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Is it a Big Lap too far for older motorists?

The driving safety of grey nomads and all older motorists is once again under the spotlight following the release of new road accident research.

A study conducted for Austroads – the national body representing Australian road authorities – found that one in nine serious crashes were related to drivers with medical conditions such as heart disease.

Some 11% - or 165 - of the 1490 injured road users admitted to the Royal Adelaide Hospital from January 2008 to last December were linked “with a high degree of certainty” to an accident involving a medical condition or acute medical event. It was considered a possible cause in another 24 cases. In 25% of the medical-related crashes motorists were known to have lost consciousness before the accident, and another 17% were known to have had a seizure that led to the incident. The study said that, although the injured road users were across all age groups, there was a disproportionate number aged over 70 years. While this age group accounted for 11.4% of the total injured road users, they constituted more than 30% of those involved in an accident as a result of a



Photo: Tourism Queensland

Are older drivers prepared for a long journey with a big rig?

medical condition or event. A couple of years ago, a similar study looked at the effects that a combination of age-related deterioration, driving big rigs, towing, and using unfamiliar roads had on grey nomads' involvement in road crashes. The QUT Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety (CARRS-Q) research paper concluded that many older drivers took to the road ill-prepared for the Big Lap and had little experience in caravan-towing or driving in rural conditions.

“Grey nomads cannot use the normal mechanisms older drivers use to compensate for age-related deterioration such

as limited driving in familiar places and conditions,” said the study's co-author, Dr Patricia Obst.

The researchers were also concerned that although a health scare had been the catalyst for many grey nomads taking off to see the country in the first place, 78% did not take first aid kits and most rated their first aid knowledge as only ‘adequate’ or ‘low’.

• *Compulsory annual driving tests for Tasmanian drivers aged over 85 will be abolished on October 7. Only WA and NSW will now require drivers aged over 85 to undertake practical assessments.*

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‘Safety-first’ Aussies lose their mojo

Adventurous Australians may be an endangered species, with new research showing people are now less inclined to try new things. The Galaxy Research survey of more than 1000 Australians indicated this growing unwillingness to sample adventure was undermining happiness and productivity. More than 70% of people said they were stuck in a rut. Nearly a third said they couldn't afford to break out of their routine and 84% said economic uncertainty made them stay at home more.

Social researcher Mark McCrindle said our new national syndrome was ‘inertia’ and it was holding the country back.

“As Australians we recognise that that adventurous spirit is part of our DNA and makes us different from everywhere else,” he said. “But we now recognise we have become a bit staid and stuck in a rut.”

The survey found most Australians harbour fantasies about trying new things, with 41% of people dreaming about packing in their jobs to go travelling.

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the Grey Nomad Times



Characters of the Road

'Journey is more important than the destination' – John

John (aka Rockylizard), 64, from Sale in Victoria has been on the road since February 2010

What do you travel in?

A Golden Eagle 23ft van towed by a Land Rover Discovery3 TDV6 auto. The Golden Eagle tows extremely well and gives a comfortable lifestyle but - being a 'black-top' tourer - it does limit some of the nice places I would like to camp.

Where do you camp?

I usually free-camp three to four nights each week and stay at caravan parks for a day or two to catch up on 'domestic' chores. Given the size of the van I often leave it in town and camp in my tent in national parks.

Favourite part of the lifestyle?

The joy of travelling full-time - no timeframe, no itinerary, no pressure. Oh yeah - and meeting great people, sometimes more than once.

Are you a 'planner'?

My job used to be managing people and constantly planning and organising things. I try not to 'plan' more than a week or two in advance in case I miss something on the way. I firmly believe the journey is more important than the destination.



John enjoys quiet, scenic campsites

Do you work as you travel?

Earlier this year, I stopped for a few months picking grapes at Stanthorpe, citrus at Biggenden and strawberries at Beerwah. I'm not intending to seek work until early next year, unless, of course, someone offers something intriguing.

Favourite place to camp?

I love anywhere that is quiet and scenic - I like people but dislike crowds. I particularly love mountains and bush but also love the wide, red land of the outback. So really, most places Australia has to offer is my favourite camp.

Scariest nomad experience?

The scariest experience for me is probably catching my reflection in a mirror - not a pretty sight!

Is there anything you'd change?

Nothing - except perhaps beginning some years earlier.

Advice for wannabe nomads?

The best advice I can offer is paraphrasing Sterling Hayden - *What do we need - really need? Some food each day, heat and shelter, six feet to lie down in - and some form of activity that will yield a sense of accomplishment. That's all - in the material sense. And we know it. The years thunder by. The dreams of youth grow dim where they lie caked in dust on the shelves of patience. Before we know it the tomb is sealed. Where, then, lies the answer? In choice. Which shall it be: bankruptcy of purse or bankruptcy of life?*

In essence - do it now before it is too late.

Nomads in Brief

Free van park app

The developers of the 'Find A Park' mobile app are offering travellers free downloads from iTunes App Store until Oct 10. The app enables users to search for the perfect caravan park by name, town, state, proximity to attractions, park amenities and more. [Click Here](#) before Oct 10 to get the app for free.

Bush tucker man

A man has survived 12 days in the NT Outback by living off bush food. Watson Cassan, 27 was found safe and well by a police helicopter which had been searching for him across a 2300sq km area. Mr Watson started walking the 100km from Kurundi Homestead to Tennant Creek on Sept 15. Relatives reported him missing when he didn't make contact by Sept 21. He has now been released from Tennant Creek Hospital after a medical check-up.

Dump in paradise

Coffs Harbour is the latest town to offer a dump point for visiting grey nomads and other travellers. The facility is located at Phil Hawthorne Dr near the city's BCU Stadium. "We are making sure people with RVs have an appropriate facility where they can discharge their waste free of charge," said Mayor Keith Rhoades. "It will also encourage them to stay longer and have a look around."

QUIZ CORNER

GRAB A CUPPA AND TEST YOUR GREY MATTA

A Slippery SOLUTION to your Space PROBLEMS:



DO YOU KNOW

1. Where do they farm seahorses in Tasmania?
2. Flying foxes take a tumble at this Cape York beauty spot?
3. A dog's tail might do this, do this here, here?
4. How many countries are larger than Australia?
5. The PM might take a dip here?

(Answers on page 5)

the Grey Nomad Times



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Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with fellow nomads

Dear Editor,
 My wife and I are two who have climbed on the overseas bandwagon after several years going north to Queensland in the winter months. This year we took advantage of the soaring dollar and enjoyed nine weeks overseas in France, England and Switzerland. It was marvellous and we'll be doing another overseas visit next year. Our van will still be there when we can no longer go overseas either for financial reasons or other reasons. Travelling overseas is quite strenuous at times for older people like ourselves and we have to contend with the language barrier but it's all worthwhile to experience foreign places.

Keith & Helen

Dear Editor,
 It really can come as no surprise that people are travelling away from Australia. The cost now involved in running a decent set up has risen exponentially and, of course, the cost of fuel is one of the main contributors. I am at present living in Spain's Canary Islands and the crazy thing is I live here with 360 days a year of sunshine next to a great beach and for under half the price of touring around Oz in my old bus.

Alan & Wendy



Viva Espana!

Dear Editor,
 Hmmmm! I wonder if it has anything to do with the rising cost of fuel and caravan park accommodation, and the clos-

ing down of some free camping spots and showgrounds to RV users?

Vic

Dear Editor,
 It seems to me that if Australian Travel were to be encouraged, it might help if it were kept affordable. Why aren't there more free camping areas; like beautiful Babinda for instance. Even the tiny triangle at Innisfail is always filled at nights. Then you have the miserable example of Gordonvale's lovely area by the Mulgrave river, which has been barriered closed again. I am dead against van park owners who lobby to close these sites. It destroys the reputation and visitor numbers to these areas.

Charles

Dear Editor,
 I can assure you that my wife and I would love to spend more time in the UK and EU. We recently towed the baby to Darwin and thought it was the pits! S.A. roads are good but roadside facilities are non-existent and God help you if you need a toilet. The NT is not much better although they do have some reasonable freebies.

Matt

Dear Editor,
 The biggest obstacle for grey nomads to travel across our beautiful country is the high price of fuel. It makes overseas travel so much cheaper.

Eric

Dear Editor,
 We don't fully concur with that scenario in that we are certainly getting a lot more caravanners than before. Not every caravanner can just park the van and jump on a boat and the numbers of caravanners

are growing as per the ageing population. I do agree that more could be done to entice the grey nomads into travelling around Australia. Possibly they could get a discount petrol account that is subsidised.

**Paddy & Colleen
 Edgewater Holiday Park**

Dear Editor,
 What will life be like in another 50 / 60yrs. when the world's population will have doubled? Bloody horrible and very scary, that's what. And the question is: "Will they still be camping when they are grey?" As we know it, probably not. More likely they will be too busy fighting to stay alive in a stuffed-up planet and society that has by then already fallen apart.

Lee



The travellers of the future?

Dear Editor,
 To Heidi on reverse parking. Have a heart. We're not all as clever as you!

Glen

Dear Editor
 Just a couple of lines in defence of the Jaclyn and Heidi column. I find this column is not only very entertaining but Heidi's wicked sense of humour often has more than a grain of truth in it (but it seems some people only like

the sugar-coated version). Please keep up the good work and keep printing the column in the format that it's in.

Dave

Dear Editor,
 Absolutely love the GNT. I had a good laugh over the letters to the editor revving you up for printing 'Heidi's' comments. Keep it up Heidi, the rest of us love your tongue in cheek comments and hints.

Russ

Dear Editor,
 After reading Paul and Liz's letter in issue 3, We say "go for it!". My husband and I made a snap decision to sell our house and hit the road ... that was two years ago. After 40 years of work in hospitality we decided that our life was full of stress and not very enjoyable. We had never had a van or a 4WD, so it was a real adventure. We haven't looked back.

Belinda

Dear Editor,
 This (snake bite) article underlines my belief that it is good insurance to invest in a satellite phone. We travelled Australia for 10.5 years and had a satellite phone. We did not use it in anger once but it was gratifying to know that help, for us or someone else, was as close as the phone.

Kevin & Naomi

Dear Editor,
 I guess when you travel to remote places anywhere in the world you have to factor in the possibility of an accident, snake/spider bite or heart attack. It's just one of those things, we hope will never happen, but we should plan for the worst and at least be prepared.

Sally

the Grey Nomad Times



A day in the life of a national park ranger

Managing the NT's land is no stroll in the park, as Gary Weir reveals

I've been a ranger here for close on 17 years now and have lived and worked all over the Territory in spectacular places like Kings Canyon, Ormiston Gorge and Edith Falls.

So what does a ranger do?

To put it simply we manage our parks so that you can have a great time while you're here. We also look after the land, the flora and fauna so that we have something to pass on for future generations.

Rangers do talks and walks during the cooler parts of the year, so this is one place where you will really see a ranger out in the field.

What you might not know is that in the NT rangers often do everything: from cleaning toilets and looking after campgrounds to flora and fauna surveys to putting up interpretive signs that tell you all about the park.



Ranger Gary Weir works in some spectacular places

One of the biggest challenges we face is carrying out repairs and maintenance in remote areas. Getting a plumber when you're 350km from the nearest town just ain't that easy. Necessity often dictates that we do these things ourselves.

Here in the Territory we don't charge entry fees (Uluru and Kakadu notwithstanding as they are Federal parks) but we do charge a small fee where camping is provided. Many of

our parks and reserves offer an honesty system to pay fees so please don't shirk this responsibility because the money really does help to both maintain, repair and to keep things at a high standard.

To be able to manage properly we need to know what we are managing. Rangers carry out surveys across the park to assess plants and animals and to understand the habitats they live in. The data collected enables us to make decisions based on the needs of these species.

One of our biggest challenges over the past couple of years has been the introduction of joint management where we work with Traditional Owners to manage our parks.

We also take volunteers as looking after parks is a massive task, so if you're interested drop into one of the ranger stations and say hello and we'll see how you can help. Accommodation is sometimes offered and the best part is that you get hang out with real life rangers!

NEW COMPETITION

Wow us with your watery tales to win

It's competition time again! As many grey nomads have already discovered, taking to the water can



add another dimension to the Big Lap. And, in recent times, kayaks have been growing in popularity as the watercraft of choice for long-term travellers. The 265-page 'Paddling Around New South Wales' by Scott Rawstone, a comprehensive guide to kayaking in the state is the top prize in our new water-themed comp. Simply tell us about your 'water adventure' in 175 words or less to enter. Entries must be received by Oct 24. The winner, as judged by the Editor, will win this great prize. Winner announced on Oct 28.

Email your entries here

Tow, row, tow your van ...



The 'Sealander' can cruise on highways or waterways

Grey nomads could be hitting both the open road and the open water when a new floating caravan hits the market next year.

German designers say the amphibious Sealander means adventurers no longer need to choose between camping and a cruise.

An electric motor kicks in when the vehicle hits the water and the \$20,000 van instantly becomes a \$20,000 boat.

"You can settle for the night at the campsite and during the day sunbathe, cruise on the lake or even go fishing for

dinner," said designer Daniel Straub. "Holidaymakers can combine the advantages of two recreational dwellings together ... it's just like a holiday should be - up to you and with unlimited possibilities."

The floating caravan is however just 160cm wide and 185cm high so it is extremely important that you get on very, very well with your travelling companion.

The boat can only be used in shallow waters but future models may have the ability to go to deeper waters and to the ocean.

Nomads unplugged!

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Tropical trip to Dalrymple is pure gold

'Great Drives' wends its way from a tropical mecca to historic goldfields and beyond

Dalrymple National Park in Queensland's tropical north may not be the biggest national park but it sure packs a mighty scenic and historical punch. Most grey nomads head out there from the vibrant coastal city of Townsville ... and it's a fascinating journey. The unofficial capital of tropical north Queensland is the start – or the end – of the 1,550km long Overlanders Way which links the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef to the rugged Northern Territory Outback. Dalrymple-bound nomads though will only follow its bitumened course



135 kilometres west as far as Charters Towers. This historic city put itself on the map in 1871 when the discovery of a gold-laden quartz triggered a gold rush. At its peak, the fortune-hunting population grew to 30,000. Dalrymple National Park is 42 kilometres north from here along the Gregory Developmental Road (Lynd Highway). Travellers eventually turn right on to an unsealed track at Fletcher Creek Crossing. This incidentally is a superb free camping area right on Fletcher Creek and it is suitable for caravans. Managed by



Enjoy historic Charters Towers

the Charters Towers Regional Council, facilities include picnic shelters, tables, toilets, cold showers and wood barbecues. The park entrance itself is a further 2.5 kilometres along. When the weather is dry the track is suitable for all vehicles but may be closed during wet periods, often between November and March. The site of the former Dalrymple township, one of the first inland settlements in northern Australia, is located within the

park. The gold rush-inspired township withered and died following severe flooding in the area and the discovery of other goldfields. Visitors however can still see the Leichardt memorial marking the camping place of the European explorer who opened up the area. Other highlights are the ancient lava flows, fossilised limestone, Mount Keelbottom which rises up 130 metres above the surrounding plain, and the Burdekin itself. The river banks are great spots from which to view the abundant waterbirds and native animals. Great scenery, great wildlife, great camping and a great drive. This is what it's all about.



ASK JACLYN and Heidi



Our experts solve your grey nomad etiquette dilemmas

Neighbourly Advice

Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,
Help! My wife and I set off six weeks ago on the trip of a lifetime but it has been a nightmare. We are travelling with our next-door neighbours from home. We have been best friends for more than 30 years, but we now realise we didn't know them at all. We want to take some of the tracks and do a little bush camping but our friends won't stray from the bitumen and insist on powered sites at luxury van parks. Then they whinge about how uncomfortable it all is. They just seem to ignore our wishes. Now, their 4WD has developed mechanical issues and we may have to wait here in Port Augusta for 10 days for it to get fixed. I don't want to fall out with our friends

but we are getting increasingly frustrated ... and we still have five months left.

Terry

I do sympathise. Travelling with friends can be fraught with danger, particularly if you don't set out clear ground rules before you set off. I know you say your friends seem to ignore your wishes but you really must try to explain to them how you are feeling. Perhaps you could arrange separate mini side trips and then meet up again at a pre-arranged campsite a couple of weeks down the road. Absence may make the heart grow fonder and you may be glad to see each other and exchange tales when you meet again. Friendships are worth fighting for.

Jaclyn

I am a big believer in friendship, Terry ... but 10 days in Port Augusta! That's just too big of an ask. Take my advice and jump in your fully functional rig and drive. It doesn't matter in which direction but don't stop – in fact, don't even glance in your rear view mirror – until Port Augusta and your whingeing 'friends' are but a distant memory. The grey nomad lifestyle is all about doing what you want, when you want and how you want. Hanging around with a couple of grumpy dead weights is not part of the package. Who needs them? If things are a bit frosty when you eventually all get back home, just make friends with your next-door neighbours on the other side.

Heidi

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5. Julia Creek