As they travel through regional Australia, most grey nomads become keenly aware of the difference they can make to struggling rural communities. While much focus is placed on the economic benefits that the ‘grey dollar’ can bring, sometimes the practical – and even emotional – support, travellers offer is just as valuable.

Just ask Jacinda and Joe Barry, the owners of Carinya Station near Lightning Ridge in remote Outback New South Wales.

The young couple, who have two young boys, bought their sprawling 6,600 acre property in 2012 after back-to-back floods when the native flora was stunning and the bird-life was prolific. However, the worst drought in living memory followed and years with little or no rain took its toll. Grasses died and disappeared, and the couple cut scrub to feed the cattle to keep them alive. Eventually they had to sell them all.

The couple freely admits it was an awful period but things are now looking a lot brighter. With Joe and Jacinda forced to go off the station to work, they made the decision to open up their property to grey nomads and other travellers … and now the sheep station is constantly filled with life and laughter and love.

They don’t charge people to stay and expect nothing in return, but they have found no shortage of volunteers who will do anything they can to help around the place. Willing hands eagerly do jobs including, but not restricted to, feeding and collecting eggs from 200 chooks, watering animals, watering the gardens, folding washing, doing housework, cooking, feeding the dogs, pigs and cat … and fixing the odd leaking pipe or tap.

“We’re pretty isolated out here and I can’t tell you the impact having people around you whose only motive is to be friendly and give you a hand has had on our life,” said Jacinda. “Once people have been here a day or so they take ownership and pride in what goes on.”

The station commonly hosts seven or eight different camps and most people stay for five or six days and even longer. “Having guests to help us out is bloody amazing,” said Jacinda. “And we’ll never charge … you can’t put a price tag on the help and friendships we have made, and charging people would ruin it.”

While she concedes it is a hard life, and that they will have to work ‘off farm’ for the foreseeable future to make ends meet, Jacinda wouldn’t have it any other way. “This is our decision and we don’t want pity,” she said. “It’s our lifestyle and we believe it’s the best way to raise our kids.”

Grey nomads Gloria and Daryl Whitfield from Victoria are among those who have been blown away by the warmth of the welcome they received at Carinya Station. Besides working alongside new friends, they also enjoyed communal camp oven cook-ups and singalongs around the campfire.

“We were just one big family and it was an amazing experience… the highlight of our trip,” said Gloria. “Everyone comes away with a warm fuzzy feeling knowing that they have helped a young couple who were struggling before.”

Do you think you have made a positive difference while travelling remote areas of Australia?

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Page 1
The art of attraction

Rural community hopes to lure grey nomads with silo art and low cost camps

Having just officially unveiled its much-admired silo art, the Eyre Peninsula town of Kimba is very much feeling the love from grey nomads and free camping enthusiasts. And, while the farming community may still be wrestling with a controversial proposal to locate a nuclear dump nearby, it seems it is totally united in its desire to see more caravanners and motorhomers call in.

The 25-metre tall, 60-metre wide silo mural created by Melbourne artist Cam Scale is just the latest in a series of traveller-friendly initiatives launched by the District Council of Kimba.

A recent survey of travellers passing through Kimba has resulted in high praise for the town’s camping facilities, and particularly the fact that there is no compulsory fee.

“We’ve found that people are usually willing to give a voluntary contribution of $5-$10 per person a night in return for the nice facilities offered,” said council’s Tourism Officer, Georgie Shirley. “Like other small agricultural towns we are mindful of encouraging industry and economic growth that is not reliant on the rainfall, and we saw the opportunity to capitalise on the passing traffic.”

While there are actually three free camping sites within the Kimba township, the Recreation Reserve Campground is the one best set up for caravans and motorhomes, offering a dump point, coin-operated shower, toilet facilities, and a free barbecue.

However, while grey nomads are actually encouraged to stay between five and seven days at the Rec Reserve, the camping survey found most only stayed one night on their way somewhere else … and that’s something the council is keen to change.

It is currently considering supporting a tourism operator to take tourists on day trips to places like the Gawler Ranges, Secret Rocks, and Lake Gilles … and have them home to their caravans for tea time.

The council has also set up a ‘Grey Nomad’s Program’ for those who want to volunteer their time.

This has attracted a fair few people travelling through looking to give back to the community,” said Ms Shirley.

“Do you think Kimba is offering a template of how it should be done to other towns?”

Bushwalker death

An elderly bushwalker missing for three days in freezing conditions in Victoria’s alpine region has been found dead. Leslie Southwell, 88, went missing while hiking with friends. The ‘extremely fit’ octogenarian was on the eighth day of a hike.

Caravan jack-knife

A man and woman escaped serious injury after their caravan jack-knifed on the Bruce Highway, 10 kilometres north of Camila. The man sustained minor injuries. The woman was uninjured. Neither were taken to hospital.

Oodnadatta crash

A man has been arrested for crashing his car into an Outback pub after losing control while doing burnouts in front of the property. The 26-year-old local man ploughed into the Oodnadatta Transcontinental Hotel on Thursday — slightly injuring some patrons inside.

Possum suspects

Possums are suspected of housing a bacteria responsible for a flesh-eating disease which is spreading across parts of Victoria. Experts are collecting the marsupial’s poo from a number of locations in the Mornington Peninsula to be analysed for the presence of the bacterium Buruli ulcer.

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Bushfire threat is real

Caravan parks have already been evacuated as bushfire season arrives with a bang

Sadly, the early indications are that all the forecasts of a horrific bushfire season are going to be spot on … and that means grey nomads have to be more alert and more aware of the dangers than ever. There have already been several nasty fires breaking out across the country in the last few weeks, including several that have threatened camping areas. Just last week, a ‘watch and act’ level alert was issued as a bushfire threatened the Hidden Valley Caravan Park in Kununurra before it was brought under control, and last month the Hydeaway Bay Caravan and Camping Park in the Whitsunday region was evacuated as the park was shrouded in heavy smoke. And this could be just the start. The Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre’s (CRC) latest seasonal outlook shows a heightened fire risk in much of the eastern and South Australian coasts. Experts say Australia’s warmest winter in record has combined with the ninth driest winter on record to leave full fuel loads in many areas. Most travellers are drawn by instinct and desire into the areas of the country that are most prone to fire danger, and so proper preparation is critical.

In its Caravan and Camping Bush Fire Safety advice, the NSW Rural Fire service warns that a bushfire can be terrifying, with strong winds, intense heat and flames, and thick smoke. It says that grey nomads should always be aware of Fire Danger Ratings and Bush Fire Alerts by monitoring electronic media or using a Smartphone application. Travellers should also ensure their caravan or motorhome has a smoke alarm, fire extinguisher and fire blanket and that electrical and gas equipment is secure, appropriately fitted, in good working order, and turned off while travelling. A survival kit should also be packed, and include a working battery-operated radio, protective clothing, woolen blankets and water.

When looking for a campsite, the Rural Fire Service says grey nomads should look for good access and escape routes, a flat site with a cleared area that is not on a hilltop, a place with a nearby safe location to go to in case of fire. And, it always pays to familiarise yourself with any evacuation plan and the location of fire-fighting equipment in a park.

* Are you bushfire conscious and prepared? 

Click to comment
Re: water worries (GNT: 155)
Giardia and crypto are removed from town supplies under normal treatment plant operations. Some 99.9% of crypto and Giardia infections are caused by drinking tankwater or swimming in pools or creeks, and hardly ever from a treated town supply. Cyanobacteria toxins are extremely potent, however, easily removed by granular or powdered activated carbon. Bore water is generally bacterial free because of protection from depth underground. I consider all surface water as contaminated and act accordingly. I always buy water for drinking if heading bush and only use my tanks for washing up and showering. The reason is chlorine will precipitate out of water and, if you use certain types of filters, they will remove the chlorine. Since the advent of chlorine in drinking water life expectancy has risen 40% in developed nations.

Ian J
We spend a lot of time in areas that say the water needs to be boiled, or we have to fetch it from creeks. We got one batch of water that we weren't happy with from a bore, so I invested in a B.E.S.T. water filter. It is one of the best additions to our caravanning and camping accessories that we have made. We have used them now for many years and have never had a problem with water since.

Mike P
I recently travelled from Melbourne up to Port Augusta, Alice Springs, Uluru, over to Airlie Beach and down the east coast. We were boiling up water along the way, and I could smell a strong odour of plastic. I thought it was my new kettle, but it turned out to be the treated water. I haven't noticed this before in previous trips years ago. We only drank water we bought from the supermarkets from Augusta onwards. What is going on?

Anthony M
We have a 0.5 Water Filter to our main tap at the kitchen sink, which we use most of the time, but we also carry bottled water for using outdoors and when we go walking.

Roger & Wilma C
I work in various remote communities in WA and even my dog gets sick drinking the local tap water. I filter and boil all our water before drinking and nothing will convince me that water quality in these communities, drunk over a lifetime, doesn't contribute to poor health.

Jacqueline C
We always take bottled water with us, and we also carry two large water containers on top of the roof rack - even our dog/little girl will have bottled water. Once we were travelling inland and we gave our little girl the town water supply and she got diarrhoea so bad it lasted for days. Now it's bottled water or we buy the 10-litre cask with a tap … and no problems.

Don & Deb
We live in South Australia and, on the road and at home, we have 2 x 10” filters but still don’t drink the water from anywhere. 10-litre casks from the supermarket is the only way we go for cooking and drinking. Won’t risk our travels by getting sick.

Mal & Nancy
Re: Eco caravan (Gadgets: GNT 155). The Green Dream Machine sounds wonderful except for the fact that it doesn't go off road. What’s the point of having all the off the grid gear if you can’t get to the best spots to effectively use it. We had 450W of solar on our van eventually and it was awesome to not have to rely on 240V. Go wherever you want, do whatever you want. Now that's livin' the dream.

Phillip R
Re: camping future (GNT:155) Totally agree with everything in this article. Our caravan club recently stayed at Bill Condon's Black River Stadium in Townsville designed mostly for over 50s and retirees and we had a ball. Great camp kitchen, wood-fired pizzas some nights, plenty of cooking options available and everyone joined in. I hope a lot of others parks choose to do this as well.

Gary H
Re: Whingers (Letters: GNT 155). The problem with the ‘Moaners Brigade’ is they spend too much time focusing on themselves and little to no time on this beautiful country of ours. We had plenty of dramas on our Big Lap but still found heaps of joy and fun in our surroundings and the amazing people you meet. It’s an experience of a lifetime and you may only get one shot at it. Grab the opportunity while it’s there because it may be gone tomorrow.

Liloking

We have been travelling most winters for about 10 years or so (more since retirement four years ago). We have met wonderful people wherever we go – free camps or caravan parks – and I guarantee that for every whinger there are 10 great non-whingers! You do need to start with an open mind yourself and take people as you find them.

Sharon & Paul S

Life is what you make it Vicki whether you stay at home or go on the road. We would rather live on the road than sit in a house/flat/unit, staring out the window waiting to die. In the four years we have been living on the road we have met wonderful people, experienced stunning sunrises, sunsets and scenery all over the country. We have smelt the bush, the animals, seen the devastation caused by fires and drought, all of which has giving us a real sense of the hardships some of our fellow Australians suffer. Living on the road is about freedom and choices. You should give it a try … you might like it!

Gail F (Fishcakesfisher)

Reading about the moaning and groaning is half the fun. It’s an insight into how the other half live. Without it life would be boring at Happy Hour. Why even Vicki would be a topic of conservation as she is moaning and groaning about those that are doing what she is doing. Get a drink Vicki and quit ya moaning!

Robert K

Re: fuel prices. We are just starting out on probably our last trip across the paddock and I am amazed how much the roadhouse gouge the fuel costs. It went from $174.9 at the Nullarbor Roadhouse to $118.9 for diesel at Ceduna. Surely, something needs to be done about this!

Graham & Marj

Re: buying in the north (GNT: 155). After travelling Australia for four years living in our van, we discovered Townsville had everything we were seeking. Excellent medical services, theatre entertainment, great golf courses, near to the sea, and swimming pools and gyms in which to exercise. By residing in Townsville we could retain our van and travel west, or north without towing it for great distances … and for nearly eight months of the year the weather is glorious. Once the Wet Season is due, we just pack up and head south!

Sandy K

Re: Camping future (GNT: 155). ‘Dynamic pricing’ my arse. What it means is that prices stay constant through the low and shoulder season, and skyrocket at the busy times. Just another excuse by the caravan park industry association to justify high prices.

Chris S

Re: Bad taste (Jaclyn & Heidi: GNT 155). Fran should just stop worrying about what she imagines other people are thinking.

Steve

Wow Heidi! Thanks for the shake up. I didn’t realise cooking up some tasty grub for your friends was viewed as rude and pretentious. I’ll try and do better next time.

Tony M

Re: tug question. I have a 17-year-old 100 Series ‘Cruiser which I’m looking at replacing. The 200 ‘Cruiser and the Ford Ranger have the same towing capacity but the price tag for the 200 ‘Cruiser is $30k dearer. Our van is a 19’6 2400 weight. Just wondering if any readers have a Ranger and what it tows like, given the Ranger has a 3.2 litre turbo diesel engine. Any thoughts welcomed.

Ian C
Time to farewell the big smoke?

Other than the sound of a million buzzing mosquitoes heading your way, there is nothing more certain to ruin that perfect Outback evening sitting around the campfire than the blooming smoke that gets in your eyes.

Most grey nomads know the feeling. There are just some evenings when there is no place to run and no place to hide. However many times you shift your campchair it seems that sometimes the smoky trails are just absolutely determined to follow you and ruin your night.

Well, despair not! Very few people would have seen this coming … but the era of the smokeless campfire may not be all that far away. BioLite, which has long been leading the way in outdoor cooking gadgets, has just developed its FirePit, which massively reduces smoke emissions by applying oxygen in strategic places.

The device has 51 jets surrounding the chamber which are powered by a Micro USB-rechargeable power pack. They pump oxygen into the fire at key spots to create a more even temperature and mix gases around, which apparently improves combustion by burning particulate matter before it can escape. The end result is a more efficient burning of fuel and, consequently, a lot less smoke. Hooray! Happy campers can control the strength of the flame by using adjustments on the FirePit itself, or via Bluetooth on a smartphone app.

The burner has perforated ‘Ray Mesh’ sides for heat distribution and flame visibility and can burn charcoal or wood. It has folding legs and features a grill top for cooking. The device comes with an optional carry case which has a solar panel on top so that the sun can charge up the power pack via Micro USB. When fully charged, this pack should provide 24 hours of use on a low setting.

If all goes well, Biolite will begin full production of the FirePit soon and start shipping next May. It is expected to cost around US$200.

• Would you splash out on this to guarantee yourself a smoke-free campfire evening?

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Shark Bay in Australia’s extreme west has long drawn grey nomads eager to swim with the dolphins at Monkey Mia, view the stromatolites at Hamelin Bay, and visit such magical coastal spots as Shell Beach. However, having ticked off the area’s most accessible ‘big ticket’ attractions, too many travellers head off without finding all this unique region, approximately 800kms north of Perth, has to offer.

To truly get off the beaten track in Shark Bay, visitors need to be ready to get their wheels dirty and perhaps let the air out of their tyres … and the Francois Peron National Park is a great place to start.

Beyond the Peron Heritage Precinct at the southern end of the park, the tracks get very sandy but lead to some stunning scenery. Cape Peron offers spectacular views across red dunes, brilliant white beaches, and turquoise waters. A 1.5-kilometre walking trail connects Cape Peron to Skipjack Point, where two spectacular viewing platforms are perched over the cliff edge. Rather than marking the end of the Shark Bay area adventure, this first 4WD foray could mark the beginning.

Further north across a short stretch of water is perhaps the crown jewel of Shark Bay … Dirk Hartog Island. This is a ‘bucket list’ destination. There are flights over it, and 4WD tours available, or travellers can catch a barge across from Steep Point. Be warned though there is no water, no fuel, and no shops.

The island is named after Dutch explorer Dirk Hartog who landed here in 1616, and promptly nailed a dated pewter plate to a post at Inscription Point. This original was later removed and taken to a museum in Holland. This is also the site of an historic lighthouse and newly restored keepers’ quarters. The remnants of a garrison at Quoin Bluff South further evidences the island’s fascinating history, but it is the towering cliffs, gorgeous beaches and sheltered bays here which will live longest in the memory.

These are not places that every visiting grey nomad gets to and, in some ways, that’s probably a good thing. But those that do make the effort to get off the beaten track in Shark Bay rarely regret it … and certainly never forget it.
Late-night trips too tiring

Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,

We've been travelling for six months and everything is brilliant ... apart from my sleep-deprived exhaustion. I love free camping and love nothing better than hunting out a spot in the bush where we can be on our own. We are both in our early 70s so I guess night-time toilet trips are to be expected ... but my wife, Sandy, is taking it to a new level. Last night, she got up four times and that's not her record! The main problem is that, as we are generally in the middle of nowhere, she insists that I come with her every time with a torch to 'keep an eye out'. I don't want to sound mean-spirited because she's amazing, but I always wake up feeling absolutely shattered. Surely, she should be able to 'tough it out' on her own by now.

Bruce

What a charmer you sound like, Bruce. Your 70-plus-year-old wife is crouching down somewhere in the bush four times a night to help ensure you live your free camping dream ... and you resent holding a torch for her! You are quite right. Sandy is amazing. One in a million. You're one of those people who, if they won $10 million on the Lottery, would be unhappy because somebody else in America won $50 million. You've got a truly remarkable wife and you're living the dream, Bruce. Just hold the torch when you're asked to and stop whingeing! If you're that tired, just plonk yourself down in a campchair every afternoon and have a snooze for an hour or two. Something tells me that Sandy would show you a lot more understanding than you would ever show her, Bruce.

Heidi

A popular camping ground near Toonumbar Dam west off Kyogle in New South Wales will open again next week despite the ‘sudden departure’ of the lessee, Kyogle Council has announced that, after “extensive discussions”, Kyogle Fishing Club will be the interim manager of the Bells Bay Camping Ground. The owner of the site, WaterNSW, is currently reviewing options for the long-term management of the Toonumbar Dam area and recreational sites.

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FOR SALE

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HELP WANTED

Various localities in Australia calling all Retiree’s. Jolly Santa’s required to work in Major Shophouses over Christmas. The job involves including Darwin plus some regional area’s of (small) jobs around the place, such as bin. We are looking for an extra pair of hands every now and then to help with the property. (small) jobs around the place, such as bin. We are looking for an extra pair of hands every now and then to help with the property.

YARRAM, NSW
Volunteers are urgently needed to assist orchard farmers Ray and Marj, in Yarraman, from now through till Dec. The immediate requirement is to milk the goats there are 10 acres of garden, but it is getting on top of, so an extra pair of hands would be great. It runs from 9am to 5pm in the morning.

BARCALDINE, QLD
Looking for a couple to “property sit” our 40,000 ac property located 50kms south Barcaldine. Dates required Tuesday 26th Sept to Wednesday 4th Oct. Bitumen road right to the house. Free powered site with access to laundry, bathroom, kitchen – in exchange for feeding/care of family pets (2 very friendly dogs) and 4 horses, watering/maintenance of fruit trees. A very gentle and kind natured. He will need some basic maintenance skills. Single donga ensuited accommodation available, and have undercover parking for caravan and car. Swimming pond. Good swimming holes near to property. Pets allowed if kept under control and don’t worry sheep or chooks etc. Click here.

DAINTREE AREA, QLD
Wanted responsible house sitter End November 2017 to End January 2018, approximately dates. Julatten Queensland. Property is 5 acres backing onto bush, own dam with jetty, rustic gazeba and fire place area. Undercover parking for caravan and caravans. 15 amp power plugs available. 10 acres of garden, but it is getting on top of, so an extra pair of hands would be great. It runs from 9am to 5pm in the morning.

KING ISLAND, TAS
Seeking home and pet sitter November – ongoing (5 month periods). We are looking for a person or couple to look after our dog and stay in our home on a long term basis. We will be away for 5 months and will return for a month, during which you will need to look after our pet DOG: Hugo is a 5 year old staffy cross, who is very gentle and kind natured. He will need daily walks, 10 acres of garden, but it is getting on top of, so an extra pair of hands would be great. It runs from 9am to 5pm in the morning.

SHAILER PARK, BRISBANE, QLD
Housesitter wanted on a 20 acre rural property. We require a person or couple to look after a friendly, honest and proactive couple to help us out with the Farm Stay in the form of cleaning and also a little bit of gardening. It would be a very relaxed working environment with more time off than on but if you get bored easily there’s always plenty to do around the farm. Cleaning is our main need for help and any cleaning will be paid work ($25 per hr). Small house provided or use your own van in conjunction with house. Click here.

SHAILER PARK, BRISBANE, QLD
A farm stay for 4 nights camping for 3 hours work available on 100 acre property in Burnaul. We are looking for an extra pair of hands every now and then to help with the property. (small) jobs around the place, such as bin. We are looking for an extra pair of hands every now and then to help with the property.

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FREE RENTAL PROPERTY

FRASER COAST, QLD
Fraser Coast. Free camp site on the Bur- rum River, fishing, kayaking and crabbing, in exchange for some light gardening and odd jobs. Friendly pets welcome. We have 10 acres of garden, but it is getting on top of, so an extra pair of hands would be great. It runs from 9am to 5pm in the morning.

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WINDINELLA, NSW
Farm sitter wanted from 24th Sept to 14th Oct. The property is a working station 40km out of Goulburn. Someone needed to feed our chickens, turkeys and geese, letting them out to forage in the day and looking after their water at night. As soon as possible, we have people looking after it currently but things are a bit sporadic. There is a small cottage you can use with bathroom facilities etc. Also you can park your rig there if it suits. Click here.

YORK, WA
House/property sitter needed for 30th Sep- 9th October on 100acre permacul- ture property 30kms south of York. Friendly pets welcome. We have 10 acres of garden, but it is getting on top of, so an extra pair of hands would be great. It runs from 9am to 5pm in the morning.

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