



PLANNING THAT BIG TRIP



Where does it start & where does it stop. I'm not talking about how far you are going but how far you go when it comes to **planning that big trip**. "What do I need? How much can I carry?" goes through your mind & then there is "What have I forgotten?" The answer isn't always simple but here are some fundamentals that you may want to consider when planning to spend time in remote regions of Australia.

Time and Distance

Let's start with the basics: time and distance. Research the routes you want to travel & the locations you want to visit. If you are a RAA member make use of their discounted maps, books etc. You can also obtain all kinds of maps, even specialty maps from the areas you travel to, at local stores, fuel stops, and National Parks & tourism offices. We also have access to PC software and internet sites. Always plan a few extra days into your itinerary.

You may find a great spot where you want to stay longer, some tracks may take longer than expected & any mechanical breakdowns or mishaps may take longer than you anticipated. Just for example; travelling around Central Australia a few years ago Karen & I had just booked out of Ayres Rock after restocking with supplies and when we returned back to our vehicle, we noticed that the camper trailer was leaning to one side, one of the springs had expired. Repairs could be made at the industrial area of the resort but they had to be measured to order, made in Alice Springs & flown in. That took two days!! So if you pre-plan a couple of extra days into your trip it can take away any unwanted stress

Remember. You are on holiday.

Fuel

Fuel costs in remote regions can vary & these days you may only get ULP or diesel. You may only get LPG on the main highway routes so even a choice of vehicle can become a consideration when planning a trip. Carrying extra fuel in jerry cans is an option and so are multiple or larger fuel tanks. Not just for carrying large amounts of fuel for longer distances but it may give you a choice of where to buy from.

I have seen people stranded for days in one spot in remote locations because their vehicle had LPG only & didn't have enough fuel to continue on their journey. The Roadhouse they were stuck at had run out & was waiting on supply also.

Remember: Fuel consumption is higher when you are 4WD driving or towing. You may only be travelling short distances in low range but in most typical off-road situations, your rev range is higher than normal use, therefore more fuel is used.

Basic Vehicle Requirements

There are a lot of 4WD accessories on the market these days & the list of needs & wants can vary as much as people's tastes & bank balances. Some people have to have every gadget that is known to man while others get by with very little or what they can afford.

Cheaper isn't always better, as the saying goes. "You get what you pay for." And some things should go without saying, like making sure your vehicle is in A1 mechanical condition beforehand. So presuming that has been done, let's look at the essentials.

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Fridges

There are plenty on the market & they vary with price. Get one that you can get parts & service for. Engel's and Waeco's are good value for money and parts and service are available nationally.

Dual Batteries

You will need dual batteries to run your fridge & other accessories so this means you will also need a battery management system. There are several different types of management systems on the market to choose from. Make sure it is suitable for your specific requirements. Speak to experienced users and gather as much information as possible before choosing.

Air Compressors

You will need air compressor for reinflating your tyres after you drive in areas of terrain that require you to lower your tyre pressures. They also are used when air diff lockers are fitted. Like fridges there are many on the market so choose one for your specific requirements.

Communications

A UHF radio is essential for vehicle to vehicle contact & most homesteads in rural farming areas or outback regions have them. For long distance and/or emergencies HF radios, (Sat) Satellite phones are available. A good UHF radio can be purchased for around \$400 but a HF radio or Sat phone can be an expensive purchase of several thousands of dollars, but offer good long range communications.

You will have running costs on top of that when accessing phone calls. It's something to consider depending on how serious you are about travelling in remote areas on your own.

Spare Parts

This is where you can get out of control with what you take as back up spare parts. The best thing you can do is remember how old your vehicle is & how well you look after it. The older it is the more spares you may want to carry. The minimum being fan belts, radiator hoses and a radiator cap, coolant, points, condensers, wheel bearings, & electrical components such as relays and fuses.

Then you will need tools suitable for you to work on your vehicle. Remember to take any special tools that are particular to your vehicle. Most importantly take a workshop manual, even if you can not repair your own vehicle someone with mechanical knowledge will always be able to use it if it is available.

Safety & Recovery Equipment

Let's start with some of the safety items you may want to carry, keeping it down to a minimum. A Fire extinguisher & blanket could mean the difference between life & death. If you don't have first aid training, do a course or at the very least invest in a St.Johns First Aid book or a survival manual. A PLB (personal location beacon) will give you some peace of mind for around \$600, hoping you may never need to use one but it could be a small price to pay in a real emergency.

A HF radio can also be used in an emergency, especially if you are a VKS member. You could carry all the recovery equipment possible & never have to use it but it is more likely that when you are carrying nothing is when you will need it. Keeping it basic & simple having rated recovery points on the front & rear of your vehicle should be the minimum, next a sturdy shovel, a snatch or towing strap & the knowledge to use them.

How far can you go? Shackles, hand or electric winches, chains, extension straps, high lift jacks, air jacks, power jacks, tyre changing devices & anchors, compressors, sand flags & the list goes on. It's all available for a price but you have to store it somewhere on your vehicle along with everything else so it is a matter of personal choice and of course money. Then the weight of your vehicle has to come into consideration.

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Leisure Items

If you are one of those people that like your toys such as digital and/or video cameras then you may want to look at buying a 12Vlt/240Vlt inverter. You can plug it into your cigarette lighter for charging those lithium batteries when you in the middle of nowhere. It will also help you run that PC for downloading that GPS track you just took, but remember to make sure you buy the one with the right watt input/output for your needs. There are also solar panels, generators and other twelve volt accessories like battery thumpers.

These basic requirements haven't included things such as food and water, clothing, cooking & camping items as well as vehicle modifications as these are subjects that need to be covered in their own right. This is just a bit of a guide to enjoying the great outdoors while 4WDDriving.

One last tip before going on that big trip. It is better to replace your tyres with new ones than to try & squeeze that last couple of hundred kilometres out of them. Some tyres can be hard to get when you are in remote places. You may only get second hand tyres or pay through the nose for new ones. Always try to carry two spares. There is a difference between bad luck and bad planning. Bad planning is preventable.

Happy Travels

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