

So you want to go on a 4WD trip!
What we doesn't tell you

Respecting Australian History

Protecting Australia's Future

Hints and Tips 17



What I did, and why. These notes and thoughts are specially created for clients and friends of Duncan's Offroad in an effort to help novices better enjoy the experience. This isn't the only way, perhaps not even the best way. But I did a lot of homework and most things here worked for me.

Mal Walker

What kind of 4WD?

It doesn't matter much, except if you're going on a serious trip, it had better be a serious 4WD. I can't name names, of course, but avoid the little toys that are touted as serious, because they're not.

If you already have a 4WD, get it checked out and throw away anything that's suspect. Fanbelts, brake linings, battery(ies). You don't want to be in the middle of Cape York, holding everyone up waiting for parts because you were too stupid to do the obvious.

What about spares?

Listen to the advice from the team at Australian 4WD. They take most of the emergency stuff but your job is to have your vehicle in good repair first.

What did I take?

Cooper STE tyres, four on the vehicle, the spare wheel and a spare tyre and tube.

Recovery gear. Do a Australian 4WD Training Course and they will tell you what to buy and show you how to use it.

An **Engel** 39litre fridge. Put it on three during the day and it'll turn your cans of Schweppes Tonic into icy slush. Great for your G&T.

At night, turn it down to one or it'll flatten your battery. The Engel draws an average of three amps, they say, so if you have a 50amp battery, it'll be flat in less than a day.

Roofrack. Must be good quality. I chose a Rhino.

It's a good idea to pull out the rear seats. They just take up space.

Two batteries, with a good recharging system and alternator. There's a lot of rubbish talked about batteries, but what you need is one battery with lots of cranking grunt to start the motor and a deep cycle one with lots of endurance to run things.

Make sure that the cradles for the batteries are sturdy and well fitted. I've seen mudguards with holes like bullet holes where the battery cradle has just torn through the metal. Reinforcement on the wheel side of the mudguard if necessary. Rubber base under the battery is a good idea.

Tent. I chose an Oztent, because we'd be putting it up and pulling it down nearly every night. We became so good we could be having our first gin and tonic within 15 minutes of turning the motor off. Tent up, bedding ready, all the other things.

Buy the **waterproof fly** that's an option. First night, we put our tent up under a tree and drips of dew during the night nearly drove me nuts.

Go to a marine upholsterer and have him make you a piece of **shadecloth** big enough for the tent and the seating area out front, complete with edging and holes for pegs. It keeps dirt off the bottom of your tent and out front gives you a place to put those bags we mention. It'll stop dirt being tracked into the tent, too.

Sleeping bags. Fairydown Bushwalker Large. They zip together but you won't like that. Synthetic du Pont stuffing. Remember even in the tropics it can become a bit fresh before the dawn.

Mattress. Therma-Rest luxury series. Self inflating so you don't need compressors and things. Dear as poison, but the best and worth it for a good night's sleep. I bought three and linked them with wide elastic (see photo). They came out of their envelope, complete with King size fitted sheet, every night and fitted just nicely into the floor of the Oztent.



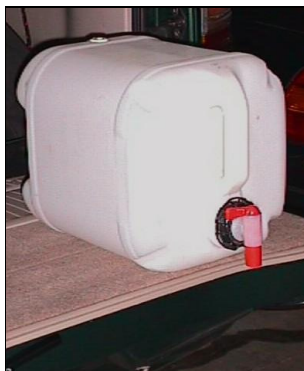
The Thermarest mattresses half out of the envelope that I had made. The elastic straps make for easier folding, and if you slip between the cracks in the night, the elastic gently pulls them together again.

Luggage. No suitcases. Too hard, and dangerous in an accident. (You should have a cargo barrier, by the way.) Buy lots of canvas duffle bag things. Different sizes, different colours. One for clothes, another for bedding (pillows, sheets), another for shoes only, another for recovery gear. Take a good quality plastic cover for a few "hanging up" things.

A good **Thermos flask** and we took two wide, flat Thermos mugs. Magic for finishing your coffee while you drive.

Holddown points in the back of your vehicle and do buy a range of those ratchet hold-downs, available in any store like Big W. And you will need a range of elastic straps. Not the cheap ones that look like pyjama cord. Buy the black rubber ones. I bought a pack of ones in different lengths, and boy, was I grateful for them.

Dashboard carpet thingie. Invaluable. Take a roll of velcro, too.



The water bottle that was invaluable on the trip. Make sure you hold it down with straps during the day.

Water. Take a 20litre square shaped plastic water container with a tap. Hygiene can be a problem, because there isn't an en suite in most places. I carried one and first job was to pull it out on to the tailgate and find the little container with the soap. Great for cleaning teeth in the morning and late at night, too.

Also, take water in your car. Two half litre bottles, keep them handy and fill them every night for the next day and at lunchtime. This is a minimum. You will become dehydrated if you don't.

Snacks. We took some hiking-type snack things, but also bought carrots and stuff. Beans, peas, cauliflower, even thin slices of butternut pumpkin. We cut it up at night in a small container and munched on it during the day. Far better than biscuits and sweets.

Torches. Buy two little guys, in addition to the biggies for the car. At sundown, each person gets his or her own from out of the car. Great for trips to the dunny.

Buy an el cheapo **squeegee** from a discount store. Good for bugs on the windscreen, but also if you take in water in a creek crossing, it's the best way I know to get water out of your carpets.

Make up your own **first aid kit** but think about it a lot. Adhesive things in different sizes, sticking plaster, tweezers, antiseptic cream, insect repellent. You know the drill, I'm sure. The things that are obvious.

Make a check list. When I was learning to fly, we had check lists for takeoff and landing. We very quickly made two such lists on the 4WD trip, one for the night and one for the morning.

Establish a routine. First time we put the tent up, we ran around and got nowhere. We very quickly thought about the jobs that had to be done and worked out a system which avoided yelling and stress. For instance, take your bag of pegs and walk around the tent, dropping them where they have to go. THEN go around and peg them in. Much quicker, at the end of the day.

Buy serious **rubber mats** to wipe feet on. Get two.

Fluoro lights that plug into your auxiliary battery. They draw no power to talk of and are very useful in the tent, because you can hang them up. I have two.

Buy a sturdy **plastic bucket** (I have a paint bucket; you can buy them cheaply and easily at the discount stores) and hold it in with a cheap elastic okky strap behind the centre console. Keep a few plastic rubbish bags in the bottom, and use one like a kitchen tidy, folded over the edges of the bucket.

Insect screen for the grille in front of the radiator. Keeps out bugs and also grass seeds.

Footwear. Sturdy adventurer type sandals are great. Thongs for the showers and do buy a pair of hiking boots if you can. Clothing should be the dripdry stuff from camping shops.

Good hats are essential. Not baseball caps. Long exposure to the sun can give you cancer on the tops of the ears.

Take a good **pocket knife**. Swiss army or Leatherman.

Tools. I don't care what anyone tells you, take the following. Multi grips (two: big one and little one), adjustable spanner, pliers (fencing type), tomahawk (preferably with a hammer-type back for tent pegs), a range of ropes.

Four wheel driving is serious. It's not life threatening, but breakdowns can be damned inconvenient where there are no telephones. And it can be expensive if things have to be flown in. So please buy good quality and have any work done properly. get it right before you go and listen to the people who have done it before, like the staff members of Australian 4WD.

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