



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

Current as at the 1st January 2018

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 recognize and respect this. Although many of us feel “bullet proof”, students and staff have 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 completed Vehicle Checklist to be handed in to the site administrator prior to leaving**

A safe vehicle:

RCSWA cars

In Esperance there is no RCSWA vehicle

Private cars

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
- Spare tyre
- Jack and toolkit for the car
- 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
- Small first aid kit
- 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 license 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 at 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.

No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:

- Tired
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs

A safe journey plan:

A Driving Plan must be completed for all journeys (private travel and RCSWA travel) not listed below;

- **Esperance/Kalgoorlie/Esperance via Highway**
 - **Esperance/Hopetoun/Esperance via Jerdacuttup Road**
 - **Esperance/Hyden/Esperance via Highway**
 - **Esperance/Lake Grace/Esperance via Highway**
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- **Esperance/Fraser Range/Esperance via Highway**
- **Esperance/Condingup/Duke of Orleans/Esperance via Fisheries Road**

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

- **Be visible** – always drive with your headlights on outside the town boundary
- **Stop and look** at rail crossings without lights. A loaded train travelling at 50km hour needs up to 1.6km to stop
- **Check** oil, water, windscreen washer reservoir and wiper blades before departure
- **Grasshopper plagues** occur frequently. If your route is through a grasshopper infestation area cable tie some shade cloth in front of your radiator grille
- **Take a break** every couple of hours. Get out of the car and walk around for ten minutes.
- **Mobile Phones – See Below**

Whilst driving, you can only touch a mobile phone to receive and terminate a phone call if the phone is secured in a mounting affixed to the vehicle. If the phone is not secured in a mounting, it can only be used to receive or terminate a phone call without touching it (e.g. using voice activation, a Bluetooth hands-free car kit, ear piece or headset).

Whilst driving, it is illegal to create, send or look at a text message, video message, email or similar communication, even when the phone is secured in a mounting or can be operated without touching it.

GPS may be used by a driver whilst driving if no touch of the keypad or screen is required.

Penalties

- Using a hand held mobile phone whilst driving
- Creating, sending or looking at a text message
- Video message
- Email or similar communication whilst driving

3 demerit points and \$400 fine.



Remember: Legal use of mobile phones can also be distracting. Consider if it is important and the demands of the traffic before using your mobile. The safest option is often to wait until you are parked out of the line of traffic.

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. Engage 4 wheel drive when driving on gravel roads (high range). This provides you with even traction and more control. • 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 and 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 - if you meet an oncoming vehicle it may be difficult to avoid a collision.
Poorly maintained roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washed out due to heavy rains. • Heavy use of local vehicles on unsealed roads especially during and after harvest (deep tyre tracks and ruts). • Sand tracks unsealed and not well maintained. • Do not attempt to drive on salt lakes, e.g. Pink Lake. Your car will become impossibly bogged and it will cost upwards of \$500 for a tow truck to remove your car from the lake.

<p>Road trains (up to 53m long)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the road ahead is clear when overtaking • Assess the condition of the road shoulder before overtaking. During harvest period the road shoulders get damaged very quickly. • Overtake quickly; if you have assessed the risk and made the decision don't hesitate. • Allow the road train plenty of room to brake and manoeuvre. • 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 and reduce dust. • Be patient. • Do not pull out onto a road when a road train is approaching. • If you do need to pull out get up to the sign posted speed limit as quickly as possible • Road trains require a considerable stopping/braking distance. • Do not stop on narrow sections of road. • Do not overtake near junctions - road trains may require two lanes in order to turn. • If a road train is approaching from the opposite direction and the road is narrow, pull over off the bitumen if necessary and 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 and wish to overtake. – Normally channel 40. The driver will tell you / or indicate when it is safe to do so
<p>Animals on the road (stock and wildlife)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid driving at dawn / dusk when wildlife is most active. • Don't drive at night. • Don't swerve to miss an animal - you may lose control of the vehicle and you can't predict which way the animal will go. Slow down if you can to minimise impact. • See additional notes from Donald Howarth
<p>Travelling on remote roads</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always let someone know where you are going and arrival time.(call or text immediately when you get to destination) • Carry appropriate recovery gear and water etc. • If you break down, STAY with your vehicle. It will be your shelter/security and a landmark to find you as it's bigger than you are if a search is needed.
<p>Extremes of weather (e.g. heat, rain, cold)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get up-to-date information about road and weather conditions • Road reports are available from local council websites and police stations. • Weather Reports are available from the Bureau of Meteorology site www.bom.gov.au

<p>Breaking down</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let someone responsible (your site administrator) know where you are going and when you are expected back. • Stay with your vehicle, don't leave it to walk for help as it is your shelter and easy for searchers to see. • Do not attempt to open the 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. • Take care when changing flat tyres that your vehicle is on a stable base; Engine must be turned off; Passengers out of vehicle; Hand brake on and gear lever engaged. Put a block/rock behind and in front of wheels that are not on flat ground. • Loosen the nuts of flat wheel before jacking up. • Have the spare wheel ready for putting on before jacking up car. • Make sure jack is in correct position so that it can't slip. • Make sure nuts are tight, stop and check them again after about 50 km.
<p>Lost signal on mobile</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about mobile phone cover in your area and whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, GPS tracking device) • In the Goldfields/Esperance area Telstra provide the best coverage.
<p>Bushfire</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC radio broadcast state-wide bush fire alerts at quarter to and quarter past the hour every day. • Headlights on low beam • Wind up windows, the recycle option for air conditioning • 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. • Fires move fast and are unpredictable so don't be a hero, there are hot embers, wind and animals that can be a danger to you. • Do not stop to help injured animals – can become a traffic hazard or result in injury to yourself.

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 waters go down.• Check for depth of water - depth indicators show level.• Check for wash out areas. Walk the road if necessary but take care.• Be careful of floating logs and debris and the speed of the water flow.• If safe to cross engage low gear and drive in that gear (don't change while crossing water).• Once safely across touch the brake pedal a few times to dry out 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 person/persons are protected from elements, rig up shade or rain cover.• The ground can be hot so burns are a risk from laying on hot ground or road surface.• Use satellite phone if you have one.• If there is no satellite or mobile coverage and there is more than one vehicle travelling send someone to nearest farm/settlement with information of distance, location (nearest cross road or landmark), number of injured and type of assistance required.

<p>Going Bush</p>	<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/obey cultural sensitivity. • If you have to open a gate to go forward make sure you close it. Always engage handbrake before moving in front of the vehicle • Don't interfere with bores/gates/windmills/tanks or stock yards. • Carry plenty of water. • Make sure you wear a hat. Slip slop slap. • Wear boots or appropriate shoes, no sandals or thongs. • Have an appropriate first aid kit, as snakes are prevalent. • Take a torch and spare batteries. • Make sure you take insect repellent and sunscreen.
<p>Night driving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Night driving is not allowed on RCSWA required journeys.
<p>Long trips</p>	<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 every two hours for 10 minutes. • Don't plan to drive after a day's work. • Plan to have a good night's sleep before you go
<p>Sun Glare/Fog/Insects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you must drive into the sun wear adequate sun glasses • Keep your speed down as visibility can be impaired • Put your lights on to low beam • Plan to take breaks to alleviate fatigue. • Make sure your windscreen is clean and washer reservoir is full. Bug Off and newspaper/cloth are handy • Take extreme care if you have to overtake, there may be a vehicle coming toward you that you cannot see due to sun in your eyes. • Be alert to wildlife as animals may be hard to see due to sun glare. • If visibility is poor due to fog, rising or setting sun, stop the vehicle safely off the road and wait till visibility improves

<p>Beach Driving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When driving past groups of people/fishers on the beach reduce your speed to 10km per hour. Never drive between fishers and the water, always go behind them or if you can't go behind wait for them to get their lines out of the water. • Be very aware of motorbikes on the beach, dunes and trails and approach blind corners cautiously • If driving in the dunes be cautious when cresting hills as they can be badly eroded on the other side. Accidents from this have claimed a number of lives and put others in wheelchairs for life. • A shovel, some shade and dunny roll as well as extra water are handy to have • If you take it to the beach – bring it home. Do not leave anything behind except your tyre tracks and footprints
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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, so 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.

The hazards on remote tracks include running into a bog. I have got bogged on remote tracks in midsummer. 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, and 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 reveal 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.

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.

