



The Rural Clinical School of Western Australia

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR COUNTRY DRIVING IN AND AROUND ESPERANCE

Current as at the 18th January 2013

Background

Welcome to Esperance.

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in the south east of this great state is access to the bush, unsealed roads, magnificent scenery and a sense of freedom and adventure that comes with that.

We get to know, and feel a growing connection to a place.

Driving around the region is an integral part of being able to access this opportunity and is a valued activity in the RCSWA.

However, country driving is a risky undertaking and we need to recognise and respect this.

Although many of us feel “bullet proof”, students and staff have already been involved in serious accidents, and we have lost friends and colleagues in tragedies in remote locations.

This SOP must be adhered to for ALL trips while in the RCSWA, and read in conjunction with RCSWA driving policy and with the two relevant UWA policies:

<http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/driving>

and

<http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/field-work-remote>

On EVERY trip, the RCSWA requires:

- **A safe vehicle**
- **A safe driver**
- **A safe journey plan**

A safe vehicle:

RCSWA cars

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In Esperance there is one RCSWA vehicle, which is not 4WD. The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring that this vehicle is roadworthy and appropriately fitted out.

Additional equipment is required and in Esperance consists of a first aid kit, a five litre water container and a fire extinguisher.

Private vehicles:

The owner is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is roadworthy, and appropriately fitted out.

All vehicles leaving the town boundary must be in good-excellent mechanical condition and must have:

- Good-excellent tyres
- A spare tyre
- A jack and toolkit for the car
- 5 litre of water per person per day, including some in a container that can be carried with you if you need to leave the vehicle
- Maps/ navigation aid
- Small first aid kit
- A road side assist programme (e.g RAC approx. \$113 per year per car)

A safe driver

As with all drivers, staff and students must have a valid driver's licence and adhere to all traffic regulations. Always wear a seat belt.

Preparing for travel on country and remote roads:

- All students must pass the pre-RCSWA driving course
- All students and staff must complete an "assessment of country driving experience form when commencing with the RCSWA. This form will be reviewed and signed off by the lead MC/administrator in each site.
- If areas of concern are noted, these will be discussed and an individual plan created to assess concerns.
- Driving risks and safety tips for the region will be discussed during Esperance orientation week.

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No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:

- Tired
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs

A safe journey plan

The journey plan form needs to be completed and handed to your lead MC/administrator and signed off prior to commencing your journey.

DRIVING IN AND AROUND ESPERANCE – TIPS FROM DONALD HOWARTH

Beaches

If driving on beaches it is sensible to do so on the falling not the rising tide. Plenty of vehicles are under the sand of the local beaches where they release pollutants while their owners pay them off.

Driving below the high tide mark is easier but runs the risk of loss of vehicle if the tide comes and you are bogged. Driving above the high tide mark requires more skill and runs a higher risk of needing assistance if bogged.

On entering a beach it is sensible to drop tyre pressure to about 15 lb/in² which is a bit below half normal pressure. This increases grip but do not forget it reduces response to the steering wheel. Clearly the tyres need to be reinflated once back on the hard. This involves having a gauge as well as a pump as the built in gauges which come on electric tyre pumps do not survive their first trip bush.

Always check your radio or sat phone works before entering a beach, you know if you get bogged you can get assistance. Fresh water, food and blankets ensure you do not do a perish if bogged and the weather changes.

Always check there is a snatch strap in the vehicle if going to beaches and tie a blanket to the middle of the strap in case it breaks. Plastic tracks are simpler to use than packing vegetation under bogged wheels.

Remote roads

These lead to magic spots.

If you cannot navigate well take a GPS and plot where you are every hour or so on the map. If the GPS fails then you at least know where you were an hour ago.

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The hazards on remote tracks include running into a bog. I have got bogged on remote tracks in mid summer. A passing shower, days before, can create some really sticky bogs.

Rolling a vehicle is not that hard on tracks as there can be deep washouts and modern 4x4s are top heavy.

Assume other vehicles on remote tracks are driven by dehydrated bogans on a couple of days off who drank too much last night. I usually don't exceed about 50 km on remoter tracks, a few times I have been glad.

In summer beware of fires. Getting out of an area with a bush fire running is unnerving.

Tell us where you are going and check in each night if going more than 20 km from the major road system.

For a list of magic tracks see me, sign the form to say you will not tell Victorian tourists and experience the beauty of the bush.

The standard bush track tragedy involves people not knowing where they went, the vehicle breaks down, bogs or rolls over and after waiting around for a while they set out on foot in the day and die at about the time assistants looking for them have found the vehicle where they forgot to leave a note. Usually they have left water and food behind.

I have had a number of patients nearly 'do a perish' due to exposure in summer and winter. It can get bitterly cold at night in the bush in winter and it can get very hot in summer. Once the temperature gets up close to 37 the body loses water very fast.

Real bushmen tend to wear long trousers and closed shoes in the bush. A snake bite in a remote site can be a nightmare.

I am happy to lend water containers and fuel containers, petrol stove, old swags etc. Maps can be obtained from Gath surveying and the owner will annotate the maps with corrections and reveals interesting spots he knows.

The major roads

The real hazards here are generally driver related. Speed and fatigue are the standard killers.

The roads are generally well maintained and well danger signed. The big trucks tend to do about 100 km hr⁻¹ so there is little need to pass them however watch for bogans overtaking the other way from the back of a road train.

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At night large dark animals can be a hazard. Though seldom encountered, hitting a horse, a cow, a buffalo or a camel is not recommended. They tend to end up in the cabin.

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