

FIRST TIME JITTERS



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Let's look at some tips to help give you confidence if you're free camping for the first time

Many of us have been free camping for a while at farm stays or roadside stops, or have even been completely off the grid for weeks on end. But we all had to start somewhere. We explore how to face those first time free camping jitters and gradually work your way towards having the confidence and skills to get off the grid.



PREPARATION

If this is your first time free camping you may not know what to expect. While it may sound strange, why not begin by simulating free camping in the comfort of your own driveway?

Start by hitching your van to the vehicle as though you've stopped for the night. Let's now simulate some of the free camping basics that you need to consider.

LEVEL AND ANGLE

Check the level of the van and its angle. You want to ensure the angle is suitable for both moving around inside your van when hitched and good for sleeping.

LIGHTING

As it gets dark, what is going to be your lighting solution? You need to be able to see somehow and there is no street lighting in the bush!

MEAL PREPARATION

Prepare your nightly meal. Consider how this will be achieved without having electricity or water plumbed to your van as you would in caravan parks.

SLEEPING

Get yourself ready for bed and be satisfied your setup will keep you warm to give you a good night's sleep.

EMERGENCY PACK UP

Every RV free camper should have a plan in place should you need to pack up in an emergency. In your situation, is it simply a case of locking the van and jumping in the car and away you go? If not, how long will it take? What needs to be done, and if one of you can't do that job, can the other? (For example, disconnecting the jockey wheel).

TOILET SOLUTION

Consider what solution you will use with your setup when nature calls.

So you've made it through the first night; well done! Take time the following morning to discuss what worked well and what could be improved. Also check items such as the fridge and batteries for performance (if you have them fitted).

The benefit of trying this all at home gives you the opportunity to test what it might be like to be disconnected from power and water while free camping. And even better, it's all in the comfort of familiar surroundings.

"TO EASE OURSELVES INTO FREE CAMPING, OUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WAS IN THE UNPOWERED SECTION OF A CARAVAN PARK"

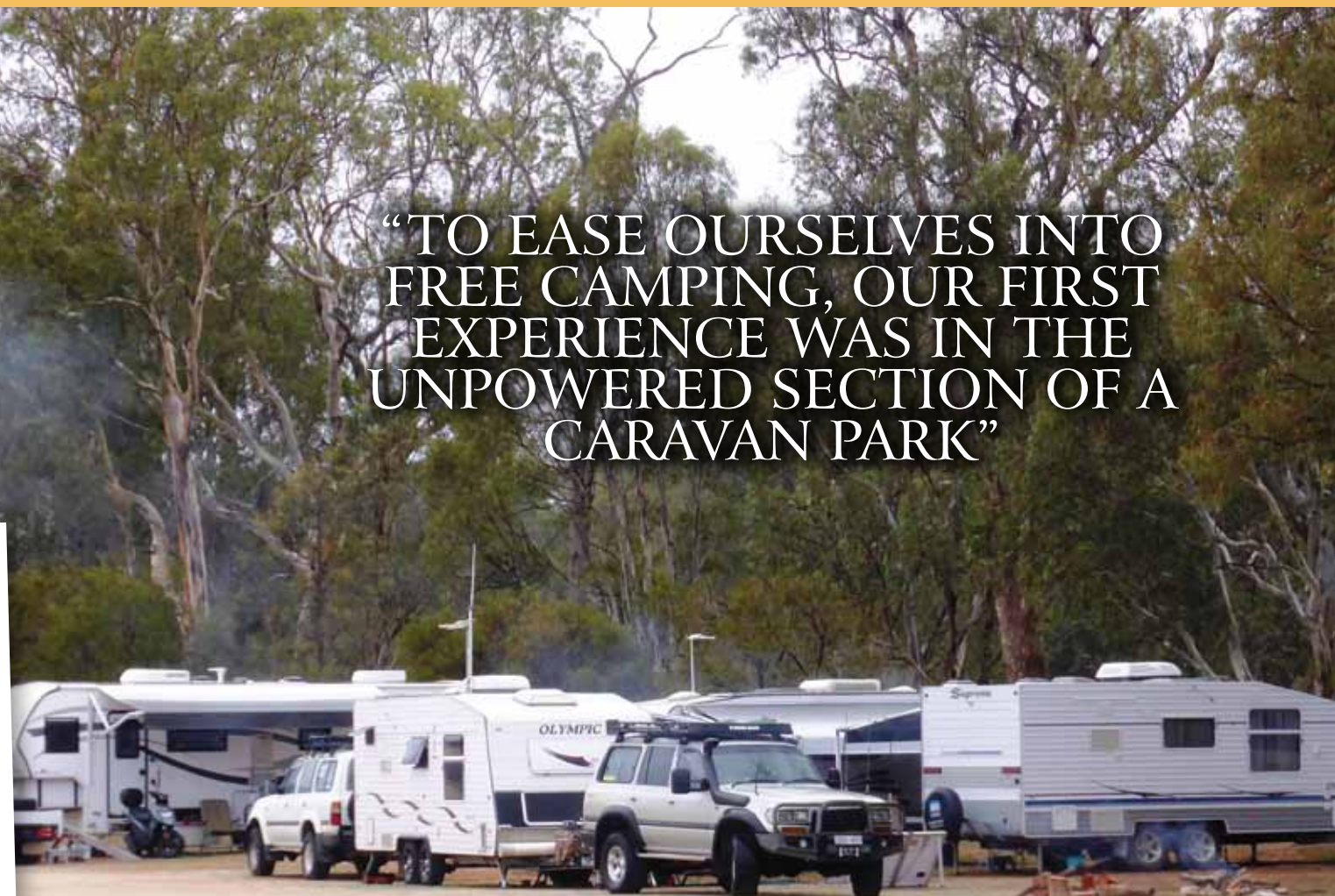
FINDING INFORMATION



There are plenty of reference guides, books and websites to assist first timers and those less experienced with free camping. Entering "free camping tips" into your internet search engine will return a large number of resources. Also ask fellow travellers, as they can pass on many valuable tips.



Carrying a range of cheap lighting options will prevent you from getting caught out



Unless you're travelling in a convoy, camping this close to your neighbour might not suit you

TAKING THINGS GRADUALLY

Some travellers rush straight into free camping with the attitude: "whatever happens, happens!" This method wasn't for us: we took a step-by-step approach. Over time we grew in confidence as we gained experience.

To ease ourselves into free camping, we established ourselves in the unpowered section of a caravan park. We were disconnected from hoses and cords, but could still use the amenities block.

Once we had confidence in how our setup worked, we then tried a farm stay. It was bush-style camping that offered amenities close by. This

TRAVELLING WITH OTHERS

Another way to gradually ease into free camping is to tag along with other experienced RVers. Travelling with friends experienced with free camping or joining one of the many associations or clubs is also an excellent option. You will have the opportunity to learn their free camping lifestyle tips, tricks and experiences firsthand.

option worked well for us because if we needed help, other campers and owners were within sight.

Whichever method you end up adopting, the important thing is to take it at your own pace.

It doesn't matter what type of vessel you choose, but have emergency drinking water as part of your free camping kit



Starting your free camp search earlier in the day will give you a greater opportunity to select from multiple free camps

FREE CAMPING

BEGINNER'S GUIDE

TOP 5 FREE CAMPING CONCERNS

We all have different levels of experience and confidence when it comes to travelling. The way we live our day-to-day life with all the comforts of home can influence how we might feel about being remote. When meeting people when we travel, we often discuss free camping including what concerns they had. These are the items that seemed to be the biggest worries for travellers.

1. SECURITY

This was the number one concern with all travellers.

2. LOCATION

Knowing whether the spot chosen was suitable

3. NEIGHBOURS

Determining whether they'll be noisy or unruly.

4. AUTHORITIES

Where to get help if it's needed.

5. AMENITIES

What to do if you don't have a full bathroom on board.



Our RV first aid kit is comprehensive and includes a few extras, but we also take a small one when bushwalking

“WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE AND CONFIDENCE WHEN IT COMES TO TRAVELLING”

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

The key to addressing concerns is all about having plans, procedures and a process in place. Let's see how we could deal with those top 5 concerns.

SECURITY

Exit plan

You need to feel safe when free camping so having an exit plan is important. But it also comes down to the bottom line – if you don't feel comfortable, don't stay.

Selecting your camp

Try picking a larger free camp area where others have already set up when you arrive. If it's later in the day and you are the first to arrive, move on to another camp with others.

Locking up

Have your vehicle and RV positioned in such a way that you can drive straight out if required. Put your belongings away and lock external hatches. Once you're inside your RV for the night, keep your RV door locked.

Communications

Ensure whichever method you use is set up before free camping. This means having relevant phone numbers pre-loaded into your mobile or satellite phone.

LOCATION

Proximity

Here it's more about knowing where you are in relation to nearby towns and passersby. Decide whether you aim to be in sight of the road which also means being visible to other road users or tucked behind some trees to avoid being seen.

Used and abused

If the free camp area looks unloved, chances are it may be a gathering area for rebel rousers. Find another site!

Popularity

If you selected the campsite from a reputable source chances are others will know about it.

NEIGHBOURS

Respect

When free camping where there are others, it's all about respecting another person's space. At some of the more popular overnight camps it can get very busy and respect can fall by the wayside, so you may just find yourself getting hemmed in. Staying hitched and ready to move on means exactly that. If it's not working for you, don't stay.

Noisy Neighbours

If possible, avoid parking near picnic tables, fire pits and any amenity areas. Generally these are gathering places and some travellers like to extend their socialising into the wee hours. When pulling into a site, you will soon be able to see other campers who are travelling in multiple groups, so size them up and park accordingly.

AUTHORITIES

Distances

There is no doubt the more remote you go the larger the distance involved to obtain assistance. While you are getting a feel for free camping, stick closer to towns and tourist hubs to be closer to hospitals, chemists, or police.

Self-sufficient

The more remote your camp, the greater your need to be self-sufficient. Consider undertaking a first aid course that focuses on remote situations. Also think about becoming a member of the RFDS and carrying a means of communication with you. Let friends or relatives know where you're heading or register with the local authorities and adhere to their protocols.

AMENITIES

Basics

You don't need full ensuite bathrooms to free camp if you intend only to do overnights. A visit to a major camping store can have you kitted out with the bare essentials. Many tourist routes will have some form of toilets en route and it's easy enough to set up simple bathing arrangements inside any RV. For longer stays you may want to have better facilities to make it more enjoyable.



Use the opportunity to spread out at larger camps

TOP TIP

Contact your insurance company before setting off to determine if your policy is affected by free camping. You will want to make sure you are still covered in the event you need to make a claim.



Before retiring for the night ensure you have everything packed away so you can leave at a moment's notice if required



Gas BBQs are an efficient way to cook when free camping

FREE CAMPING

BEGINNER'S GUIDE



We have our mobiles and satellite phone pre-loaded with all emergency contact numbers for travelling



Shower options like these won't break the bank at under \$30 each

RV FRIENDLY TOWNS

Staying at RV friendly towns is an excellent choice. To achieve accreditation, towns are required to offer a range of RV friendly options and facilities. Chances are you will be pulling up close to amenities and a range of retail and services outlets. At these types of sites there will more often than not be other RVers so you won't be alone.

SUMMING UP

Free camping can be a lot of fun and need not be daunting. It is all a learning process, so ask lots of questions, do some research, and make a plan. And if you see us at your next free camp, come over and say hi! ■

OUR TOP 5 "MUST HAVES" WHEN FREE CAMPING

- 1. PLAN**
Having a plan means knowing how to get out in a hurry if need be.
- 2. COMMUNICATIONS**
We don't go anywhere without knowing we can call someone so having a mobile and a satellite phone is a must.
- 3. FIRST AID KIT**
We carry multiple kits but the one in our RV is comprehensive and includes a few extras – a variety of ointments and prescribed medications.
- 4. WATER**
This means drinking water. Other than our RV tanks, we always carry either a jerry can full or store-bought water for an emergency.
- 5. LIGHTING**
We keep a variety of torches, lanterns and candles and a few boxes of matches.

With these 5 items in your RV, you can go everywhere. As you become more adventurous, there is no doubt you will add other things.

WHAT YOU'RE SAYING ONLINE

With all the experience we have in our Facebook community, we asked what advice people could provide to first time free campers. We're sure our first timers will appreciate some of their responses.

BRIAN CARTER:

We sometimes free camp. I found the biggest help is Wiki Camps App for my iPad/iPhone. We learnt the hard way to avoid truck stops etc. Far too noisy! There are lots of really good free camping spots around. I don't stop at a place I am not comfortable with.

MARGARET HUMPHREY:

The best way to start free camping is to find a spot with others camped too. Always try to arrive from 2pm onwards (early as possible) to get a spot unless you are held up. If you feel unsafe, leave.

CHRIS BRADFORD:

I am on my own and I free camp and love it. I do 4 or 5 days max then go to a caravan park to refill water and charge the battery. I always make sure I'm there by 4.00pm so I'm not in the dark on arrival. I always camp if there are others there. Camps 8 book is a fantastic reference. You'll love it once you do it!

SHARON IMPSON:

You won't be disappointed. We have a battery fitted to our van as well as a gennie for backup. A portable solar panel is good for keeping the battery charged if you are camped up for a couple of days.

www.facebook.com/caravanandmotorhome

