

# Destination Planning



Do your homework, or you're not going out'. That's what your mum used to say and she was right.

This bloke and his family looked glum and well they might be: sitting in their petrol-engined 4x4 at the lone gum tree in the middle of the Simpson Desert, begging fuel from anyone who could spare them a few litres at a time. They had the required Desert Pass package, but they hadn't bothered to read all the information in it and, as a result, they had completely underestimated the distances involved and their fuel consumption.

There's simply no excuse for putting a family in this position, nor is it fair to put the hard word on other travellers who've planned their own fuel needs.

This trip should have begun with a thorough reading of the Desert Parks Pass package and an assessment of their 4x4's real-world fuel consumption, fully loaded, running in soft sand. And the Simpson is a relatively easy trip to plan for, because the maps are up to date and the fuel situation is clearly spelt out. Try a casual approach to The Canning Stock Route and you will be in real strife, as several visitors have discovered, by paying the ultimate price.

It's pretty easy to work out how much fuel should be carried: divide the total distance between refuelling stops by the estimated, worst-case fuel consumption figure, then add a healthy reserve.

## Easy Stages

Before settling on any trip – long or short – do your homework by reading as much as possible about the areas you intend to visit. There are many sources of information, including tourism centres and various web sites.

The next step is to assess what your family and your vehicle are capable of doing. Everyone dreams of "Doing 'The Cape'", but Cape York can be very hard on vehicles and on people. We've seen relatively normal city-types go quite troppo after a few days of tropical heat, sandflies, creek crossings and the endless fears about being dragged out of their 'humidicrib' tent by rogue crocs, or getting back home in a 4x4 that's rapidly falling to bits.

The Gunbarrel Highway is another dream, but it's rough as guts in most places and there's uncertainty about fuel supplies along the way.

## Step One

If you're new to 4x4 tripping we suggest you start with a weekender. The next stage could be a longer journey, with trip guidance from tourism centres and websites.

These treks will give you a good idea of the 4x4 travel scene and prime you for doing your own trip research.

Another initial path is to join a 4x4 club or contact one of the many 4x4 tour operators. If you join a club make sure you pick one that has a good trip program, not a club that concentrates on off-road competition.



Tag-alongs take the logistical worry out of doing trip planning, provided you choose a reputable operator.

Many 4x4 owners are content to spend their travel time with club outings or tag-alongs and never need to plan their own trips. There's nothing wrong with that.

## Step Two

If you've decided to plan your own trip it's essential that you have the latest information on the route. Destination guide books, tourism and National Parks fact sheets list phone numbers and web sites you can consult before finalising matters, so make sure you read all these information sources. On this site we've given you a brief summary of Australia's varied attractions and our itinerary service can plan a complete trip for you, for a modest outlay.

However, it's not fair to expect a printed guide book or sheet to have the latest data on road conditions, particularly in the case of areas that are subject to The Wet, so check by phone, fax or email with road authorities, police or 'locals' – be they camp ground owners, National Park rangers, local government or Tourist Information centres.

If you're doing your own thing and you're travelling as a solo vehicle start with a short self-planned excursion, to see how your planning skills are working. Don't leap off into the Great Unknown until you've done a few shorter journeys.

### Step Three



Step Three involves some reflection on your 4x4 travelling to date and asking some searching questions about the vehicle and the crew. Is the vehicle suitable for what you're doing? Does everyone on board like 4x4 trekking? Does everyone like going to the same places? Is it really FUN?

If this process comes up with a heap of positives it's probably time to go to the next level and plan a major Outback or Top End Trek.

### Step Four



The major treks are well defined in guide books and in this web presentation. However, you should update the road condition, camping and permit information that's printed with current inputs from the web or by phone.

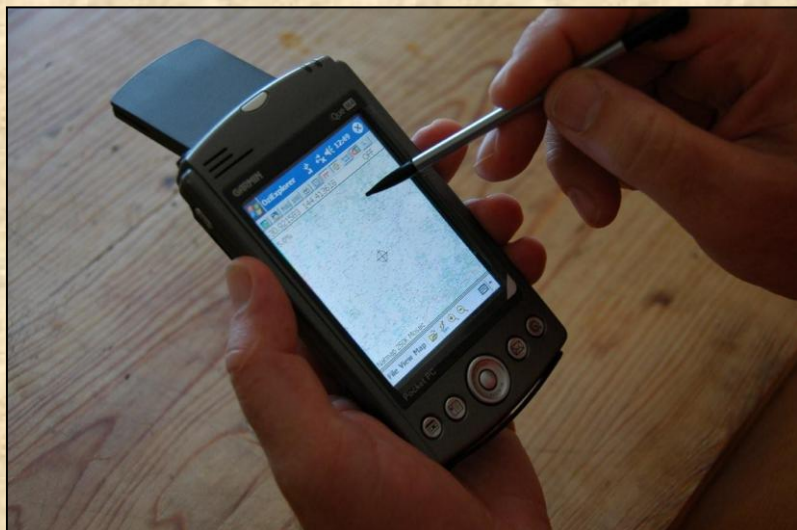
If it's a remote area trip you're planning, where your estimated total fuel, water and food supplies can't be carried without re-supply it's vital that you contact all the planned re-supply points before you set out, to make sure that there's adequate provisioning available.

## Maps and GPS

No matter what type of 4x4 trek you're doing – tag along, club outing or self-planned – it's wise to carry detailed paper maps of the area, be they location-specific 4x4 touring maps or topographics.

It's always possible that you'll be separated from the rest of the group and without maps you're lost.

We have a golden rule that we don't drive on any road or track for which we don't have map coverage – and nor should you. A GPS is no use if it's giving you lat and long that you can't pinpoint on a map.



Part of essential map coverage is a wider perspective, so that if you can't proceed where you intended you have map coverage of some alternatives. You'll be able to predict likely trouble spots from your research into the area, so that you don't arrive at a flooded creek without any detour plan.

## Whom to Ask

There's no fixed rule for checking on current conditions at bush locations. In some places the main roads department know best, in others it's the tourism office or the local Aboriginal Community and in others it's the police.

We like to check with several sources before we plan a trip.

The relevant Aboriginal Community usually issues permits and it's wise to allow plenty of time for their delivery.

## How Much Time

Estimating the length of a bush trip is a subjective exercise. Some people like to drive after dark and camp late, while people like us are camped by 4pm every day, no matter what.

On desert and Top End trips it's virtually impossible to break camp before about 9am and everyone needs a lunch break, so a typical driving day is only six hours, in our book. Subtract from that any time spent actually walking around in the country you're travelling through and it's easy, on rough tracks or in sand ridge country, to achieve no more than 30 km each day. That said, you can run the whole Tanami Road in two days.



As we said earlier, do short trips first and work up to the longer trips and you'll learn the pace as you go.

Lastly, try not to confine yourselves to a tight schedule. It's much better to plan a shorter trip, with plenty of leisure time built in, rather than fill every day with 'certainties' that rarely can be achieved.

## Safety

An old bush bloke told us that his golden rule was: "Safety should never be sacrificed, for any reason".



It's worked for us and is a calming influence when excitement and enthusiasm try to take over from reason. A lost 4x4 can be replaced: people cannot.