avoid driving at night in areas with wildlife; animals are most active at night and you can't see as well
- Drive with particular care at dawn and dusk
- Take extra care in forests where animals are close to tracks
- Let animals move off the track before passing them
- If you do hit an animal, stop and check if it is still alive
- For marsupials, check if it is a female with a joey in the pouch, since these can often be saved
- In some parts of Australia, local vets treat injured native animals free of charge, and pass them on to trained wildlife carers to be rehabilitated and taken back to the bush
- If the animal is not too seriously injured, the quicker you get it to a vet, the more likely it is to recover
- If the animal is seriously injured, you may have to put it down

Muddy Tracks

- If possible, stay off muddy tracks; they are easily cut up
- Damaged tracks are expensive to repair and often get closed
- Drive slowly on muddy tracks, select a gear to maintain torque without spinning wheels
- Cross old ruts at an angle to avoid getting stuck
- Straddle ruts and gullies, or drive along the sidewalls

Minimal-Impact Camping

- Most 4WD tours involve overnight backcountry camping
- Stay at an existing campsite if you can
- Choose your campsites at least 100m from rivers or lakes
- Park your vehicle 100m away from the water too
- Where there is no campsite, find an open space so you don't have to clear vegetation
- Don't cut plants or pull them out
- Keep your stay short, especially at a previously undisturbed site

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- Published by CRCST www.crctourism.com.au

Fires

- Many areas have restrictions on open fires; check before you go, and take a fuel stove for cooking in areas where fires are banned, firewood is scarce or fire scars would leave an impact
- Keep fires small and contained; use existing fire areas if available
- Large areas of Australia are naturally fire-prone, and as long as they do not get out of hand, campfires do not cause significant environmental impacts
- This does not apply in other parts of the world where vegetation is not adapted to fire
- Even in Australia, campfires are best avoided in environments where natural bushfires are rare, such as alpine grasslands, rainforests and many lake, creek and dune areas, because fires leave permanent scars on soil and vegetation
- To build a small fire over living vegetation or soil, lay down an old tarp or blanket and cover it with at least 10-20 cm of loose sand or soil to provide insulation from a fire on top
- If you routinely run tours to otherwise fire-free areas and your clients expect a campfire, then bring a firepit and your own firewood in the vehicle, and take ashes and charcoal out
- If you are cooking on a stove but your clients want firelight, try candle lanterns; carry glass ones in a travelling case, or improvise by standing candles in loose soil or sand inside a plastic bag

Washing and Toiletry

- If your clients want to wash with soap or shampoo, give them buckets to carry water well away from the lake or river bank, so that soapy water drains into the soil, not the creek
- Use biodegradable detergents for washing up, sparingly, and pour out used water at least 100m from creeks or lakes
- For non-family groups or commercial tours, a 4-bucket washing-up system is standard: hot detergent, hot rinse, cold rinse, bleach
- Pour out bleach and detergent well away from water
- Make sure clients and group members don't put rubbish or food scraps in campfires, but collect all litter and take it out
- If you are camping with a big group, or at an often-used site without a permanent toilet, you may need to take a portable toilet in one of your vehicles; especially with commercial clients who aren't used to the bush
- For small groups in little-used areas, the best toilet technique is to dig individual catholes 15-30cm deep, well away from camp and at least 100m from any creek or lake
- Bring hand trowels and unscented toilet paper, and remind your clients to use it sparingly
- Set up a trickle cup and antibacterial soap for hand washing, and make sure your clients know how to use it