

# WET WEATHER Camping

*Article & Images by Phil Bianchi*

Winter is coming! However this shouldn't stop you from getting out, but like I always say, be prepared for anything. Rain can turn our wide, brown land into mud very quickly, and it is important to know you have the gear and the knowledge to survive this as well as you could our searing heat.







***Clockwise from left:*** Ominous clouds | What a mess! | Still smiling :) | Team work and proper equipment saves the day

Your vehicle should always be in top shape. Particular attention should be paid to the tyres; badly worn tyres significantly increase accident risk on wet roads, and bogging and tyre damage on tracks. Always carry some basic wet weather gear in your vehicle. I carry two umbrellas, a couple of folded ponchos and when on an extended trip a rain coat as well. These items take up little room but you'll be so glad you had them when the time comes.

A few years ago we were travelling with another couple and were camped on a track west of Rudall River National Park. After a pleasant evening around the campfire, we packed up in the morning under blue, cloudless skies

and headed west. Within 1.5 hours the horizon turned black, and a thunderstorm was heading our way fast. Within 40 minutes the country turned to mush. We were hopelessly bogged, with our vehicles about 80 metres apart on a large flat area. On with the raincoats and out with the shovels and MaxTraks, but after two hours of digging and only moving forward a few metres each time, we decided it was futile. We also noticed that the large cleared area in which we were bogged was collecting water and it was rising.

Giving up we decided to wait for the rain to stop and try again. As the rain started to ease, we could see we were stranded at the bottom edge of a large





***Clockwise from above:*** You've got to keep trying | It's all part of a day's adventure | Always take an umbrella or two | Slow down and cross slowly | Don't give up





open area, like a massive football oval, with the nearest trees off in the distance. For three nights we were marooned, however, being experienced desert travellers we had a satellite telephone and two HF radios for emergency use, and we had plenty of food and water.

Realising we were going to be stuck for days we called up the VKS HF Radio Network, of which we are members, and explained our predicament. They informed us we weren't the only ones caught out. The rain had cut across a large strip of country and left many stranded. 'Please call up morning and evening so we can ensure your safety,' they requested. We agreed.

It was too muddy to pitch a tent, but I can tell you that sleeping in the front seat of your 4WD, especially when you are 190 centimetres tall, is diabolical. By the morning the rain had cleared to showers but we were still camped in a lake.

Piling up a mound of mud we lit a fire using a gas torch to dry the wet wood

– it took forever but we weren't going anywhere and had plenty of time. Our spirits lifted when we had a fire, and we amused ourselves by making pumpkin soup, damper and scones and trying to dry out our soggy bedding.

On the third day we were advised that authorities wanted us evacuated; the rescue helicopter from the Telfer mine was to be sent to collect us. This of course would have meant abandoning our vehicles and equipment. We weren't happy about that, after all we weren't in danger and the country was drying out. We pleaded for one more day; they asked we call in that night.

Later that day we walked to the higher ground off to the side of the flat. We found the ground hard enough to walk on without getting bogged. Making a collection of markers (sticks with toilet paper tied on), we walked from one clump of higher ground to the next and marked out a meandering 1000 metre route out.

During the call to VKS that evening they said the authorities wouldn't wait and they wanted us out. We explained the country had dried out and we had marked a course and would leave in the morning. If we had problems we would get back to them. They accepted because it was nearly dark and the rescue couldn't happen until daylight anyway. Thankfully the ground was dry enough and our toilet roll flags did the trick. We got to hard ground without problems.

This incident may be considered extreme and unlikely by some, but it illustrates how unpredictable nature can be. By being thoroughly prepared; we were safe, able to keep authorities and families briefed, had plenty of food and knew from experience the country would dry out. Probably most important of all there was no need to panic.

Wet weather camping need not be a turn off, as long as you are prepared, and accept it as part of the adventure.





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