



Department for Planning and Infrastructure
Government of Western Australia

Travelling in Outback Western Australia

Tips to help you enjoy your outback adventure

Department for Planning and Infrastructure, Perth, Western Australia

www.dpi.wa.gov.au/pastoral





Western Australia's outback is truly beautiful, but it can also be very unforgiving.

Ensure you are fully prepared.

Keep this booklet handy in your glovebox.

It lists important things to consider to make your trip a safe and memorable one.

Travelling in Outback Western Australia

More people from all walks of life are venturing 'beyond the bitumen' to explore Western Australia's vast pastoral regions.

Sadly, some travellers have met with misfortune or perished, simply because they were ill-prepared.

Don't underestimate the dangers!

Your safety is your responsibility





What is a pastoral station?

Pastoral stations are very large sheep and cattle properties, which are steeped in Australian history.

In Western Australia today the pastoral industry continues to thrive, with more than 470 stations, covering 90 million hectares.

That's more than a third of the state, stretching from the Nullarbor, through the Goldfields, Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions to the Kimberley.

Pastoralists rely on natural vegetation to breed and run their stock in a sustainable manner to produce food and fibre for us all.

All pastoral stations are on State Government Crown Land, which is leased to pastoralists.

The Pastoral Lands Board of Western Australia administers all pastoral leases in the state.

Why can't I go where I like and do what I want?

Pastoral leases are held by families, pastoral companies, Indigenous groups, mining companies or conservation groups.

Many stations have been run by the same family for generations.

Just as you cannot do what you like on someone else's rented property in the city, pastoral stations are people's homes and all the land on the pastoral station is used to run their business. They have a legal right to their privacy and to run their pastoral business without interruption.





How do I know if I'm on a pastoral station?

Good quality, reliable maps show pastoral station lease boundaries and are essential for any trip to Western Australia's pastoral areas.

We recommend the *Traveller's Atlas of Western Australia*, which shows pastoral lease boundaries and other information.

If you plan to use minor roads and tracks, you will need more detailed topographic maps.

You do not need permission to travel on a public road through a pastoral station.

However even on a public road, you may still encounter gates and livestock. You must leave gates as you find them. Never interfere with livestock.

Do not assume that a track marked on a map gives you a right of way. Even though station tracks may be marked on some maps, this does not give travellers the right to use them without permission. You should contact the pastoral station well in advance to clarify which tracks you can and cannot use.

This is particularly the case if travellers want to access parts of the coast, a gorge, or go camping on a pastoral station. Tracks on pastoral stations are used and maintained by pastoralists for their business. They may be closed unexpectedly due to flooding or for other reasons, so be flexible with your plans.



You do need to ask permission, in advance, if you are travelling off public roads that run through pastoral stations.



Access may be refused if tracks are already damaged; or if the vehicle is inappropriate, such as a large four-wheel drive truck (which may damage fragile tracks); or if you are towing a trailer.

Allow time to contact pastoralists, as depending on the time of year, they may be working out on the station for extended periods.

When you contact them, they will want to know where you want to go on the station, what you plan to do and when. Answer their questions openly and listen to, and heed their advice. They know their country best.

Don't assume that if there are no fences you are not on a pastoral station — many pastoral stations are not fenced. Even pulling off the road onto a station and setting up camp overnight unannounced, is trespassing.

You must seek permission to enter.



Remember, station access is a privilege, not a right.





If you get lost or break down, stay with your vehicle.

Your safety is paramount. Pastoral stations are so large — some cover an area the size of the entire Perth metropolitan area — you can very easily get lost on disused or overgrown tracks, even though they may be marked on a map.

If an accident occurs and you are lost, you could be in serious trouble.

Many daily activities on pastoral stations, such as mustering, shooting, or burning off, can also be very dangerous to the public.

Pastoral stations are busy enterprises and pastoralists may be away for some time on other parts of the station.

Don't let your poor planning be a burden on pastoralists.

Be self-sufficient, respect their right to privacy and don't disturb them (unless they advertise accommodation).



Tips to help you enjoy your outback experience

Be prepared before leaving

- » Research your trip well in advance and assemble a good range of maps to cover all locations to be visited.
- » Ensure your vehicle is in peak condition. Remote repair facilities are limited and can be costly.
- » Carry a comprehensive range of vehicle spare parts; even if you can't fit them, someone else may be able to. A vehicle workshop manual may also prove useful.

- » If planning to travel on gravel roads and tracks with a caravan, trailer, bus or two-wheel drive vehicle, carefully consider both its, and your capability.
- » Check that your vehicle insurance will cover you throughout your trip and find out if any circumstances may not be covered.
- » Carry plenty of water and food including three days emergency supply. Don't rely on creeks, homesteads or 'catching food'. Plan ahead for regular fuel and water stops.
- » As a guide, at least four litres of drinking water per person per day should be carried. Extra water will need to be taken for washing and other tasks.
- » Be self-sufficient. Make sure you have a full set of equipment for recovery, vehicle breakdown, first aid, communications and camping.
- » Buy at least one good quality, adequately sized fire extinguisher and know how to use it.
- » Recovery equipment must be good quality and comprehensive. Everyone travelling should practise using all emergency equipment before it is needed.





- » Hire or buy a satellite phone or other reliable long-range communications equipment. UHF or CB alone is short-range and not good enough. Remember that mobile phone coverage is mostly limited to towns. Buy a good quality 406MHz EPIRB for a life-threatening emergency, but try and communicate with a satphone first.
- » Travelling with others provides a greater degree of safety and may allow for some equipment sharing.
- » Learn basic navigation, take a full set of maps, compass and Global Positioning System (GPS) and know how to use them. Never rely on verbal directions.

- » Consider joining a four-wheel drive club, or enrolling in a four-wheel driving and recovery course to get advanced off-road skills and experience in using recovery equipment. If appropriate, undertake a survival course.
- » Gain a first aid certificate and take a well-stocked first aid kit.
- » If on medication, ensure you take enough for your trip and store it appropriately, according to the label. Elderly or infirm travellers should carry a health summary from their doctor and a list of medications they are currently taking. Be up-to-date with vaccinations.
- » Apply several weeks prior to departure for any authorisations you may need for entry into Aboriginal lands, prospecting, or other activities.





Multiple tracks in sensitive areas can cause environmental damage.

- » If you plan to travel off public roads through a pastoral station, contact the pastoralist well in advance of your intended arrival to discuss your plans and seek permission.
- » Regularly check road conditions with Main Roads WA (phone 138 138), the local shire, the police or the local tourist bureau.
- » Check in advance and monitor the progress of local hazards such as cyclones, fires and floods. If one may affect you, seek official advice and heed it.
- » When driving in a remote area, give a reliable friend or family member full written details of your route, vehicle, passengers and anticipated time of return. Update them during your trip and don't forget to tell them when you arrive back.
- » Don't underestimate the potential danger of crocodiles, sharks or snakes and the consequences of an incident in a remote area.

- » If planning to travel through extremely remote areas or in the wet season seek advice from local police. Heed their advice and if they say don't go, then don't go.
- » Allow extra time in your travel schedule for unforeseen circumstances.
- » Be flexible. Be prepared to alter or postpone plans, if road or other conditions change.
- » Plan your schedule so you are not driving at night.
- » Bring some cash — in very remote areas don't rely on credit cards.





Encountering stock on a blind gravel corner can be dangerous ... drive carefully.



Driving through a station

- » Know your limitations and avoid costly trouble. Ask yourself:
 - » Do I really need to go there?
 - » Is my vehicle capable?
 - » Am I capable?
- » Drive slowly, be alert! There may be washouts, wandering stock (especially at dawn and dusk), and other hazards, even on 'public' roads through stations.
- » Take heed of road signs warning of crests, stock, floodways, and 'four-wheel drive only'. Never travel on a 'closed road' as substantial penalties will apply.
- » Be cautious if you see a vehicle in front of you brake or stop.

- » Be very wary of animals near the edge of the road, even if they are moving away from the road. They can quickly turn around and walk back in front of your vehicle. Also, if you see one animal, it is likely there are others around, so be prepared.
- » Respect our native plants and animals. Picking of any plants, including flowers, is strictly prohibited.
- » Forget the four-wheel drive advertisements — get out and check the speed and depth of all water crossings and only if safe, drive through slowly. If in any doubt — don't.
- » Give way to road trains and be wary of their dust. Don't overtake blindly — be patient.
- » Unmarked and unsignposted tracks may be private — don't trespass.
- » Beware of unmarked but well-formed tracks, which may be old mining tracks that go nowhere but use precious fuel.





Station tracks may be marked on maps but they can be rough, especially for caravans ... get advice from the pastoralist well in advance.



- » Maps have their limitations and marked tracks may no longer be passable. Get reliable advice before setting out on minor roads and tracks. If in any doubt about a track, don't proceed.
- » Whilst travelling, regularly check your position on a map.

**If you get lost or break down, stay with your vehicle.
It provides shade and shelter and is far easier for searchers to see.**

- » Drive only on used tracks. By staying on tracks you avoid seeds blocking your radiator and spinifex build-up around your vehicle's exhaust (which can cause it to catch on fire).
- » If it looks like a shortcut that's too good to be true, it probably is.
- » Don't drive on salt flats or mud flats.
- » Leave all gates as you find them.
- » Never cut fences or lay them down to drive over them.
- » It is important not to use station tracks after rain. Attempting to drive on them after rain may put you at risk. Even if you get through, just one wheel rut left behind can cause serious erosion and expensive problems for the pastoralist. Wait for the ground to dry out.
- » In sandy areas, reduce your tyre pressure to minimise bogging and protect the environment. Make sure you have a good quality air compressor and tyre gauge to reinflate tyres when back on a hard surface.



- » When travelling through areas with old mineshafts, open pits or caves, drive slowly as they may not be marked. If you see any, keep well away.
- » If you are visiting a 'dry' community, obey community rules and do not bring alcohol. Some communities may also have restrictions about carrying extra petrol, so ask in advance. If you are unsure, ask the relevant government department or Aboriginal community before your trip.
- » To prevent the spread of serious weeds, check vehicle and camping equipment thoroughly before you leave a station. Remember to check your vehicle radiator, floor mats, tyres and underneath the vehicle for weed seeds, plant or soil material. Dispose of any seeds by burning in a hot fire or seal them in a plastic bag for responsible disposal later.





Camping on a station

- » Contact the pastoralist for permission weeks in advance and listen to their advice.
- » Ask if dogs or other pets are allowed and if so, keep them under control. They must not disturb stock or native animals.
- » Beware of poison baits and traps, which are used on pastoral leases.
- » Consider leaving pets at home. They can limit where you can go as they are not allowed in conservation parks, national parks or nature reserves.
- » No firearms and no shooting.
- » Camp well away from stock watering points and don't disturb stock or wildlife. Bring plenty of your own water.
- » Do not park your vehicle on long grass. Heat from your exhaust may start a fire.



When cooking, use a stove or existing fireplaces.

- » Don't cut down trees or disturb vegetation or the soil. Remember that even fallen branches are a habitat for some of our native animals.
- » Stay well away from areas quarantined for weeds or diseases.
- » Animals' lives and station business depend on station equipment, so keep away from it.
- » Don't use soap in creeks, rivers or troughs — it affects animals, plants and the environment.
- » Camp and wash at least 100 metres from creeks and rivers and 500 metres from troughs.
- » Use portable toilets where possible and take waste with you. If no toilets, use an area 100 metres from creeks and campsites. Bury human waste 30cm deep, then fill, compact and disguise the hole.

- » Cook using a stove wherever possible. If you must have a fire, use existing fireplaces, keep it small and obey fire restrictions. Never leave a fire unattended and ensure it is completely extinguished (not smouldering or glowing) before leaving.
- » If taking a short walk away from the camp or vehicle, don't go alone, take ample water and let someone reliable know where you are going.
- » Be very alert in crocodile country.
- » Sites containing Aboriginal art or artefacts are protected by law. Treat these sites with respect and do not touch or disturb them.
- » Aim to leave your campsite better than you found it. Leave no trace of your visit. Use rubbish bags so you leave nothing behind. Animals dig up buried rubbish, so take any waste, rubbish and leftover food with you to dispose of in the next town.





Whilst every care is taken in preparing the information in this booklet, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure cannot accept any liability resulting from its use. Travellers should make their own enquiries to suit their particular situation.

Further specific information on travelling through pastoral areas is available at www.dpi.wa.gov.au/pastoral

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