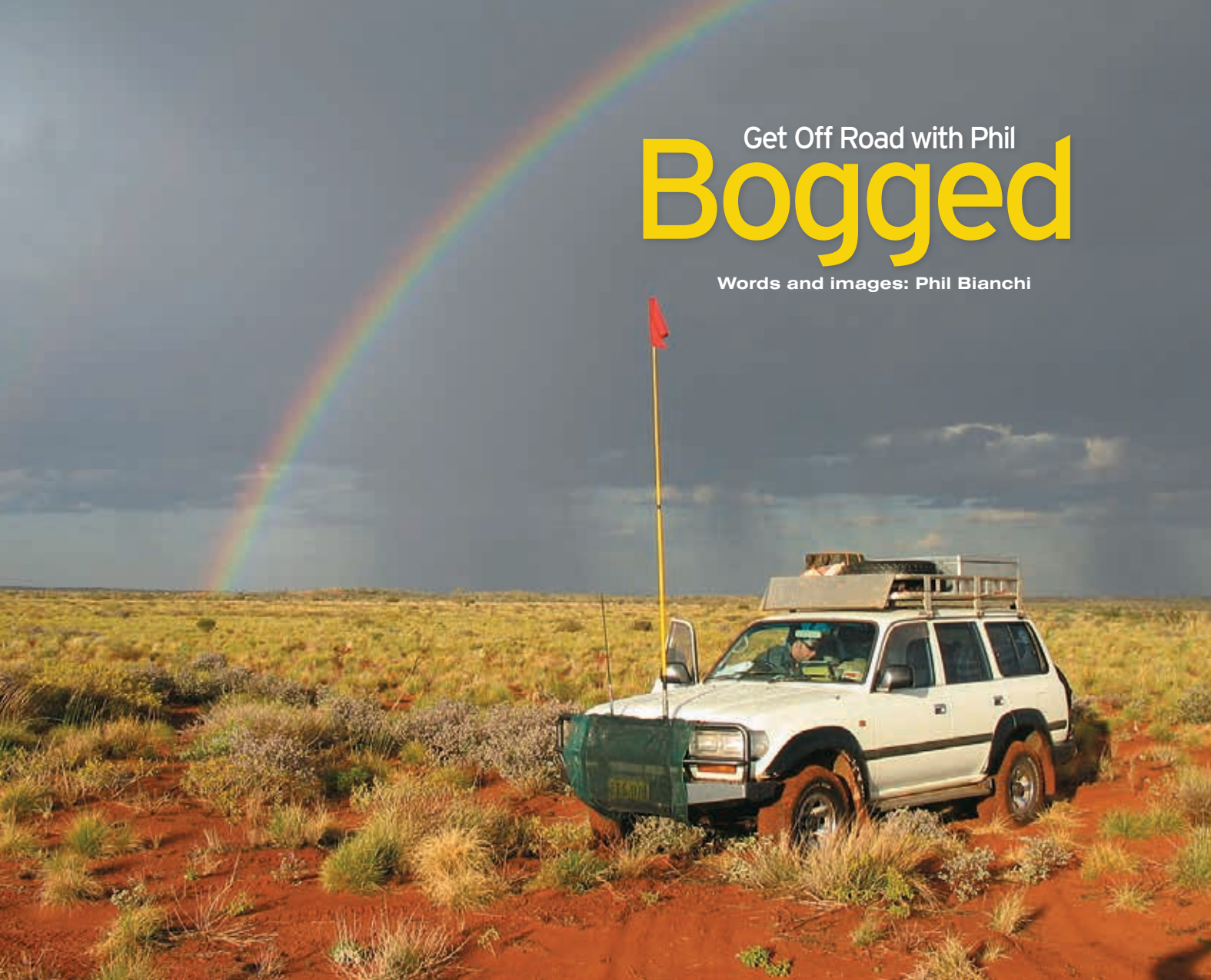


Get Off Road with Phil Bogged

Words and images: Phil Bianchi



Clockwise from far left:
It's a pretty landscape, but an ominous weather sign. ❖ Mud bogged – not my favourite situation for many reasons. ❖ Marooned for four days, but determined to rescue ourselves eventually. ❖ This is where it's good to have a mate along for the drive. ❖ Bogged in the sand – don't try and spin the wheels to escape. ❖ Some off the beaten track beauty.

You've seen the advertisements on television; a four-wheel drive hurtling along a dirt track through creek crossings and muddy patches. However, what they don't show is being bogged and how to get out of it.

No matter how good your driving skills are or how powerful your engine is or what tyres you have or if you have diff locks, you will get bogged at some stage.

I detest mud and driving through bogs for many reasons: possible hidden obstacles, deeper mud sections, it gets in everywhere and over everything, tyre treads block up, getting mud inside the vehicle, and so on. But, it's part of off-road driving and you need to be prepared and know what to do if you do get stuck.

Before we tackle how to get out of a bog, let's look at what equipment you should have on-board and at strategies to prevent being bogged in the first instance.

Essential equipment:

- long-handle shovel
- rated recovery hooks (have a reputable 4WD shop check them)
- snatch strap
- two rated shackles to connect the snatch strap to the recovery points

- a tree protector or bridle to spread the snatch strap load across multiple recovery points
- suitable vehicle jack
- jacking plate to give the jack a bigger footprint
- tyre deflator
- quality air compressor.

Non-essential items

Although not essential for everyday touring, if you are driving regularly on the beach or planning a trip on the Simpson or the Canning, I strongly suggest you add these items to the kit:

- Kangaroo/high-lift jack to quickly lift the vehicle and push sand, rocks, logs and such like into the hole.
- Two MAXTRAXS at least. I have been bogged so many times over the years I now travel with four MAXTRAXS. I have tried numerous recovery boards in my time; some were next to useless and others didn't provide all-round performance. To me, the extra cost in paying for MAXTRAXS is worth every cent. There must be a reason why the Australian army buys them.
- A sand flag, so that people can see you when coming over a sand dune.
- A vehicle winch is handy, but for the little use it will get, the high maintenance costs,

and extra weight out front of your vehicle, I wouldn't consider it an essential to have item unless you do regular touring.

When approaching a sandy or muddy area:

- Stop and have a good look at what you are facing.
- Seek alternative routes around the risky patch.
- Make sure you have the recovery equipment on-board. It may be wise to attach the snatch strap *before* entering the boggy area, this beats digging down in ooze to find the recovery hook!
- Let the tyres down.
- If there is another vehicle with you, position it so that it's ready to spring into action.

Okay, so you're bogged! What do you do? Most importantly, make sure you're not in a dangerous situation, such as the tide roaring in or you're in the middle of a busy access track.

Consider the safety of people first and abandon the vehicle if you can't get it out of the way of a racing tide or position someone up the track to warn other drivers.

If you're bogged there is no point in spinning the wheels in an effort to get out; you'll only make matters worse and recovery more difficult:

- Don't panic, stay calm and think the problem through.
- Reduce the tyre pressures more to give a larger tyre footprint and more flotation.
- Try to reverse out.
- If in sand, slowly drive backwards and forwards to compact the sand, remove built up sand in front of the wheels and hopefully you can drive out.
- Use a shovel to dig out the sand or mud to make a track in the intended direction of travel. Also clear the area underneath the axles and differentials.
- Place the MAXTRAXS in position. You may also need to line the track with sticks, rocks, or logs to gain some traction.
- If another vehicle is with you, use a snatch strap. A gentle tug is often enough to extract a vehicle.

If after trying all of the above you're still bogged, do it all over again! Reduce tyre pressures further (I've been down to six psi) and consider changes to the gearing used to drive out previously.

If you're travelling in remote areas and are so seriously bogged that you can't get yourself out, don't panic.

Some years ago we were travelling with

another couple west of the remote Rudall River National Park in WA. It was a lovely sunny morning as we headed off after breakfast but, within two hours, dark clouds covered the sky and it started to rain. Within half an hour it was a waterfall-like downpour that changed the hard desert soil on an open flat area into a custard-like mush.

We were soon bogged down on all four wheels. After spending hours recovering the vehicles and moving only a couple of metres each time we considered the situation to be hopeless. The water level slowly rose and we found ourselves bogged in a large sheet of water with nowhere to go.

Soaked to the skin and exhausted from fruitless hours of recovery work we gave up. It didn't stop raining until the next day and we spent the night trying to sleep in the front seats and ate whatever we could hastily cobble together under an umbrella.

We alerted authorities of our plight via the VKS HF radio network and kept in contact with them twice a day. The police wanted to send the Telfer mine helicopter to take us to safety, however we asked to be given the opportunity to drive out when the ground dried out and, if that failed, then we'd accept the helicopter recovery.

We spent three nights sleeping in the vehicle and on the fourth day we were able to drive out and head home like drowned rats.

If faced with a similar problem, including a major vehicle breakdown, there are a number of strategies to employ:

- Stay with the vehicle, and find a way to make yourself visible by lighting a smoky fire and laying out a visible tarp on the ground.
- Keep calm and don't waste time and effort beating yourself up with 'if only' or 'why did I do that?' thoughts.
- Work through all the options, including determining what supplies you have and how long they will last.
- Shelter from the elements and if it's cold keep warm
- As a last resort, if you must leave your vehicle, leave a note telling of the intended destination and the date and time you left.

It's a great country out there; with suitable preparation and precautions you'll have a safe and enjoyable trip.

See you in the bush. ❖