

Right On Track



Four-wheel-drivers pick their way through a blanket of flowering *Verbena*s near Eneabba (above).

by Kylie Byfield

W.A. has some wild and wonderful country - and every year more and more people are discovering that the best way to see it is to pack up the four-wheel-drive and head bush for a dose of adventure.

They grind their way across some of the State's roughest terrain to sleep below a blanket of stars. They huddle around an open fire sipping a steaming cup of boiled billy tea. They walk, talk and soak up nature's beauty before heading home, exhausted.

That's what four-wheel-driving is all about - getting a buzz from getting back to nature.

WAYNE Schmidt, manager of CALM's Recreation Branch, says most four-wheel-drivers want to get away and find opportunities that are testing.

'Those opportunities are there and they will remain as long as the drivers are responsible. In the Eastern States, four-wheel-drives are banned in many areas, but in W.A., if the public continues to do the right thing, the chances of them being locked out are minimised.

'The users have a duty of care - an obligation - to do the right thing as far as the environment is concerned and CALM has received strong support from the growing number of four-wheel-drive clubs in getting this message across.

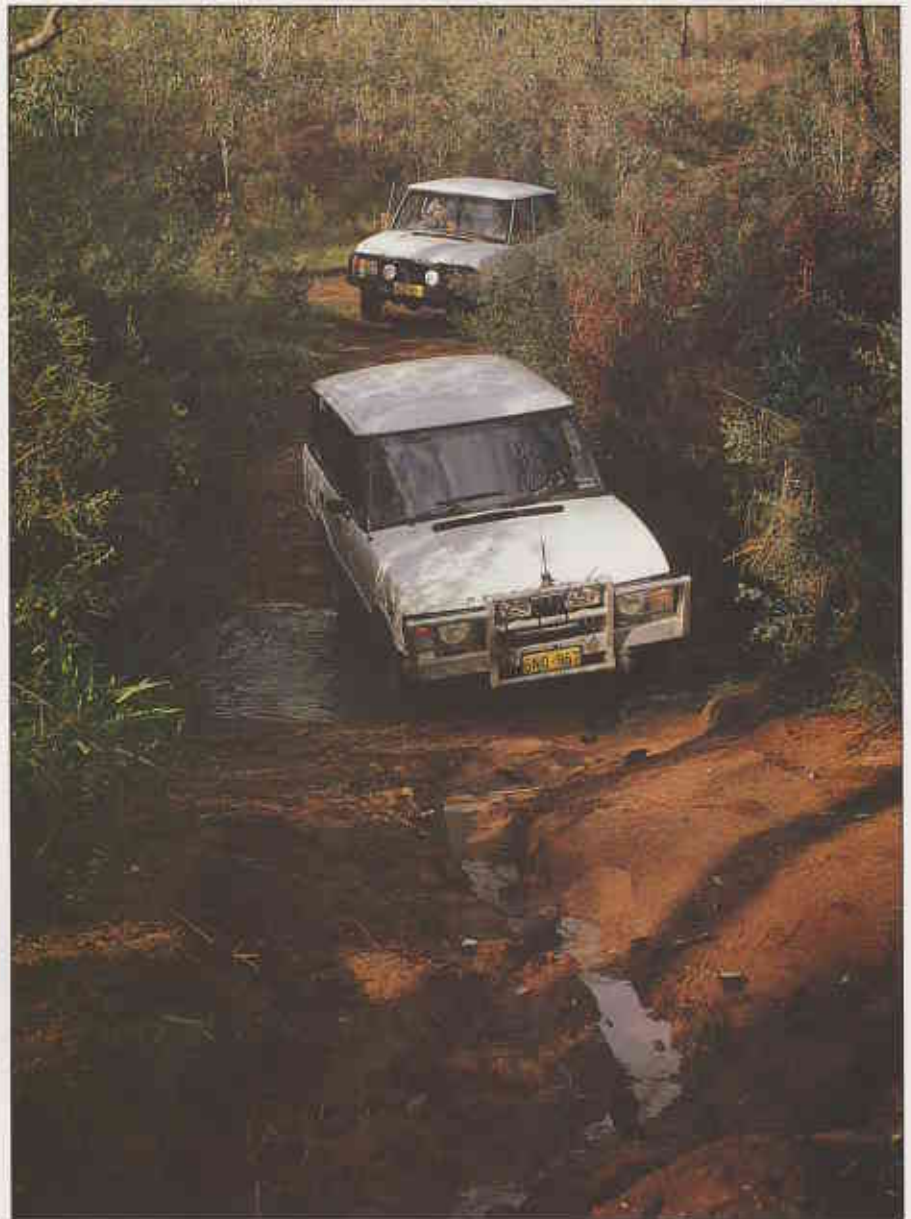
'Most people with a four-wheel-drive don't want to go "bush-bashing" anyway. They have, in most cases, invested upwards of \$35,000 in a vehicle and don't want to wreck it. The clubs provide a mechanism for ensuring their members do the right thing.'

'The clubs achieve this by adopting a code of ethics,' says Steve Wilke, vice-chairman of the W.A. Association of Four-Wheel-Drive Clubs and chairman of its land use sub-committee.

'There are about 30 clubs in W.A. today, and all of them have a code of ethics,' he said. 'Many of them have adopted a 12-point Code produced by the Australian National Four-Wheel-Drive Council. By adopting such a code the clubs aim to maximise their enjoyment while minimising their impact on the environment.

'Four-wheel-drives can still get to places which are inaccessible to two-wheel-drive vehicles and they don't need to stray from existing roads or tracks to get there.

'And that doesn't mean you have to stay in a caravan park. We travel with friends in convoy, pitch



Les James

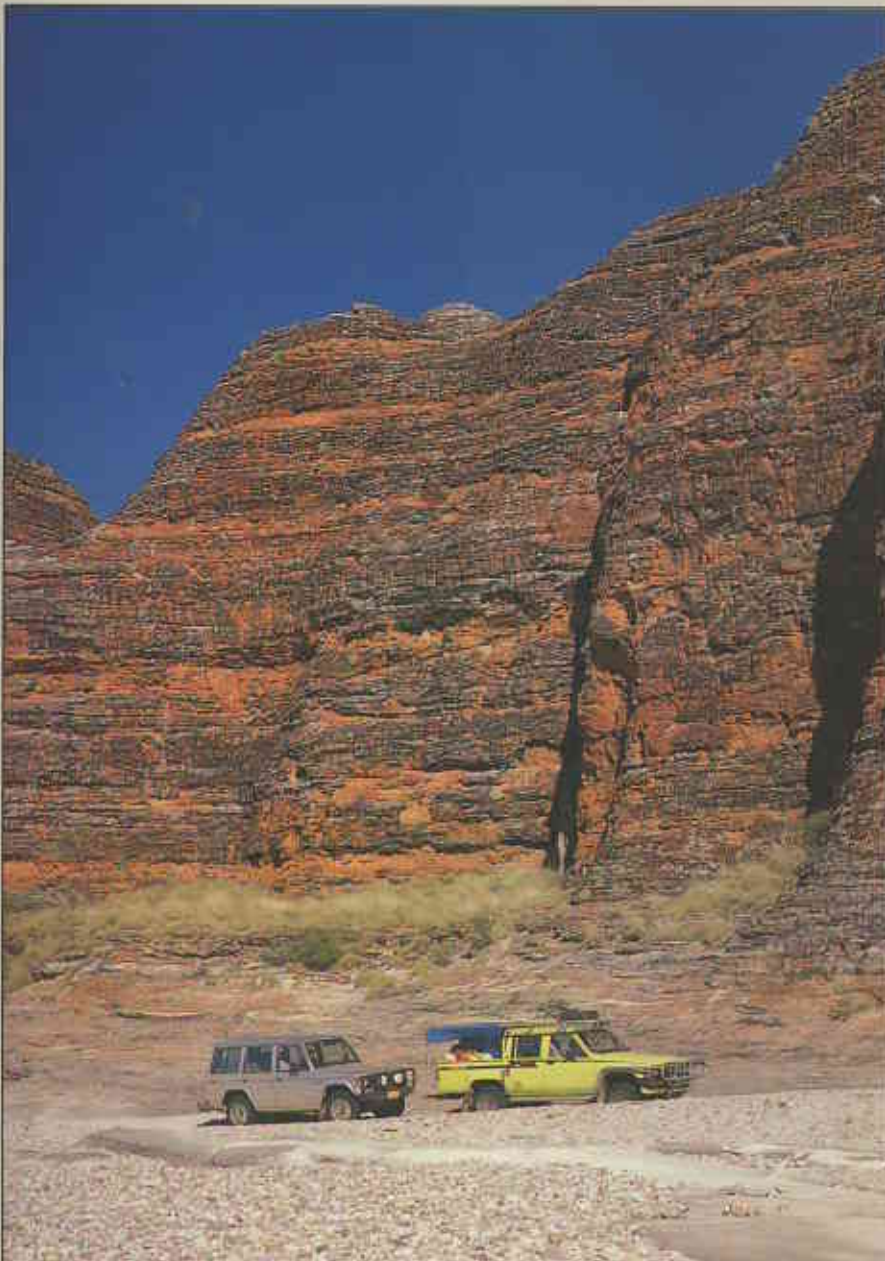
It's slow going along a steep forest track in the Darling Ranges (above), while four-wheel-drivers take to the open road along the northern section of the Canning Stock Route in the Kimberley (below).



Les James



The track to Port Warrender, Mitchell Plateau (above). Picanniny Gorge in the Bungle Bungle area is restricted to hiking, but thoughtless four-wheel-drivers can spoil it for the rest (below).



our tents, boil a billy and sit around a campfire chatting under the stars. It's so refreshing - that's how we get our buzz rather than bashing expensive vehicles.'

But while the clubs are doing the right thing, they are concerned about the irresponsible minority who continue to 'bush bash' and destroy not only the environment, but the reputation of all four-wheel-drivers.

'They believe they have a right to go where they like off-road and, lacking any environmental ethics, they tend to see the environment as a challenge rather than something to be enjoyed, appreciated and respected,' says Mr Wilke.

'The results can be quite devastating and, unfortunately, the general public tends to lump all four-wheel-drivers into the same category. However, the legitimate four-wheel-drive club movement is working hard to overcome this problem by encouraging others to join clubs or to at least embrace a code of ethics.'

Although 'bush bashing' is a term likely to offend most of today's four-wheel-drivers it is still a major problem. CALM is all too familiar with the lasting scars left on the landscape by irresponsible four-wheel-drivers or trail bike riders.

One of the greatest sins of irresponsible four-wheel-driving is that it spreads dieback and other diseases. The vehicle tyres which carry these diseases can also destroy vegetation, leading to erosion of the soil by wind and water. With heavy traffic, soil becomes compacted, preventing plants from regenerating and in some cases, water which can't penetrate the soil runs off into other areas, sometimes causing floods during heavy rainfall. Four-wheel-drives can also disturb wildlife or destroy its natural habitat.



Enthusiasts learn about angles of approach and departure during one of the RAC's four-wheel-drive courses (left).

Les James

Clubs

Four-wheel-drive clubs are nothing new in W.A. In fact, some of the State's oldest clubs are more than 20 years old. Today, there are about 30 clubs in W.A. based in both metropolitan and country regions. Of these, 23 belong to the W.A. Association of Four-Wheel-Drive Clubs, which is itself affiliated with the Australian National Four-Wheel-Drive Council. Clubs range in size from 10 to more than 100 members and most cater for families.

The structure of clubs also varies. Some cater for four-wheel-drives from one particular manufacturer while others allow all types of all-wheel-drive vehicles. All clubs have a constitution, an elected executive and many have become incorporated bodies. They all adopt a code of ethics and meet regularly (usually monthly).

Touring is the main club activity and trips range from short, one-day tours (less than 200km) to weekend jaunts (200-1000km) and extended trips (more than 1000km).

For more information, contact the W.A. Association of Four-Wheel-Drive Clubs, C/- Sportsmens Association, Stancliffe Street, Mount Lawley 6050

Then there is the damage inflicted by the drivers themselves. As more people gain access to previously inaccessible areas, the risk of fire increases along with vandalism and littering.

It's hardly surprising, then, that CALM is concerned - after all, managing and caring for the environment is its prime responsibility. But far from condemning four-wheel-drives, CALM actually encourages their responsible use. This, too, is not so surprising when viewed in light of the Department's policy that the environment is there for the public to enjoy.

So what has emerged in recent years is something of a cooperative arrangement, says Frank Batini, manager of CALM's Environmental Protection Branch.

'The four-wheel-drivers help us and we help them,' Mr Batini said.

It's an arrangement which seems to be working.

For their part, the drivers are doing much to help by simply staying on existing roads or tracks. This minimises damage to plants and wildlife and helps CALM contain erosion. They also reduce the threat of fire and join the fight against dieback by complying with fire and quarantine regulations.

So what is CALM's end of the bargain in this cooperative deal? Is it to place unnecessary restrictions on four-wheel-drivers - restrictions which sometimes prevent them from escaping to some of the State's most isolated yet most attractive areas?

Not so, argues Frank Batini. Although there are restrictions, they are imposed for two very good

reasons: to protect environmentally sensitive areas and to protect the public.

'Four-wheel-drives are allowed in areas where they will have the least environmental impact but in some places, such as disease-risk areas and nature reserves, CALM has either limited or prohibited four-wheel-drive access,' Mr Batini said.

'CALM doesn't want to take a big brother approach and have to enforce the rules. We would prefer four-wheel-drivers and four-wheel-drive clubs to be self-policing.'

The responsible four-wheel-driver is usually the first to support conservation. After all, they have seen some of the most beautiful and remote parts of W.A., and they are very likely to want to look after our unique environment.

Though seeing the issue from different perspectives, both Wayne Schmidt and Steve Wilke strongly advocate membership of four-wheel-drive clubs as the best way to encourage responsible four-wheel-driving.

'Clubs have a lot to offer. Not only do they provide social interaction with people who have similar interests, it is also safer to travel with a group, particularly in remote areas. The clubs also run driver education programmes, host guest speakers, conduct first-aid, bush survival and navigation courses and offer instruction in search and rescue techniques.

This is where the cooperative arrangement comes into play again. Officers from CALM, and other government bodies such as the Environmental Protection Authority and the Water Authority, have been called upon to address four-wheel-drive club meetings. CALM also provides training for the public in outback safety and bushcraft.



Wade Hughes

Fuel supplies can be few and far between in the remote outback and modern petrol pumps can sometimes be hard to find (above).

By doing these things they are, in a sense, upholding their end of the bargain. But this is not where CALM's cooperative role begins and ends, as Wayne Schmidt explains.

'It is very important that four-wheel-drivers invest time in planning their trip - particularly when conditions can change so quickly,' he says.

'This is where CALM can be an enormous help. The Department can provide up-to-date information about almost any region in the State no matter how remote it is. Say, for example, four-wheel-drivers are planning a trip to the south coast. They could drive hundreds of kilometres only to find the roads have been washed out by rain or are closed to prevent the spread of dieback. For the cost of one long-distance phone call, they could have found out what local conditions were and either abandoned the trip or planned an alternative.

Tips For Trips

Planning and careful preparation is the key to safe and enjoyable four-wheel-driving say Les James and Neil Baldwin of West Coast Four-Wheel-Drive.

And they should know - they run four-wheel-drive training courses for a variety of government bodies and other organisations.

Les says four-wheel-drivers should start a checklist of what to take and things to do before they leave. This list can then easily be added to or up-dated.

Here's a few tips to start with:

The Essentials

- First-aid kit
- Fire extinguishers
- Spare water (4.5 litres per person per day minimum)
- Petrol engine ignition tune-up kit
- Petrol and diesel fuel filters
- Spare radiator and heater hoses
- Spare fan belts (make sure they're the right size)
- Safety triangles
- Tow rope (with shackles)
- Leather gloves
- Puncture repair kit
- Jack and jack base plate(s)
- Ground sheet
- Spare tyre with extra tube (take 2 when travelling to remote areas)

- Basic tool kit to suit your vehicle
- Torch/trouble light
- Small round-mouth shovel
- Survival kit

The survival kit should be able to satisfy your needs for water, shelter, warmth and food. Apart from food and water, include items such as a bandage, a candle, a cigarette lighter (for lighting fires), medication (such as pain-relieving, diarrhoea and vitamin tablets), bandaids, twine and fish hooks, a whistle, a signal mirror, a knife, nylon cord, wire, aluminium foil, a compass, a survival blanket, pencil and paper, a hacksaw blade, a needle and thread, a can opener, a small torch, insect repellent and some plastic tape.



Marie Lochman

Getting back to nature at Bob's Crossing in the Lane-Poole Reserve.

'We strongly urge all four-wheel-drivers to contact CALM's district offices or local rangers before embarking on any trip.'

The W.A. Association of Four-Wheel-Drive Clubs makes a similar recommendation. 'It's in the four-wheel-drivers' own interest,' says Steve Wilke. 'That way they can be sure there will be no hitches.'

So the cooperative arrangement really does work - and it's not hard to understand why. CALM, for its part, wants people to enjoy the environment but not to damage it in the process. The four-wheel-drive clubs, on the other hand, want continued access to some of W.A.'s most fascinating and beautiful areas and don't want to jeopardise the good relationship they currently have with CALM.

'This relationship is important because CALM lands afford some of the best opportunities in this State for touring, camping, bushwalking, photography and nature appreciation,' says Steve Wilke.

And that, after all, is what four-wheel-driving is all about - getting a buzz from getting back to nature.

Preparation Plan

Decide where you want to go and buy a general map of the area to help you plan your trip.

Consider the distance you plan to travel, the sort of terrain you will cover, and the time you have available. Allow some extra time for unforeseen circumstances or simply so you can look around.

Plan alternative routes in case your original route is inaccessible.

Buy more detailed maps of the areas which do not have established roads. (These are available from CALM or the Department of Land Administration.)

Start making enquiries about conditions and restrictions in the area you plan to cover. Find out where you can camp, what food and water sources are available en route, which places are accessible by vehicle and whether your route crosses private lands.

In some cases, you will need a permit to cross Aboriginal lands. This usually takes about six weeks to get. If you will cross pastoral stations, get permission from the owner or manager. Because stations are often very isolated, it is also courteous to offer to pick things up from the nearest town for them.

Take a first-aid, and survival course before setting off.

If you are travelling to very remote areas, make sure you have high-frequency and C.B. radios.

Do a bit of research to learn about the area you will travel through (its history, plant and animal life, etc.)

Give your vehicle a thorough check. This includes wheels and tyres (don't forget the spares); fittings such as the fire extinguisher, tool kit and first-aid kit; fuel, lubricants and coolant; the battery; the engine (make sure all gauges and lights work along with the windscreen wipers, indicators and horn); and finally, brakes and steering.

Make sure you have all the supplies you need to be totally self-sufficient. Carry plenty of extra food and water.

Try to avoid using a roof rack. If it is a must, carry no more than 100 kg on the rack and never carry fuel on the roof.

Finally, when travelling to remote areas, advise police and at least two friends or relatives of your departure date, proposed destination, the routes and alternative routes you plan to take, and your estimated time of arrival. Notify them of your arrival once you get there.



LANDSCOPE

Volume 4, No.1
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In W.A. the concept of marine conservation reserves was firmly established in 1984 when the CALM Act was passed, with provision for Marine Parks and Marine Nature Reserves, vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority.

Since 1984 two major Marine Parks have been declared in W.A.: Marmion and Ningaloo.

This is a new field in W.A., and there are no local precedents to guide us in resolving the many management issues which have emerged.

A first consideration has been that fishing is already controlled under the Fisheries Act. It would be foolish for CALM to attempt to establish itself as a fisheries management agency. A policy decision has been made that any fisheries in Marine Parks will be regulated under the Fisheries Act.

A more philosophical problem has been that many citizens, although generally sympathetic to the conservation cause, are unaccustomed to the idea of having parks and reserves in the sea. The idea that the sea is a public common where anything and everything goes is still well entrenched in public attitudes. Yet there are many terrible examples around the world where coastal environments and their resources have been devastated by excessive and improper use. In W.A. we have not reached that point.

W.A. can be proud of its fisheries management record, based on the principle of sustainable use for posterity. Development of a marine parks and reserves system along our coast is another essential part of the overall objective. It is to be hoped, then, that our first initiatives in this direction will receive public support.

PINES



*How can less than four per cent of the State's area supply us with all our timber needs, and save the hardwood forests at the same time?
Details on page 28.*

WALL OF MOUTHS



It's a fish-eat-coral world, but what do the coral eat? Find out on page 32.



BORERS

Now you can be sure there are no borers in the door. Well, if they are there, at least you'll know what to call them after reading the article on page 42.

TROUBLED WATERS



Does the very word pollution make you feel powerless? Discover what you can do to help the wildlife victims on page 20.

FOREST RENEWAL



What is the connection between the poets' of the First World War and W.A.'s forests? Find out on page 56.



JEWEL OF THE KIMBERLEY

What do you mean frog? In my home I am a prince. After all, Prince Regent is the only mainland reserve where all of the original animal species remain. Meet the rest of them on page 47.

HILLS' BELLES



When Perth looks out its backdoor in spring the Hills are ablaze with colour. Your field guide to some of our glorious wildflowers starts on page 4.

ATTENTION ADULTS!

Sick of taking the anklebiters to the same old national parks and camping spots? Put them to work for you. If they enter the kids' competition on page 63 they could win two beautiful books on all the best picnic and camping spots between Perth and Eucla.

GATHER NO MOSS



The trouble with lichen is that up until recently it wasn't protected flora. Now lichen and their relatives - mosses, liverworts and algae - have joined the rest of the State's flora. See page 54.

RIGHT ON TRACK



Is a high-tech wilderness trek a contradiction in terms? Find out how 4WDs and conservation can co-exist peacefully on page 12.

Cover Photo



Magpie Geese take off from the Ord River.

Photo: Richard Woldendorp.

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