

the Grey Nomad Times

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In this issue: • Enjoy elegant Echuca • Options for cool customers • Free camp debate ... your say

Licence overhaul plan takes a political detour

Establishing a national licensing policy will be 'complicated'

A rising tide of public anger is forcing the authorities to move towards a more nationally uniform system of vehicle registration and driving licences. Following a story in the GNT last year, hundreds of you wrote in to register your frustration at the huge inconveniences that the differing state and territory systems cause you as you criss-cross the country. These grievances were forwarded on to the relevant authorities and it seems change is coming ... but slowly. The Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Anthony Albanese, told the GNT that the Government cannot regulate registration practices without the agreement of the various states and territories. "I note that while jurisdictions have no current plans for a national registration system, the Austroads Registration and Licensing Program is continuing to work towards harmonising different aspects of licensing and registration to make it easier for people, when crossing interstate borders, to transfer their vehicle registration and driver licences," he



Plans for a national licence are making slow progress

said. "Austroads' work in this area has most recently resulted in the elimination of licence fees being charged when transferring a licence interstate." Indeed, Austroads (the Association of Australia and New Zealand Roads and Transport Authorities), has established a Registration and Licensing Program taskforce to harmonise registration and licensing practices. "A national system for licences and vehicle registration is considered ideal and is in our future plans, but not in the immediate future ... certainly for the next 3-5 years," taskforce co-ordinator Jane Fitzgerald told the GNT. "We are currently looking at smaller elements within that bigger structure but

there are different computer systems, different legislations to deal with ... it is complicated." Ms Fitzgerald says implementing a uniform national system would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. "We have been doing research in this area and have looked at ways it might work," she said. "All we can do is pass it up the chain though and then it is a matter of whether politicians have the appetite to fund it." It seems that while there is broad consensus that the registration and licensing systems need a real overhaul, the steps towards it could well be slow and politically painful.

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Most nomads are happy to grin and bare it

The naked nomads of the road are nearly united ... no spy in the sky satellite is going to make them put their kit on! In the last issue of the GNT, we asked whether the super advanced photographic technology available on orbiting satellites and drones would end your carefree days of nude Outback sun-bathing. "No way," screamed 93% of respondents. Just 7% were modest enough to want to cover up in case of potentially embarrassing footage finding its way into space. "If they need to get their jollies by perching on naked, 65-year-old, overweight, hairless beauties like myself, then good luck to 'em," said Maca. "Let them look," said Sally. "They'll only look once!" quipped Robert. Bruce was equally brazen. "Let them get a good eyeful," he said. "I couldn't care less." Valerie and Dan were even hopeful it could open up new opportunities. "Maybe someone will spot our talents and we will become film stars ... still dreaming!" they wrote.

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Characters of the Road

Life on the road is but a dream for keen kayakers

Brisbanites Carol & Graham, 70, love their van ... and their kayaks

What rig do you travel in?

Tug is a 1995 Nissan Patrol 4.2 EFI (petrol). We bought our 1999 Jayco Westport 21'6" new in 1999 and it's the only van we have ever owned. We have never had a moment of regret after covering around 180,000km with the van and tug. All driving has been on the blacktop. It is now part of the family and is unlikely to go until we are unable to physically cope with caravanning.

Where do you camp?

Caravan parks almost exclusively. Carol is a confirmed city girl and is uncomfortable in the bush. I don't like pulling the rig over rough tracks. It is not built for that and the repair bills can be large.

How long do your trips last?

For touring ... 2-3 months these days, used to be 3-6 months. Beach or bush getaways ... around 1 month. Local Redclaw fishing trips ... 3-4 days. Sometimes just the Patrol and kayaks though.

On the-road hobbies?

Exercise, kayaking, bike riding, reading, cooking, fishing, and exploring new things.



Graham and Carol's rig outside the Nindigully Pub

Do you always bring a kayak?

Absolutely. I often take two. One is a fantastic fishing platform and the other great for early morning/sunset paddles and longer day tours. I just wish I had had one 10 years ago. They are great for the beach, in estuaries and exploring bush waterways at sunrise and sunset. Though maybe not so good up where the snappy handbags live!

Lifestyle likes and dislikes?

We like the affordable freedom to go where you want for as long as you want, away from the hassles of suburban life. We like socialising with people of a like mind. We dislike the ever increasing cost of fuel and caravan parks that want to be 'Holiday Parks'. We prefer to avoid caravanning along the coast during school holidays.

Favourite places?

We recently visited Mallacoota. Fabulous. Quiet (off season), good bike riding, fishing and kayaking, and an active local village. We also love certain sites at Mooloolaba on the surf. Other regular spots are Port Macquarie Breakwater, Woolgoolga, Urunga, Ballina Lakeside, Cotton Tree and Narabeen Lakes when we are in Sydney. West beach in Adelaide is great, and the park overlooking Boston Bay at Port Lincoln is hard to beat.

Advice or tips?

Think carefully before taking the plunge on the big decisions like selling your house for a life on the road. Make contingency plans for the future when you are no longer able to go vanning.

Nomads in Brief

Snake shock

A four-year-old girl has survived after being bitten on the shin bone by a suspected tiger snake on a bush track near Mathinna in northeast Tasmania. Rebecca Johanson was given two doses of anti-venene at Launceston General Hospital and is fit enough to continue with her family camping holiday.

Flying low

The wet weather has caused a Boeing 747 on display at the Qantas Founders Museum in Longreach to start sinking. The museum says the nose wheel of the jumbo jet is tied onto a large concrete block but it has sunk about 20cm into what appears to be an old underground fuel tank.

Feeling flush

Pyramid Holiday Park in Tweed Heads West has installed 60 new four-star rated cisterns and pans to replace older single-flush toilets. The expected water savings will be about 1.2 million litres per year – or about 60 backyard swimming pools.

Algae bloom

Lake Connemare and the Barwon River Estuary in Victoria are the latest places to report high levels of blue-green algae. Parks Victoria has increased testing of water quality and is warning people to adhere to information signs and to avoid contact with the water.

QUIZ CORNER

GRAB A CUPPA AND TEST YOUR GREY MATTA

How some van parks keep the 'riff-raff' out



Do You Know

1. Which highway leads from the Stuart Highway to Borroloola?
2. What is the road distance between Dubbo and Alice Springs?
A) 895 km B) 1,865 km C) 2385km
3. What is Australia's most affectionate waterway?
4. What is the most westerly point in mainland Australia?
5. Which WA beauty spot has a special ring to it?

(Answers on page 4)

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Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with fellow nomads

Dear Editor,
 We wonder if anyone else has experienced thieving in campsites. The fridge in our nearly new van decided not to work so, to save our frozen food, we moved everything to the campsite recreation area with a note to explain that our fridge had broken. The next morning I went to collect our 'frozens' and discovered some lovely camper had stolen all our meat ... roast lamb, rump steak and sausages. Could not believe it! The owner was very upset and said it was the first thieving at the camp in eight years! Is this a common occurrence please? Rather ruined our day.

Pete & Sue

Dear Editor,
 Re: shower stealers (GNT: Issue 13) When we were managing van parks, if someone came in for a shower we would charge them \$4. Most people were happy to pay. A lot would then ask if they could use the washing machines as well, which we didn't have a problem with as it cost them anyway. If we found anyone abusing power, ie recharging phones etc, we would unplug the devices, put them outside, and then ask the offender to leave. We didn't have much trouble with that one!

Natalie

Dear Editor,
 Re: Jaclyn & Heidi (GNT: Issue 14). Poor Alison. I know the feeling of the 'sleepless midnight' trying to hang on because you don't want to go behind a bush in the dark. I hate going outside at night for a wee. I also hate the formality of van parks. My answer is a porta potti. I got one six months ago, and wouldn't be without it ever again. As for privacy, surely hubby has seen you 'whiz' before but, if not, a

gentleman would turn his back (or go on snoring!).

The dog lady

Dear Editor,
 A shower tent and portaloo. Five mins to set up and totally private.

Owen

Dear Editor,
 So, is the bush littered with your toilet paper? All towns have a pub or a public toilet. What gives you the right to use the bush and contaminate the ground water eventually with your waste? Be a bit responsible.

Albert

Dear Editor,
 Alison. I too have found it is more difficult than ever to 'crouch'! As a 60+ babe who has never been too ashamed or physically unable to bend my knees to visit nature in the past, I now end up not being able to completely empty my bladder in that difficult position. The end result has been a Urinary Infection ... never nice, but worse on a caravaning trip! I bought a portaloo and a quick release loo tent, and they work very well.

Judy

Dear Editor,
 We have a 'Happy Crapper', a milk crate with the bottom cut out and a toilet seat bolted in place. A bum bag contains toilet paper, wet ones, a torch, and matches to burn the paper. Also attached is a folding shovel, and a bicycle bell in case of emergency ... saves squatting, allows one to take in the view of the surrounding countryside, and makes doing one's business less of a chore.

Bob

Dear Editor,
 Re: Gadgets of the Road (GNT: Issue 14) \$450 dollars for peace of mind versus a shotgun ... \$2000 + plus licence fees. I

would feel a lot safer with a pair of glasses and a UHF hand-held radio.

Don

Dear Editor,
 Re: ranger power (GNT: Issue 14). So, let's provide rangers with more power ... the power to tazer us? Where does this madness stop? 50,000 volts for dropping litter and not picking it up quick enough when told to perhaps? Abuse of tazers are well documented in the US and here, and so are the deaths. We should be outraged!

Lebbell

Dear Editor,
 I have been arguing with rangers for 40 years or more. They are put there by the government to stuff up your holiday. I could write book on how stupid they are to the public.

David

Dear Editor,
 More power, more problems. Sorry, but we have enough power-crazy people making our life miserable. Giving more power to rangers without trying to give the camper some rights will cause confrontation.

Noel

Dear Editor,
 Rangers have all the power they need. As it is, some think they own the national parks. Maybe a better understanding of people and how treat them would go a long way.

Ben

Dear Editor,
 Re: Great Drives (GNT: Issue 14). We spent six weeks on the Eyre Peninsula and it wasn't long enough. We'll go back to see what we missed and see our favourites from last time. It's definitely a premium nomad destination. Port Lincoln was fantastic and the locals were so friendly.

Karol

Dear Editor,
 We did the Westall Way and had a great overnight stay at Speed Point free camping. We also stayed at Venus Bay which also had a jetty that is great for fishing. We also tried surf casting from Camel Beach and caught Australian Salmon. We found Port Lincoln to be the most RV friendly town in the 34,000km of our trip so far. Lincoln National Park has had an upgrade and was a great camping experience. We would recommend a trip around the Eyre Peninsula to anyone ... but the wind on the Nullabor is another story!

Valerie & Dan

Dear Editor,
 Thank you for the interesting info on the Eyre Peninsula. We have just arrived in South Australia from Victoria. We are in the first week of our life on road. So far so good. We love reading your newsletter. Keep up the good work.

Frank & Shirley (Gypsy)

Dear Editor,
 We played the Nullarbor Links golf course at Christmas, starting in Kalgoorlie - interesting! We went to Streaky Bay for a couple of days before driving back to Perth and thoroughly enjoyed it. We would have liked to have carried on south but didn't have time. I will keep your article and try to get back to the Eyre Peninsula.

Pat

Dear Editor,
 We travelled around in the Eyre Peninsula on our way home from Perth a few years ago and will definitely be back. It was incredibly beautiful and friendly.

Lindsay & Bev

(Free camp debate - your views, see page 6)

the Grey Nomad Times

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A second fridge can help travellers keep their cool



Gadgets of the Road

with Jezza

For many grey nomads – particularly those who like to travel with a fishing rod in their rig – the standard RV fridge just doesn't cut the mustard in the size department. This makes a second fridge ... often housed in the back of the 4WD ... a desirable proposition. As well as increasing storage capacity, it also enables adventure-hungry grey nomads to take off for a few days in a tent, while leaving their van stored safely somewhere. Three-way fridges that can run off 12-volt power, mains electricity, and LPG are a versatile possibility. A full gas bottle can power a fridge for maybe two weeks before it needs refilling, the 12v option allows travellers to draw power from their car or motorhome battery as they drive, and it's always nice to have the 240v power-up option for when you are staying in a powered caravan site.



There are many portable fridges on the market

Size, durability, efficiency are all key elements in choosing a second fridge but deciding on the best power source is the real starting point. While three-way fridges are still very popular, increases in efficiency mean that 12v/240v fridges can do a great job if you are away from power for just a day or two. A portable generator or a dual battery system in the towing vehicle can also offer some power 'insurance'. Solar fridges which have their own solar panels are also gaining in popularity and can work pretty much indefinitely as long as the sun keeps shining! Similarly, a more holistic solar power recharging system can

enable multiple fridges to keep their cool. Travelling in the tropics will require a harder working fridge and you should seek out a fridge that has a higher Climate Class rating. Fridges come in a variety of sizes and it is important that you choose the right one to suit your needs. If you are travelling for a long time and plan to get off the beaten track, bigger is almost certainly better ... but you need to be able to power it! Oh, and if you are a fisherman, you need to have the skills – and the luck – to stock it!

[Click to comment](#)

Website highlights

Surprise reunion with long lost rig

Recently, our website www.thegreynomads.com.au reported on the British man who bought a caravan on Ebay ... nearly 50 years after he first sold it! Frank Holgate actually built the 12ft four-berth Silverlight caravan from scratch so was particularly sentimentally attached to his masterpiece ... and absolutely delighted to get it back. He sold the van back in 1963 for UK £540 and thought he had seen the last of it. However, when a friend noticed the distinctive 'Hol-gates' badge on an Ebay listing

Frank didn't hesitate in paying £700 – a 30% increase on its original price tag – for the van that was still in good condition. Now that he has been reunited with one of the loves of his life, Frank has already begun tenderly refurbishing it. Is Frank alone in his sentimental attachment to his rig?

[Read more here](#)

SURVEY

Does your rig have a name (and does it have its own personality)?

Yes
 No

Other website must-reads:

- Cabin fever**
Do parks still have room for vans?
- In the firing line**
Is the US parks gun policy 'shot'?
- Gold rush**
New old timers on treasure trail
- Wrong turn**
Nomad's highway horror drive
- Fossicking fever**
Discovering a gem of a hobby
- Safe to eat?**
How to keep tummy bugs at bay

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A bygone era beckons in Echuca

Take some time to meander through mighty Murray country



Echuca-Moama on the Victorian/ New South Wales border is a fantastic destination for travellers in its own right ... but it's also the gateway to genuine bush adventure.

The Long Paddock touring route takes grey nomads from this historic inland port town along the 600-plus kilometre length of the Cobb Highway to Wilcannia ... and the very doorstep of iconic Outback towns such as Broken Hill and Bourke.

Not that travellers will be in a hurry to leave Echuca, the spot where the Goulburn and the Campaspe rivers join the mighty Murray ... and boat lovers, fishermen and wildlife

spotters are in their element. The good rains of recent years have seen the rivers return to health and the tourist-carrying paddlesteamers do a roaring trade. A tourist precinct has also been established in the old wharf area giving visitors an insight into the bustling activity of the late 1800s.

When the time comes to leave, the Long Paddock – the colloquial term for Australia's old stock routes – beckons, and so does a quite unforgettable journey.

Just a scenic half-hour drive from Echuca are the Red Gum National Parks, incorporating the Barmah Millewa forest, home to the largest Red Gum



Paddlesteamers are a great way to experience the Murray

forest in the world and an incredible array of flora and fauna.

Deniliquin, at the intersection of the Riverina and Cobb Highways, is divided by the Edward River and services the local rice, wool and timber industries. It also hosts a popular annual Ute muster. Time your visit carefully!

Further north, the Long Paddock passes through the tiny townships of Wanganella and Booorooban and these are great places to stop, shop and meet some local characters.

Sweeping through this important agricultural country, you will also pass through the Hay Plains, the flattest place in the southern hemisphere. Hay is a leading wool growing and sheep meat producing area, and home to the Australian Shearers Hall of Fame.

As you continue through Booligal and Ivanhoe to Wilcannia, a series of interpretive panels at significant sites along the way provide historical and geographical information. Despite travelling on bitumen and in air-conditioned luxury, it is still easy to walk in the footsteps of those original stock herders and to see the country through their eyes. A century or more on, the landscape is still just as spectacular and as uniquely Australian as ever.

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ASK JACLYN and Heidi



Our experts solve your grey nomad etiquette dilemmas

A bad view?

Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,

We are about to set out on our big two-year adventure around Australia. We have done many shorter trips over the years and I am really looking forward to being a full-time grey nomad. However, I have to admit I am mildly panicked about not being able to watch TV without feeling guilty about it. Since I retired I like to relax by watching shows like Neighbours, the Biggest Loser and all manner of crime shows. I know it's not overly productive but I enjoy it and am dreading having to justify my 'vice' to people who want me to have a happy hour drink, go on a bushwalk, or go birdwatching. Should I try to mend my ways ... even though I don't want to?

Merilyn

Don't stress, Merilyn. You're about to embrace a lifestyle which is geared towards doing what you want when you want. Life on the road isn't about living up to what other people expect you to do. Different people get different things from the Big Lap. It may well be that, as the weeks and months roll by, you will gradually feel less 'loyal' to your favourite shows and will wean yourself off them ... but don't feel guilty if you don't. You have worked hard all of your life and this is your reward ... not a stick to beat yourself with.

Jaclyn

You don't mention 'Home and Away' in your letter, Merilyn, which is a worry as it by far the best Aussie soap. No, you should not try to 'mend your

ways,' as you put it. The shows you mentioned offer great entertainment and quality productions like 'The Biggest Loser' also offer valuable life lessons and should be compulsory viewing. A lot of overweight grey nomads would be far better off if they put away their bushwalking boots for five minutes and watched how Shannan and Michelle whip people into shape. I would scream blue murder if someone tried to stop me watching Margie from the red team in action as I see a lot of myself in this wonderful woman. You can go for a walk any time you like but these shows are only on once a day. Happy viewing, Merilyn, and don't forget to give 'Home and Away' a look.

Heidi

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the Great free camping debate

Our story about disappearing free camps had many of you seeing red and typing fast. Here's what you had to say:

Some of us grey nomads only want the basics, not all these kids' play areas, so why pay for something you won't use?

Brian (Big Ducky)

The park at Gordonvale south of Cairns used to be a 'must' comfort stop for myself and fellow workers when grey nomad campers were there. After the council banned them, the toilets had their doors and seats ripped off and other less mentionable vandalism. The only people I saw there then were youths doing 'donuts'. The grey nomads moved on to spend their money in Babinda!

The dog lady

There is a place for free camping, but our problem is that we have a free campsite only 300 metres from our gate! Most states have a distance between free campsites and a commercial caravan park, but not in Tasmania. Hopefully this will change! If you think about your business before you were retired; I'm sure you would be upset if the council was giving it away for free anywhere.

Small park owner, Tasmania

Whoever informed caravan parks that the big money was to be made from the 'houses' in parks for cashed-up young families have ignored those who enjoy caravanning and camping and do not like these type of parks. Bottom line. You cannot make people do what they do not wish to.

Gordon (Mallee)

Van parks are their own worst enemies. They provide great facilities but most nomads do not need them and a lot of families can't afford them. Free campers spend money in towns that provide good free camps so councils should think hard before bowing to pressure from van parks.

Barry

This is the time for all caravan owner clubs, caravan magazines and 'the Grey Nomads'

to stand up and have their say. Don't let the caravan park owners sway the council's decision.

Tony

How many times have we had to pay top dollar, because the van park had a monopoly on the only camp site around. We owe them nothing.

Sea21

A few candid van park managers told me that many park owners were re-categorising their parks to 'Holiday Parks'. Being able to charge higher rates means they can afford to have cabins empty for more than six months of the year and still come out ahead.

Robert

Van park owners who have over committed financially cannot expect to dictate whether fellow Australians can enjoy being self sufficient when they travel. Councils who may attract travellers to their town by providing free camping areas also represent other local businesses who may benefit from sales of fuel, food and other supplies.

Tom (the Airhawk Guy)

With my husband and I on the road looking for free camping in our self-sufficient van and, with security an issue, van parks could well take advantage by offering \$10 sites. We cannot afford \$38-\$42 fees.

Mary

If free camping within a town's boundary is abolished that town's volume of tourism and therefore economic situation could suffer. We combine free camping with caravan parks.

Peter

The appeal of lower cost options such as van parks close to – but not on – the ocean, may increase over the next few years as costs become impossible to justify on the coast. What people are looking for is an escape from the cold, not necessarily an ocean view.

Dunwerkin

The park at Blackall in Qld is often at capacity during the season and offers traditional camp oven dinners. At the same time, the \$5 per night campsite on the edge of town on the Barcoo River often has 20 or more vans. These campers are all contributing around \$500 a week to local businesses. Remove that facility by the river and there will be a substantial reduction in the coffers of the town's traders.

John

We use a combination of park stays and free camping. If we were compelled to stay in parks every night, we would have to shorten our trip and therefore we would not be out there patronising parks, fuel outlets, grocery stores etc. I sympathise with van parks but, as self-funded grey nomads, we are on a budget.

William & Jessie

Many parks have borrowed money to build pools, luxury cabins and other resort features. To repay their debt they have to charge high tariffs. They have misjudged the market. More travellers are self contained and do not want those things all the time.

Peter (retired park operator)

What about the grey nomads with pets ... eh!

Christine

Finding it much harder to find free camp spots as they are closing them as fast as we are being told about them.

Peter

If a rig is set up with its own water, power, shower and toilet they simply don't need a van park. Business a caravan park was never going to get in the first place is not business lost.

Cheryl

The reason van parks are closing here in WA is because the mining companies are taking them over for their workers. We usually free camp anyway.

Ron

These same caravan park owners wouldn't hesitate to close their doors if they were made an offer to sell by developers. Why should these same park owners be able to hold a gun to local council heads? Next, you'll have the butchers in the town wanting to close every other venue that sells meat.

Sally

I look carefully as I approach towns. Those that have 'No Camping' signs on their rest areas, and where there are no free camping sites, I expect to be ripped off by van parks and look for more traveller-friendly places. I won't spend money where I am welcomed only as a mobile wallet container.

Dan

We don't need caravan parks ... just a safe place to stop. \$30 plus per night for 50c worth of power and two hot showers is a rip-off. If I'm forced into using caravan parks at those prices then it is cheaper to leave the caravan at home and use motels. \$15 to \$20 per night is a fair price for a van park overnight and that is all I will pay.

David

The attraction of free camping is not just the free bit; it's also getting away from it all and the peace and quiet that, we hope, comes with it. People like us won't be forced to go to caravan parks, we'll stop caravanning. Parks should realise who their market is (younger families) and cater for them.

Jeffrey & Marian

There is not one Dump Point in Ballarat and no free camp. The closest spot that welcomes RV'ers is Smythesdale, a lovely little community park, where we stayed. We picked up the locals' rubbish etc and willingly paid a donation to the local community. No parks in Ballarat would accept us, as we have a travelling companion, Chad the Cocker Spaniel!

Marg