Nomads head north as mercury plunges

Rigs of all shapes and sizes are united by the ‘call of the dry’

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Camooweal in Queensland’s far northwest, for example, has just recorded its lowest daytime temperature in 29 years – a chilly 16 degrees.

“Some will stay for a short time, while others will stay for the season,” said Caravanning Queensland CEO Ron Chapman. “Many return to their favourite spot year after year, while others will take the opportunity to explore new locations.”

Mr Chapman is predicting a bumper season in the north … and higher numbers of grey nomads travelling for different reasons on different budgets means many different rigs. While the trend is towards larger, more luxurious caravans and motorhomes, many travellers are still opting for older, more basic – and more affordable – rigs.

“Amazes us that folks think they ‘must have’ an ‘off road’ caravan/camper/trailer,” said grey nomad, David McGil livray. “Over the past few years we have covered over 10,000 kilometres on dirt roads, towing a standard 14-year-old 18ft. single-axle Roadstar van or a standard 1983 Jayco Eagle camper.”

David and wife Heather firmly believe that less is definitely more. They don’t worry too much about television but enjoy listening to their old transistor radio. They have a three-way fridge, a gas stove, and a $25 dollar 12-volt shower … and they say their back-to-basics approach helps them more fully appreciate their surroundings. But it is not for everybody.

Motorhome and campervan manufacturer Trakka, has seen business boom as it caters to high-end customers looking for all mod cons, including HD televisions, fridge/freezers, air-conditioning and full-sized bathrooms.

“Motorhomes can be tailored for individual traveller comforts,” said Trakka General Manager, Martin Poate. “With a self-contained motorhome that boosts power levels with solar panels and uses a diesel cooktop, travellers have extensive cooking and entertainment options even in remote locations.”

What luxuries could you not do without on the road?

Click to comment
Kay, 68, and John, 60, bought their first caravan 10 years ago … and have never looked back

When did you hit the road?
We lived in a caravan park in South Australia for several years and then, when we retired (I worked in the TV industry for 42 years and John was a police officer and a refueller at Adelaide airport), we started on our retirement trip!

Do you work as you travel?
Six months into retirement we put our names down for Relief Management. A few months later, while sitting in Airlie Beach, Qld, we received a call from a park in Cowra NSW. They trained us for two weeks and then left on a four-week holiday. We learned the hard way and have had many jobs since, travelling to many great places. We have the best of both worlds.

Do you return to the same jobs?
Three years ago we were offered a six-month commitment which we have done each year, then we travel for six months. Last year we went up the Centre again to Alice Springs then Uluru, followed by Darwin, Townsville, Brisbane and back to Victoria.

What do you travel in?
We have a 50th anniversary edition LandCruiser and a 25-foot Jayco with ensuite, washing machine and satellite TV.

Best thing about the lifestyle?
Freedom! We have been north many times and just love it. There is so much to see and enjoy. For a while my daughter lived on Hamilton Island which gave us a reason to visit Airlie Beach many times.

On-road hobbies?
Photography for John and I make knitted teddies and have sold 700 in three years. I also have a professional keyboard and work on my music.

Scariest experience?
A trip through Macquarie Pass out of Kiama NSW. We should have waited until the next day, but negotiated a hairpin turn in the dark where traffic had to stop and allow us to manœuvre the bend.

Any funny moments?
While staying at Wycliffe Well in the NT, where there are stories of UFO Sightings and aliens, the park lost power and it was pitch dark. At around midnight, there was a knocking at our door and a voice said: "Hello, are you there?" It repeated this several times, and I thought we had an alien visitor … very exciting! Finally, my husband answered and it was an Aborigine requesting matches to light his fire!

Secret to grey nomad success?
You both have to want it and work as a team. People ask if we would ever go back to a house and we say ‘never!’

Kay and John are at home in their van

The Big Lap is a work in progress for Kay and John

Caravan crash
A Victorian couple were seriously injured when their caravan and 4WD rolled while trying to pass a truck on the Gregory Development Road, near Clermont in Queensland. The female driver, 58, sustained severe chest injuries while a male passenger, 61, suffered head and chest injuries. Both were flown to Mackay hospital.

Croc capture
Northern Territory wildlife rangers have captured two big crocodiles which were ‘too close for comfort’ to populated areas. A 4.8-metre saltie was captured at the Corroboree billabong, a popular fishing spot south of Darwin. Rangers also removed a 4-metre crocodile from the Katherine River.

Whale of a tale
Whale bones and jaws have been stolen from a South Australian tourist park. The artefacts had been on display in a shed at Whalers Way Tourist Park at Port Lincoln. The curved jaws are 183cm and 213cm tall.

Hans Solo traveller
A traveller has walked nearly 5000km from Perth to Sydney for charity dressed as a Star Wars stormtrooper. It took Jacob French, 21, nine months to complete the epic trip. He walked for more than 10 hours a day Monday-Friday during the adventure.

Quiz Corner
Don't camp under one of these

Do you know?
1. Which WA town could do with a tonic, tonic?
2. What is the road distance between Albany and Cairns?
   A) 3,768km  B) 5,755km  C) 7,235km
3. In which SA settlement won’t you need your ensuite?
4. How long is the Murray River?
   A) 576km  B) 1,096km  C) 2,375km
5. Name Australia’s three largest islands.

(Answers on p. 5)
Dear Editor,
Re: Paradise not lost (GNT: Issue 18). Regardless of the outcome of James Price Point venture, put this one on the TOP of your ‘bucket list’ and hurry. See Cape Leveque and the peninsula before someone else has an idea to spoil this beautiful section of Western Australia. The indigenous population are most welcoming, the spirit of the country is unspoilt, and sites such as Cape Leveque, Beagle Bay and Lombadina are unique and spectacular.

Bruce & Mary

Dear Editor,
Re: Great Drives (GNT: Issue 18). We did the Mereenie Loop Road in 2004, towing our camper trailers. The day we drove the road it was extremely wet, muddy and very slippery. It was an amazing experience and the road isn’t promoted at all very well. The scenery is beautiful and the wildlife fascinating … with dingoes, camels, horses and donkeys to be seen. We plan on doing it again!

Trish & Nev

Dear Editor,
Re: Gadgets of the Road (GNT: Issue 18). What a silly idea the Cargo Saddlebag is. First, it blocks half your back window view, then what about all the paint it will rub off your car while you drive on a bumpy road? No thank you. Not a good idea.

Peter (Hillbilly Pete)

Dear Editor,
Re: Insect battle story: (GNT: Issue 17). I would love to travel around Tasmania. However, with a 23’ van and Land-Cruiser, the return trip cost is astronomical. If the ferries would shave their fares a little, I am sure they would redeem the cost in a very short time with a higher number of us going there.

Jack

Dear Editor,
Re: Fence campsites poll (GNT: Issue 17) I would love to travel to a fellow grey nomad. We did.

Valerie & Dan

Dear Editor,
Re: Too old for a big rig (GNT: Issue 18). What is age? Some people can drive till 80, others only 60s, some have heart attacks, strokes, etc at 40, 50, 60. You can check out fine medical and then walk out the doctor’s door and drop dead. Get on with life. Who knows what will happen?

Keith F

Dear Editor,
Re: Insect battle story: (GNT: Issue 18). I am a bit like Jasmine and, although I would love to stay at any old caravan park on a whim, that will often not work out well … especially late in the day after a long drive. Horses for courses I think … but it’s always worth calling ahead on the day, even in inland areas. You want to try to get a reasonable site, especially if you need to be near the amenities like us!

Jim (Jaycee)

Dear Editor,
Re: Jaclyn and Heidi column (GNT: Issue 18). I am a bit like Jasmine and, although I would love to stay at any old caravan park on a whim, that will often not work out well … especially late in the day after a long drive. Horses for courses I think … but it’s always worth calling ahead on the day, even in inland areas. You want to try to get a reasonable site, especially if you need to be near the amenities like us!

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Jack

Dear Editor,
Re: fence campsites poll (GNT: Issue 18). Has anyone seen dingoes or crocs near a country residence or close to town? Most have been educated to stay away, or will be in the near future. I am not suggesting total removal or eradication, just education. Wave a broom handle at a crow and watch the reaction.

HB

Dear Editor,
Re: Too old for a big rig (GNT: Issue 18). What is age? Some people can drive till 80, others only 60s, some have heart attacks, strokes, etc at 40, 50, 60. You can check out fine medically and then walk out the doctor’s door and drop dead. Get on with life. Who knows what will happen?

Dear Editor,
In reply to the letter saying you should have a driving test at 65, who will pay for the test as we the pensioners get very little help finance wise? Testing every driver over the age of 65 would be very expensive.

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Dear Editor, If visitors don’t leave food scraps laying around and don’t feed the dingoes they won’t come near your camp. If you put up fences around bush camps or national parks, you might as well go to a caravan park. Seems obvious to me … no food, no interest.

Tom
Grey Nomad Times

Campchair design ‘revolution’?

At all ends of the market, however, the folding chair’s basic design can be said to have remained pretty much the same. Until, that is, the Revolve camping chair arrived to give the sitting scene something of a twist.

The chair’s unique swivel base allows a full 360° spin-around-potential just like an office chair. Now, you don’t have to jump up to see what that spooky noise is coming from the moonlit bushes behind you. You simply spin around to more efficiently face your fears.

And there’s no more neck-twisting nightmares as you try to follow the excited happy hour chatter from grey nomads to your left, your right and sometimes even to your rear.

And grabbing another beer from the esky behind your chair has never been as much fun.

Wow!

The Revolve is said to be exceptionally comfortable and durable. Although it is inevitably more bulky than the average campchair, it still folds down into a zipped carry bag for easy transport and storage. The chair still has four legs for stability on uneven ground and boasts a single drink holder, a carbon steel frame and a 136kg weight capacity.

Besides its swivel ability however, the Revolve’s most exciting feature is definitely the option of buying it with an MP3 pouch and built-in battery-powered speakers. Say what! Has living in paradise just got even more perfect?


Would you buy a Revolve campchair if it was available in Australia? What fun things would you do in it?

Click to comment

Fuel prices to plunge! (this is not a misprint)

Recently, our website www.thegreynomads.com.au reported on the predicted fall in fuel prices that could provide some relief for budget-conscious grey nomads struggling with the spiralling costs of the Big Lap. Some analysts say fuel prices should fall by up to four cents a litre in the coming weeks. Regional oil prices have recently plunged by nearly $US8 a barrel and lower wholesale pump prices should ensure petrol prices ease further. The situation has also been helped by the fact that the Aussie dollar has been tracking modestly higher.

Studies show Sydney still has the cheapest average weekly price for unleaded petrol of the major cities while Darwin has the most expensive.

Read more here

Survey
Will falling fuel prices affect the way you travel?

Yes
No

Other website must-reads:
Kicking up a stink
Twelve Apostle looses under fire
Bussellton Beauty
The best in the west?
House sitting opportunities
Take a break from your travels

The perfect LED light for:
*Camping
*Caravans
*Motorhomes
*Fishing
*Boating

and much much more!

Order online or phone 0435754254 today!

What you get:
* CamperLED light bar with 3 mtr cable & 3amp fused cigarette lighter plug
* Huge 1900 lumen output
* 3x mounting brackets
* 5 year full replacement warranty
* Free delivery Australia wide

CamperLED
CamperLED is a high quality LED lighting solution for all your camping and fishing needs—fully waterproof, portable and brighter LED light bar, perfect for caravanning, camping, boating, around the home or workplace. They are also an ideal present for family, friends or workmates!

Order yours today!

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www.camperledaustralia.com.au
Sandy adventure awaits island visitors

Straddie offers great walks, beautiful beaches and wonderful wildlife

At just 38 kilometres long and 11 kilometres wide, the entirety of North Stradbroke Island could easily be called a great drive in its own right. Situated just an hour for Brisbane, this is the only sand island in Queensland that has bitumen roads. For some 4WD-loving grey nomads, however, it is the beach driving possibilities that really gets the heart racing.

The ferry from the mainland brings visitors to Dunwich on the west coast. The museum and the self-guided historical walk around this old convict outstation are fascinating but, ultimately, it’s Mother Nature that is the star of Straddie.

The walking trails of Browns Lake Conservation Area are just west of Dunwich, and a little further along the Trans-Island Road are the magnificent, turquoise-coloured waters of Blue Lake. 4WD vehicles can follow a 2.5-kilometre sand track to within 200 metres of the lagoon.

After continuing back to the main road, it is another 6.5kms or so to the magnificent Point Lookout. On the way though, you’ll pass close to the Keyholes, a freshwater system of lakes and lagoons which are home to more than 250 species of native birds. The Keyholes can be accessed via the 4WD-only Fishermans Road, which runs east of East Coast Road. Point Lookout has been described as the jewel in Straddie’s crown. It boasts the North Gorge headland walk which offers truly spectacular views across the South Pacific Ocean and should not be missed.

There are several beaches at Point Lookout, including patrolled ones at Cylinder Beach and Main Beach. For some, the 35 kilometres of white sandy beaches fringing the island’s eastern side are now just too much to resist. After obtaining a $37 annual beach permit, four wheel drives can access Flinders and Main Beach. Drivers are asked to drive responsibly, remain aware of the fragile environment and, importantly, to stay aware of the tides.

Then it’s time to hit the sand. For some, the driving experience simply doesn’t get any better than this.

Click to comment

All by myself?
Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,

I am striking out as a solo grey nomad next month … even though I have been happily married for 44 years. My wife Maria simply doesn’t share my passion for the Outback and for camping. Travelling Australia in a camper trailer for six months has been my dream for as long as I can remember and is something I must do or will always regret. Maria has been incredibly supportive of my solo adventure and says she wants me to live my dreams. The only problem is that all our friends are raising their eyebrows, making snide jokes and making me feel terribly guilty. I suspect they think our marriage must be on the rocks … which it isn’t. Am I being silly and selfish?

Will

You are not the only one who has faced this dilemma, Will, and there is no right or wrong answer. Every marriage is different, every situation is different. It seems like your relationship is solid and you both understand and respect each other’s positions, which is always a good sign. Perhaps Maria can arrange to fly out to meet you wherever you are in three months or so just to make the time apart seem a little less daunting. As long as you and Maria truly communicate with each other and are totally honest about how you both really feel about your trip, then I am sure it will work out just fine.

Jaclyn

Oh for goodness sake! If you’ve been married 44 years, Will, I’m guessing you’re a fully-fledged grown-up by now. If you and Maria are happy with the arrangement, then forget about what your so-called friends are saying. Who cares? You are very lucky to be married to such an understanding partner … it’s a shame you haven’t shown the same good taste in choosing your ‘friends’. Get out and live your dreams, Will and, don’t let a bunch of jealous naysayers who are too cowardly to do it themselves spoil it for you. At the end of the day, would you rather be sitting in paradise cooking your newly-caught barramundi on a campfire or be at home mowing the lawns alongside all the ‘losers’ you seem so anxious to please? Toughen up, Will.

Heidi

Click to comment