Is cabin fever losing its grip on van parks?

Mayor adds to chorus calling for camping to be made ‘affordable’ again

A New South Wales mayor has weighed into the debate about the changing face of caravan parks … and what he perceives as their growing unaffordability.

Richmond Valley Council Mayor Ernie Bennett is enraged by a State Government plan for a $10 million upgrade of a caravan park at Evans Head. The Silver Sands Holiday Park is slated to lose 10-20% of its sites in order to accommodate larger rigs, make room for new cooking and playground facilities, and to create a new community access area.

But Cr Bennett is not impressed. He says that since the State Government took control of the park away from council three years ago, the cost to stay there has more than doubled.

“They can put all the fancy cabins in that they like and I’m sure they will fill them,” he told media outlets. “But in a low socio-economic area, the park should be available if the local community wants to use it.”

It’s a complaint echoed by many grey nomads who say the rise of the ‘cabin-filled’ caravan park with their bouncy castles and water parks is both beyond their budget and surplus to their needs.

Peter Shotton, a former van park operator who now travels Australia in his caravan, says cabins came about because they appealed to a much wider market and could deliver better returns.

“Now we have an economic downturn in manufacturing and mining, those benefits have dried up,” he told the GNT. “There is an oversupply of cabins, often with large overdrafts from the purchase, except for the 10 weeks of school holidays each year … and there are less RV sites to pay for it all!”

So, could we see less caravan park cabins in future? The Brisbane Holiday Village is one park that recently decided to take out some cabins in order to make more space for caravans.

However, Kristy Ponting, the Operations Manager of the Caravan Parks Association of Queensland, says this is the exception rather than the rule. “The trend of removing cabins is not one that I can say is notable throughout the state,” she said. “Cabins remain incredibly popular with the family market and no doubt always will for those travelling with young children.”

Ms Ponting does note that both powered and unpowered camping sites have also seen a revival in demand, and says caravan parks will always structure business and investment based on consumer demand.

Meanwhile, giant digging machinery is back at work at the Brisbane Holiday Village … this time it’s clearing a space for a huge, new bouncy pillow!

Click to comment

‘Our cash is our business!’

GNT readers

“It’s our cash … and we’ll spend it how we want!”

Our recent poll asking whether it was wrong to ‘blow’ superannuation on living the good life on the road sparked a massive response from GNT readers, with 82.1% not wanting to justify what they did with their own money.

“We have all worked our lives and it is ours to do as we wish,” said Pugs.

“Should grey nomads be expected to sit on the rocker-recliner watching telly and the tomatoes grow until they fall off the perch?” asked Chris T. “If they’re healthy enough to enjoy their hard-earned, good for them.”

Crocodile Davey & Rose agreed, but said travellers should be a little budget conscious and not “blow it all”.

Frank W also thought superannuation should be a little budget conscious and not “blow it all”. “Most retirees I know expected to sit on the rocker-recliner watching telly and the tomatoes grow until they fall off the perch?”

Our recent poll asking whether it was wrong to ‘blow’ superannuation on living the good life on the road sparked a massive response from GNT readers, with 82.1% not wanting to justify what they did with their own money.

Frank W also thought superannuation should be a little budget conscious and not “blow it all”.

Most retirees I know have spent a fair portion on holiday or a new car or caravan,” he said. “They can finally enjoy luxuries they have gone without during their working life.”

Click to comment
Characters of the road

No timetable, new friends, ... what could be better?

Queenslanders Gordon & Robyn A (58 & 52) are never in a hurry

What do you travel in?
A 2012 Volkswagen Touareg and 2012 21’6” New Age Jewel Caravan.

Where do you camp?
We either free camp or stay at a powered site in a caravan park. We can’t go into national parks this trip as we have our little dog with us.

Likes of the lifestyle?
The fact that we can stay on longer if we really enjoy a place. There is no timetable and we rarely travel for more than three hours in a day. We love experiencing our country first hand, and we love being together, meeting new people, and making new friends.

Any dislikes?
I enjoy doing my own repairs and maintenance and helping others out, so I wish I could carry my workshop with me.

Biggest scare?
I got really crook in Denham, WA, once and had to get the ambulance out. That was a real fright for us both. Having said that, our neighbouring caravanners were unbelievably supportive so it was a case of turning a stumbling block into a stepping stone.

Is health a worry?
I have a heart condition which I manage with medication so that is always in the back of our minds. We have found that WA above Perth has been the worst area as it is a long way between drinks and many of the towns have a nurse practitioner but no doctor. I carry a folder around with me of all my medical reports, latest ECG, medications etc.

Are you on a budget?
If we are spending too much on fuel then we park up a little longer, if van park fees are excessive then we free camp more. All our lives we have had to budget to raise a family, pay a mortgage, buy a car or furniture, and pay bills. Now, we are debt free, not a worry in the world really, so why burden ourselves with the same problems?

On the-road hobbies?
We both love to read, and we follow the trips of friends we have made and look for opportunities to cross paths again. My wife took up photography on our last trip and has become quite the happy snapper now.

Favourite place to camp?
We loved Tumut as we are both keen fly fishermen. The van park backed on to the river. It was magical. We also enjoyed the Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas in South Australia.

Advice for other nomads?
We have seen so much damage to awnings in our travels so we always secure our awning at both ends with tie down ropes. Most times it is ‘overkill’ but if you get that odd gust then the damage is a real bummer.

Nomads in Brief

Park setback
Developers who wanted to accommodate 92 relocatable homes on a 24-hectare site at Calliope in Queensland instead of caravans have had their proposal rejected. Gladstone Regional Council had previously approved plans for a new 140-site caravan on the site, but the applicants then changed their proposal.

Marree earthquake
A magnitude 5 earthquake has been recorded south-west of Marree in South Australia. Seismologists said the earthquake was ‘significantly large’ but the remote location meant no damage was recorded.

Construction cruises
Gladstone is running ‘construction cruises’ to allow visitors to view the growing LNG structures on Curtis Island. The next free boat tour will leave on Friday, July 11. Bookings can be made through the Gladstone Visitor Information Centre.

Caravan struck
Police are investigating a hit-run crash at Port Lincoln in South Australia in which a ute hit a caravan. The crash occurred in the early hours of the morning when a vehicle lost control on a corner and struck a parked van.

Quiz Corner

Win 2 Grey Nomad Bumper Stickers!
Email us the solution to this picture puzzle. Winner will be drawn from entries and announced in Issue 74.

CLUE: Everyone with wanderlust should do this.

1. Shortest road distance between White Cliffs, NSW, and Adelaide, SA? a) 542km b) 803km c) 976km
2. Elegant water bird + small mountain = which rural Victorian town?
3. Bakery Stay (anagram) This gorgeous South Australia town is well worth a stop.
4. Non-foliated metamorphic rock + a place to get an alcoholic drink = which WA hotspot?
5. Which highway links Cootamundra to Junee in NSW?

(Answers on p. 4)
Dear Editor,
Re: solo travellers (GNT: Issue 72). I have been a full-time nomad for over 17 years, the last nine on my own – and I love it! I normally travel solo and don’t mind camping on my own either. I agree with Jeannie that it is nice to have company sometimes … but in their own rig! I rarely stay in caravan parks and keep in touch with family and friends via my ‘free hour’ phone, emails, snail mail and Facebook so I never feel alone. Right now, I am camped beside a beautiful river, basking in this delightful sunshine. Who could want more?

Glenys M (Gem)

Dear Editor,
I am a 74-year-old female and I travel alone and have done so for many years. I have had four caravans and, although I enjoy my time at home as well, I love the independence and the feeling of living the ‘gypsy life’, and enjoying this beautiful and still safe country. However, I wouldn’t be without my dog for company and security and I always make sure my vehicle is in good order. And, yes, I stay where there are other people. I also mostly stay in caravan parks and have never had any problems. I have just bought my first motorhome and I will have to run it with my savings, so no I won’t be sharing it either.

Faye H

Dear Editor,
I travel alone around Australia and met a lot of other women doing the same. I enjoyed being on my own, just going wherever I wanted to go, and meeting up with terrific people. I can’t wait to do it all again soon.

Joyce L

Dear Editor,
Why not travel alone? Some people find it difficult to find someone compatible to travel with for all sorts of reasons. Safety is an issue, but a common sense approach is paramount.

Susan O

Dear Editor,
The number of times I have had work colleagues tell me that: “I wouldn’t go on my own, you are very brave,” is astounding. Last year, I bought myself a motorhome and – while I am still getting used to how everything runs – I don’t intend to let it stop me from doing the Big Lap in the very near future. For those who think we don’t, or shouldn’t, be travelling as solo females, I feel all the more sorry for them as they are the ones missing out. I also will not be sharing the ‘me’ time with anyone else. As I see it, I have done without for a very long time to get my motorhome and will have to run it with my savings, so no I won’t be sharing it either.

Faye H

Dear Editor,
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Anne F

Dear Editor,
Re: Still can’t calm down (Jaclyn & Heidi: Issue 72). Tell Dominic to stop being a self centred drama queen, give himself an uppercut and wake himself up. The world isn’t all about him … what a pain he must be to camp next to! I just take a deep breath and say ‘so be it.’

Paul M

Dear Editor,
You need to learn to relax and chill out otherwise you will never enjoy anything in life. Pull in behind that slow mover and have a random chat on the UHF and listen to the person and have a random chat on the UHF and listen to the person. It’s a cheap way to live.

Anthony C

Dear Editor,
I intend to let it stop me from doing a great trade. The sunset was fantastic, too.

Ellen B

Dear Editor,
I can’t wait to retire and take to the road – I’m looking around for ‘the van’ and then my dogs and I will be away. See you out there!

Dianne K

Dear Editor,
We have cut back our van parks stays considerably. On our next trip down the west coast, we realise that van parks are a necessity. However, our intended stay in Broome will be limited to two days at the most and will spend longer in Derby.

Victor W
Dear Editor,
Travelling with drones (GNT: Issue 72). I use a DJI Phantom Quad copter for aerial pictures whilst travelling in Australia. The perspective from the sky is wonderful. Recently, due to a knee problem, I was unable to climb to the top of a ‘Line of Lode’ at Moonta in South Australia. I used the drone instead to take my pictures. I would not go anywhere without the quad.

John P

Dear Editor,
The thought of travelling with drones sounds a bit excessive to me. If the flying range is only 3km and you are trying to figure if that park is crowded, what is the point? It’s only 3km away! Being able to get parts for a drone so easily online also raises the question of who is likely to have one, and will they use it the way it is intended or as a voyeuristic way to watch people? Sounds like they might be about as useful as jet skis!

Jeanne (Maccy Girl)

Dear Editor,
If you so desperately want connection whilst away, don’t go bush!

Allan the Dingo

Dear Editor,
We think it would be great to have Wi-Fi over as much of our country as possible. If we have it, we can use it. Also, if we want solitude without it, at least we can make the decision, and not someone else.

Craig n Cath

Dear Editor,
We are doing the Big Lap and, as well as a Telstra Hotspot to provide Wi-fi, we have bought a Spot Gen 3 tracker. This is a GPS tracker that allows you to tell people via email your location and that you are okay. It also has an SOS function that will initiate an emergency response that you can use in a life-threatening situation. Because it is a satellite tracker, no Wi-fi reception is needed. So far on our trip it has worked flawlessly.

Reg & Mila

Dear Editor,
Sounds great but I think the 100 watts version would be needed to charge onboard 12 volt batteries.

Jim C

Dear Editor,
It’s a great idea! I did see someone in South Australia that made their own.

Pat D

Dear Editor,
Where can I get one? I’m ready to purchase! Brilliant idea!

Red (Retired Extremely Dangerous)

Dear Editor,
Love to have one of those gadgets as a backup, especially the 4kg model.

Paddy R

Dear Editor,
I recently spoke to the owner/manager of the local Big4 about the expense of their caravan sites, especially for grey nomads and how they seem to be catering more and more for families with young kids. His response was that it is a policy decision as that is where the market is heading. Karen A’s comment on doing the posted speed limit to avoid holding up traffic is in error. Surely, the speed limit should be that in which the individual feels safe and comfortable when travelling with a caravan. I for one rarely feel comfortable when travelling at 100kph unless the road surface is perfect, and there isn’t much traffic around.

Carole-Anne L

Dear Editor,
We stay at the showgrounds wherever possible. Only $20 per night and usually have shower and toilets.

Marella C

Dear Editor,
Grey nomads and how they think about sites. They will come. Surely a few for GNs in the busier times, even have some sites reserved according for the likes of GNs to fill the quieter times, and even have some sites reserved for GNs in the busier times, they will come. Surely a few sites filled at say 30-50% discount and money in the bank is better than those same sites empty?

Howard J

Dear Editor,
Advisory speed limits are not compulsory. They are maximum speed in perfect conditions. Some vehicles are limited to 90kph or less. These people need to read their traffic handbooks. Then the roads will be much safer for all.

Warren
Reversing the caravan into a tight spot is one of the most notoriously stressful aspects of the Big Lap for many, many grey nomads. It can send blood pressures soaring, make rock solid relationships rocky, and end up in expensive damage to vans, walls, trees, fences, bushes or power outlets. Even the ‘gifted’ reversers among the grey nomad fraternity occasionally have to admit defeat, jump out of the ‘tug’, and attempt to manually guide a van into that ultra snug site. This is where hernias and muscle pulls take over from frayed nerves and wounded pride as the most likely negative consequence of the van parking attempt. However, the march of technology and the arrival of a wide variety of increasingly affordable caravan movers and power jockey wheels has made life a breeze for many grateful vanners. While there are manual movers with a ratchet mechanism on the market that can lighten the load, many grey nomads are opting for motorised versions. These can be broadly divided into two main types. The sort that moves the van by driving the primary caravan wheels tend to be permanent fixtures attached to the chassis. For those looking for a more ‘detachable’ caravan moving option, there are other devices that effectively replace the traditional jockey wheel in one way or another. There are a great number of variations on this theme with some movers having their own batteries while others draw power from the caravan battery. Caravan movers offer incredible manoeuvrability, allowing vans to turn on a sixpence. There are options that will work on both single and dual axle vans and many will guide vans over fairly rough terrain and on inclines. They can either be steered by the use of an extended ‘rudder’ or by the use of a remote control. Suddenly, parking the van is fun! However, turning the caravan reversing ‘nightmare’ into a potentially enjoyable experience does come at a cost. The motorised models can cost several thousand dollars … but that’s not likely to stop an increasing number of travellers deciding it is money very well spent. Reports from the road suggest that the various caravan mover options are taking one of the very few stresses out of life on the road for many. Who said life couldn’t get any better?

Are you a caravan mover convert? Would one of these devices have got you out of a sticky situation?

Click to comment
Known as the ‘Garden Town of the Riverland’, Loxton has obvious appeal to grey nomads venturing into this magnificent part of South Australia. Situated on the south bank of the mighty Murray, the town’s many beautiful gardens, fascinating history, friendly reputation, and stunning surroundings make it a place not to be missed.

Although it has a population of just four thousand, Loxton – located approximately 240 kilometres east of Adelaide – has a full range of shops and businesses to service the needs of the weary traveller. There is no shortage of entertainment options, either. As always, the best way to get your bearings is to take one of the town’s well-established walking trails. One of the most popular ports of call is Loxton’s famous Historical Village. Here, around 50 buildings exhibit a variety of farm equipment, machinery and household items used by the early settlers. Fascinating.

Another place of interest as you stroll along the riverfront is the Tree of Knowledge, a living testament to the unpredictability and power of the waterway it stands next to. If all of this walking is giving you a thirst, you could do worse than stop for a cold one at the community-owned Loxton Hotel, which was built way back in 1908.

While the town itself is both beautiful and fascinating, the area in which it sits is truly stunning. Both citrus fruit and summer fruit grow in abundance here, and this is also wine country. There are some excellent wineries about, and a tour around some of them is a lovely way to spend an afternoon ... or longer!

There are two or three scenic caravan parks in Loxton and also a number of places along the river where you can camp for free or for a nominal fee. There are also great camping opportunities in the wonderful Murray River National Park which is virtually next door to Loxton. The three areas of the park – Katarapko, Lyrup Flats and Bulyong Island – cover more than 13,000 hectares. The Katarapko area features floodplains and several wetlands, the Lyrup Flats on the northern side of the river offers great birdwatching and fishing, while Bulyong Island – which is only accessible by boat - is a veritable haven for wildlife and birdlife. The Katarapko Creek Campground is probably the biggest campsite in the park and boasts 60 campsites among shady river red gums. Now this is living!

For all its many attractions, it will always be the mighty Murray and its effect on the surrounding country that will define Loxton. Whether you are into canoeing, taking a trip on a houseboat, fishing, swimming, dangling your toes in the water, or sitting in a campchair gazing out at one of Australia’s greatest waterways, Loxton is the place for you.

Click to comment

Enjoy idyllic camping in the Loxton area

Photo by: Adam Bruzzone

New shirts on order

It’s a sell out! Demand for our last batch of high-quality men’s and ladies’ polo shirts with embroidered grey nomads logo was overwhelming … and most sizes sold out very quickly. With stocks severely depleted, it’s time for us to re-order from the supplier … and we are asking people to request sizes and colours now to help us tailor our order to match demand. Visit our shop here to see the range of shirts available, and also to check out our other merchandise including embroidered baseball caps, stubby holders and bumper stickers.

If you think you might like a shirt, please email us here with the likely size. Note: This is not an order but simply an expression of interest.

Step out in style
It’s driving us both crazy

Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,

My husband, Oliver, and I were having the trip of our lives until a couple of weeks ago when he had a fall and broke his arm. The accident itself was bad enough, but we received fantastic medical care and the prognosis is good. It’s just a temporary setback but I am now seeing the man I married turn into a demanding child.

As if waiting on him hand and foot wasn’t bad enough, I also have to listen to this ‘poor invalid’ criticise my driving and roll his eyes every time the motorhome goes over a pothole or I brake. Considering I’ve hardly driven in 30 years I think I’m doing okay but his constant carping is driving me bonkers.

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Mr Insecure to ‘belt up’ or prepare for a very bumpy ride.

You’re in the driver’s seat now, Wendy, and Oliver is just going to have to deal with it. If he doesn’t sharpen up his act, I suggest you accidentally on purpose leave him behind at a remote roadhouse. When you come back for him in a year or two, you’ll be a more experienced driver … and I bet he’ll be a lot more appreciative!

Wendy

Click to comment

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FOR SALE

- 26 ft Concept Caravan
- Stowed under cover
- Built November 2007
- 6 x Chassis, 15" wheels
- Simplicity independent suspension
- Rear view camera
- Truma hot water system
- En suite bathroom with Vaccum toilet
- 2 door, 3 way fridge and freezer
- (Gross 186 litres) Auto Washing machine
- Microwave and Oven
- Queen size bed
- Venetian blinds, A/C on, much more
- Price $49,900.00
- David on 0418 243 368

FOR SALE

Rainforest retreat on the Sunshine Coast.
- Family sized in small over-size style village close to Buderim.
- Secluded with full length verandah balconies.
- garden setting. Beautifullly maintained with two bedrooms, fans & AC fans.
- Garden shed & carpet
- Pets are not permitted in the village.
- For sale by owner for $198,500.
- Email fieldingrealestate@gmail.com or call 07 5445 4590.

FOR SALE

- TBL – 22 inch television
- $150.00
- Dual power 240 and 12 Volt, HDIS – High Definition.
- Multi media interface.
- Remote control with owners manual, Brand new near condition – just no longer needed.
- Great for caravans / boats / homes
- Darwin NT
- Call Julia - 0438 571 235

FOR SALE

- Magnificent residence is situated only 150 meters from Wagga Bay Beach.
- Unfortunately the number one address at this serene unspoilt views of the ocean, fishing boats, Diamond Island, and the mountains.
- New offered for sale this expansive residence of approximately 40 squares
- Click here to learn more
- Price: $800,000 negotiable
- Inspectors welcome by appointment.
- Email: jasongregory@bigpond.com

FOR SALE

- Beachouse in a sleepy rural area about one hour south of Townsville.
- "Happy go lucky" couple to run our local licensed sports and recreation club located in a sleepy rural area.
- Applicants will need to be self-sufficient and equipped to camp in all weather conditions.
- Ph: 0405 645 052
- www.carvanlocationservices.com.au

FOR SALE

- ECOllaboration is seeking volunteers to work as camping area hosts at Fraser Island, Conondale National Park and Imbil State Forest camping areas on the Sunshine Coast. Volunteers camp for free and receive vehicle access permit and barge passage to Fraser in return for maintaining the camping area facilities. Applicants will need to be self-sufficient and equipped to camp in all weather conditions.

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