

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR COUNTRY DRIVING IN THE KIMBERLEY

Current as at January 2014

Background:

Welcome to Derby

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in Kimberley is access to the bush, unsealed roads, magnificent scenery and the sense of freedom and adventure that comes with that. We get to know, and feel a growing connection, to place. Driving 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 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 to tragedies in remote locations.

A number of students and staff over the past decade have hit cattle or lost control on unsealed roads, causing considerable damage.

This SOP must be adhered to for ALL trips while in the RCSWA, and read in conjunction with the RCSWA driving policy and the 2 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**
- **Completed vehicle checklist to be handed to reception prior to leaving – see attached**

A safe vehicle:

RCSWA 4WD:

The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring that this vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out. The driver is responsible for checking tyres, oil, water and noting any change in condition that may indicate a problem. If you note any concerns relating to the safety of an RCS vehicle, please contact your administrative person as soon as possible. All RCSWA vehicles are covered by a roadside assist programme (RAC).

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 roadworthy spare tyre(2 if going long distances on unsealed roads)
- 5 Litres 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
- Communication device (e.g. mobile phone and charger)
- A toolkit for the car, including a working jack
- Small first aid kit
- A blanket

Pre-travel vehicle check:

Before every trip, ensure the vehicle is fit for the journey (by visual inspection and checking gauges, checking oil, water and tyres).

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.

Obey all road signs!....in particular, temporary signs such as "Road Closed" or signs related to dangers ahead.

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 address concerns.
- Our site in Derby will have a discussion about driving risks and safety tips for the region during orientation week.

No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:

- If they feel 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.

Staff and students need to be aware of the conditions they are heading into: aware of the risks they may face³ in their year in the Kimberley and to take appropriate steps to minimize these risks. This includes regular journeys (e.g. car travel Derby-Broome), and other journeys which may be part of the Kimberley experience or related to RCSWA requirements.

Some general points when travelling remotely:

- Find out about culturally sensitive locations before you go. Obey signs when you get there and check with locals to make sure you do the right thing.
- Leave gates as you find them – if closed then close them behind you, if left open then leave open.
- Don't stay around bores, gates, windmills, tanks or cattle yards without landholder's permission.
- See attached documents for risks that may be faced, regular driving plans and personalized driving plans for other long journeys.

Particular risks in our region include:

Risk	Relevant information / measures
Gravel roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow down and reduce your speed to suit the conditions -there is less traction on gravel roads and it is easier to lose control, compared to driving on a bitumen surface. • If traffic signs warn of a gravel road ahead, slow down while you are still on the bitumen. • Follow tyre tracks wherever possible - this will provide firmer ground. Keep away from the loose gravel on the edge of the road, it could pull you off the road and may cause your vehicle to roll over. • Slow down for corrugations - the old adage about speeding up to travel over the top may appear to work for small corrugations, but you could lose traction. When corrugations get severe you may lose control of the vehicle. • Watch out for the slope or camber of the road on corners - it could be sloping in the wrong direction and cause you to skid off the road if you are travelling too fast. • ABS will work differently on gravel and may increase your braking distance. If you have to brake heavily be aware of the difference in the braking sensation of ABS. • Consider using a lower gear when driving. It will give you better control & enable you to use the engine as a brake rather than relying on the brakes. • Try to steer and brake as smoothly as possible - jerky or sudden braking or steering will increase the risk of your vehicle skidding. • Watch out for dust ahead. It could be a sign of an oncoming vehicle, or it could signify that you are coming up behind a vehicle - switch your headlights to low beam when driving in dust. • Slow down and keep left on the approach to blind corners and crests – other drivers may not be careful when they are not expecting to meet traffic on roads used unfrequently.
Damaged roads and other hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive slowly and especially carefully after heavy rain as wash outs and large holes can appear unexpectedly. • Be careful of deep tyre tracks and ruts from heavy use of unsealed roads/tracks. • Tracks that cross tidal areas (Derby marsh) may not be passable during, and for days after, periods of rain or high tides. • Do not drive below the high tide mark on beaches – 4WD's become bogged, then covered in salt water and written off every year on beaches in Broome.
Road trains (up to 53m long)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road trains require considerable stopping/braking distance, need extra room on the road and are sometimes slow moving. • Be patient. • Do not overtake near junctions - road trains may require two lanes in order to turn. • Overtake quickly; don't hesitate. • Make allowances for the wind buffeting your car as you pass. • Allow the road train to remain on the bitumen, if the road is narrow. This will minimize flying debris from the many wheels of the larger vehicle & reduce dust. • Do not pull out onto a road when a road train is approaching. • Do not stop on narrow sections of road.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a road train is approaching from the opposite direction and the road is narrow, pull over off the bitumen if necessary & allow as much room as possible. • If you have a CB radio in your car, let the driver of the road train know that you are behind & wish to overtake. – Normally channel 40. Often the driver will then tell you/ or indicate when it is safe to do so.
Animals on the road (stock and wildlife)	<p>Kimberley roads are generally unfenced. Cattle are common and can be very hard to see. Kangaroos can appear very suddenly. Little calves are unpredictable with behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCSWA vehicles are not to be driven outside of towns at dawn or dusk – any breach of this rule will be treated very seriously. • Don't drive at night. • Don't swerve to miss an animal - you may lose control of the vehicle & you can't predict which way the animal will go. Slow down as much as possible and stop, if necessary, until the road is clear. Better to hit the animal if you can't stop than to kill yourself or your passengers.
Travelling on remote roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always let someone know where you are going and your expected arrival time. (Call or text immediately when you get to your destination.) • Carry appropriate recovery gear, plenty of water and also food, (if something goes wrong, you could be stuck for long periods in remote locations) • If you break down, STAY with your vehicle. It will be your shelter/security and a point to find you if a search is needed.
Extremes of weather (e.g. heat, rain, cold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get up-to-date information about road and weather conditions. Intermittently UWA will send out email warnings and these must be followed. • You can get information and updates from the Bureau of Meteorological site www.bom.gov.au . The weather bureau provides the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tropical cyclone information bulletin – issued when a cyclone is active in the Australian region, but is not expected within 24 hours. • Tropical Cyclone watch – Issued if a cyclone is expected to affect coastal communities with 48 hours but not expected with 24 hours. • Tropical Cyclone warning – issued if a cyclone is affecting or is expected to affect coastal communities with 24 hours. • Warnings for pending cyclones are issued by BOM hourly on local television and radio stations. • Check for road closures at http:// www.mainroads.wa.gov.au and contact your local shire for up-to – date information on local roads. <p>Heavy Rain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow down or stop (move off the road when safe to do so) put headlights on low beam and wipers on high speed. • Be aware that in some areas flash flooding can occur – watch out for water on the road. Proceed through water with caution, if safe to do so. • After driving through even shallow water, touch the brake pedal a few times to dry out brakes.

Breaking down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let someone responsible know where you are going and when you are expected back. • If you break down STAY with your vehicle. Don't leave it to walk for help – it is your shelter and a point of find you if a search is needed. • Do not attempt to open a radiator of a vehicle to check for water if the engine is hot. Leave for several hours to cool as it will be scalding hot and under immense pressure. • Take care when changing flat tyres that your vehicle is on a stable base. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engine must be turned off. ○ Passengers out of vehicle ○ That the handbrake is on and the car in GEAR (or PARK for automatic). ○ Put a block/rock behind and in front of wheels that are not flat. ○ Loosen the nuts of flat wheel before jacking up the car. ○ Make sure the jack is in the correct position so that it cannot slip, ○ Make sure nuts are tight, stop and check them again at 50km.
No Mobile coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Kimberley region it is common to not have mobile coverage. Telstra has the best coverage, so have a Telstra phone with you. • Think about whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, GPS tracking device)
Bushfire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fires move quickly and are unpredictable so don't be a hero. There are hot embers, wind and animals that can be a danger to you. • Put your headlights on low beam. • Wind up your windows; engage the recycle option for air flow. • Follow advice of police or fire-fighters if available.' • Remain away from the fire until safe to pass through. • Smoke can obscure oncoming vehicles so drive with care.' • Do not stop to help injured animals – this could become a hazard and may result in injury to you.
Floods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never drive into flood waters or creeks without first ascertaining that it is safe to do so. If not sure, don't attempt to cross. Either go back to where you have come from, or sit and wait until the water goes down. • Depth, rate of flow, the surface that you are crossing and your vehicle (4WD, 2WD) are all important factors when deciding whether to cross. • Floodway's on most roads have depth indicators. • Check for danger – crocodiles are not just in salty water! • Be careful of floating logs and debris and the speed of the water flow. Check for pot-holes, wash-out areas and obstacles. Walk the road if necessary, but take care. • If safe to cross, engage low gear and drive in that gear (do not change gear while crossing water) • Once safely across, touch the brake pedal a few times to dry out the brakes.

Injury/illness on the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote areas – do the best you can with the resources that you have around you. • Make sure everyone (not just the injured) are protected from the elements, rig up shade or rain cover. • Hot road surfaces/ground can cause burns to people lying on them - ensure injured people are on a safe surface. • Use mobile or satellite phone if there is coverage. Coverage may be better on a hill. Activate EPIRB if available. • If there is no satellite or mobile coverage and there is more than one vehicle travelling with you, send someone to nearest station/settlement with information of distance, location, number of injured or people involved. • If you are alone and injured, try to get protection from the elements. • Make sure you have water available. • If there. • is no coverage and you have informed someone of the expected time of your arrival, the be prepared to wait for them to come looking for you.
Journeys outside this SOP [insert local examples]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a driving plan • Let a responsible person know where you are going and what time you expect to arrive. • Do not go onto land that is known to be sacred, respect cultural locations. • If you have to open a gate, make sure you close it. • Don't interfere with bores/gates/windmills/tanks or stock yards • Before undertaking trekking or climbing hills make sure that your level of fitness is adequate. • Carry plenty of water. • Make sure you wear a hat, slip slop slap. • Wear boots or appropriate shoes, no sandals or thongs as snakes are prevalent. • Have an appropriate first aid kit. • Take a torch and spare batteries. • Make sure you take insect repellent. Serious mosquito-borne viruses occur in the Kimberley.
Night driving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Night driving is not allowed on RCSWA required journeys.
Long trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't drive more than 10 hours per day • Don't drive when you are tired • Share driving with others • Plan a stop at least every 3 hours for 20 minutes. • Don't plan to drive after a day's work. • Plan to have a good night's sleep before you go.
Driving into the sun.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whenever possible, plan your trip to avoid driving into the sun when it is low on the horizon. • Wear adequate sun glasses. • Keep your speed down as visibility can be impaired. • Keep your lights on low beam. • Plan to take breaks to alleviate fatigue. • Make sure your windscreen is clean. • Take extreme care if you have to overtake a slower vehicle, there may be a vehicle coming toward you that you cannot see due to sun in your eyes. • Take extreme care of animals crossing the road as you may not see them due to sun glare. • If necessary stop until the sun has gone down sufficiently to that it is safe to resume driving.

