

Heading Outback - Do I Need a Permit?

A comprehensive review of the permits required to access national parks, remote areas and indigenous lands

Part 1 - by John Greig

If any decent road map of outback Australia is examined, numerous tracks will be marked as "Permit Required". Other tracks are marked as "Private Road" or "Aboriginal Business Road" and even "Restricted Access". Yet others are marked "For Use in Emergencies Only", or "Wet Weather Access Only". So what does all this mean, and what ramifications do such notations hold for outback travellers?

Generally, it can be assumed that if any track is marked with any of the above notations then that track is NOT a "public road" and access is not generally available. Thus the track can only be used under the conditions noted on it. For example, tracks marked "For Use in Emergencies Only", may only be used in an "emergency" situation. Equally, tracks marked "Wet Weather Access Only" may only be used in wet weather. Normally, this latter situation will apply when the track you may otherwise be travelling on has become impassable or has been closed. If the track you were intending to take has been "closed" due to rain, then the local road reports will normally also note whether or not any "wet weather only" track is open and passable. Conditions such as these are generally imposed by the Local Government entity responsible for the road.

The reasons for imposing such restrictions can be many and varied. For example, the road surface may be such that constant, general use will very quickly deteriorate the surface, and thus when the circumstances necessitating use of the track arise, it may be found to be impassable simply as a consequence of the volume of traffic that had previously used it. However, if the track had otherwise remained almost unused, its surface may have been preserved in such a state as to readily facilitate the passage of just a few vehicles under the conditions allowed. In other cases "emergency" or "wet weather" tracks are simply not maintained at all, and thus regular traffic could render such tracks impassable. Road maintenance costs in the bush are very high.

Other tracks are on private property and may not be used except under the conditions noted on the map. In those situations, the landowner is saying that general access to the track is forbidden, however in an emergency situation, or if you find yourself on a track which becomes impassable due to rain, then you may use the particular track under the situations noted. Such usage of course would be minimal, and thus the condition of the track may not be adversely affected. Private landowners are responsible for the maintenance of their own tracks, and do not like being put to unnecessary expense.

In that same vein, there are a few tracks around, which whilst actually being a "private track" located on private property, are none the less open for normal traffic, with some limitations. For example, a size of vehicle or weight limitation may be applied. If such restrictions are simply ignored by travellers and damage to the track results, which then costs the landowner time and money to rectify, there is a big risk that the landowner will simply close the track.

Remember also that driving around a "Road Closed" sign anywhere can result in a very large fine being imposed. Many local government entities in outback Australia have adopted a very aggressive approach to road closures. As soon as it starts to rain, if there is any prospect of the rain being heavy and/or prolonged, then almost inevitably up go the "road closed" signs on many dirt roads and tracks.

If you are in a town, and the roads have been closed due to rain, or you are travelling on a track, and come to another which you intended to take and find that it has been closed, then it is always worthwhile contacting the local police or council, or the local Roads Authority. In many such situations, the road may be closed to heavy vehicles, caravans and say, two wheel drive vehicles. However, it may be open, with care, to 4WD vehicles not towing a caravan or camper. We have experienced that exact situation on a number of occasions. Equally, we have experienced situations where a particular road was closed, however that road gave access to another track which had not been closed. Access was being allowed up the closed road, but only to the turn off to the other open track. So it is always worthwhile having a talk to one of the responsible organizations to ascertain the actual situation.

Tracks marked "Aboriginal Business Road" are generally tracks which have been put in by various aboriginal community corporations to facilitate travel between communities. Permits may or may not be issued to transit such tracks. It may very much depend on your reasons for requiring the transit, where you are coming from and/or where you are going, and also whether there are any ceremonies or rituals taking place on or near to the track or in communities. The same situation normally applies to roads within aboriginal lands marked as "restricted access". There are also a number of "aboriginal business roads" that do not actually appear on commercial maps, but are shown on "mud maps" issued to inhabitants by the community. So if you do come across a properly constructed track which does not appear on maps, it will in all probability be such a track, and should be treated accordingly.

Most tracks marked as "Permit Required" pass through aboriginal lands. As such, they are essentially on private property, and the traditional owners may or may not approve of access being granted. And, just because a track is marked as "Permit Required" is no guarantee that a permit will be granted on application.

The conditions under which permits are granted may also vary, and permission may be withdrawn at any time, or access simply barred without notice. For example, if there has been a death in a community, or a ceremony or ritual is taking place somewhere along or near a track, then access may be barred, even though a permit had been granted earlier. You should always very carefully read the conditions attaching to the issue and usage of any permit. Also ensure that you obey all requirements, including any directions issued to you whilst on or accessing such tracks.

Generally, with aboriginal lands, there are two types of permit issued. The first is a "transit" permit, which simply allows you to transit through the area. You may or may not be allowed to stop on the way, or to leave the track, or to camp. Generally, the length of the track involved will dictate many such circumstances. Whilst you may not be aware of them, there may be literally dozens of sacred sites along a track. A stop, and a camp fire, or the moving of some rocks to facilitate a tent site, could well be interfering with a sacred site. Over the years, such interference, whether intentional or not, has resulted in a number of locations and tracks now falling into the category where permits are simply not issued to travellers.

In general, when you apply for a transit permit, you normally need to nominate a 3 day "window" within which your travel is to take place. However, that is not always the case. The application form will normally be quite clear in relation to any such requirement.

The second type of permit is one to "access and remain on, aboriginal land". Such a permit would normally be applicable if you needed to actually visit a community and/or remain overnight, for example.

Whilst applications for permits are generally made to the responsible Land Council, the Councils are simply acting on, and carrying out the instructions of the "traditional owners" (sometimes referred to simply as T.O.'s) who live along the tracks, whether in communities or on outstations. And there may be dozens of such traditional owners. Thus it is their wishes, and the conditions they impose, that dictate to the staff of a Land Council, whether or not a permit may be issued. It is also surprising, but in many situations your permit application is physically sent off to one or more traditional owners, for their personal consideration, rather than simply being processed by the Land Council.

Regrettably, over the years, there have been too many irresponsible travellers who have ignored permit requirements, and have simply travelled over tracks without one. The end result has been a number of locations which have simply been shut to visitors as a consequence of persons ignoring the normal protocols. You would also be surprised at how well the bush telegraph actually operates in outback Australia. A lot of people seem to know whether or not you have a permit.

The recent "intervention" in the Northern Territory by the previous Federal Government, (which has to date been continued by the new Government) has changed absolutely nothing as far as travellers are concerned in accessing tracks and gaining permits. It was apparently intended to do so, but the appropriate "determinations" under the new legislation had not been made by the previous Government by the time the most recent elections were called. Currently, the needed "determinations" appear unlikely to be made by the new Government. Some changes were made by the previous Government in relation to accessing communities; however it appears that the new Government is going to abolish those changes with some possible exceptions. But as far as traveller's access to communities, tracks and aboriginal lands is concerned, nothing has changed. The Central Land Council is thus asking that travellers apply for permits in exactly the same manner as prior to the "intervention".

Some aboriginal communities are noted on maps as "closed communities". This normally means that they are not open to travellers, and have no facilities whatsoever available to travellers. However, we have noticed in recent times, that a few communities, which were "closed", have now changed their philosophy, and offer some limited facilities to travellers. Thus, if in the planning stages of your trip you think you may need to access a community for some reason, and it is marked on your map as "closed" then I would be making a telephone call to that community to check on that status. If it is still "closed" then your planning processes will need to be revised to take account of that situation.

And notwithstanding all of the information above, if you intend to drive through or visit any community or place on land marked as aboriginal land, and there appears to be no limitations or conditions on any of the tracks within that area, I would still be telephoning the community in your planning stage to check on the situation. It is cheap to do so, and polite, and you never know what good information you might gain.

The costs of permits vary significantly. The majority are free; others may cost an application fee varying between \$2 and \$5. Yet others can be very expensive. For example a permit to access Surveyor-General's Corner will currently cost you \$100 per vehicle and \$20 per person, whilst a single vehicle permit to access any of the numerous aboriginal sites along the Canning Stock Route will cost you \$50. Access and camping fees in some areas of aboriginal land on Cape York vary between \$5 and \$30 per night per vehicle, or per person, whilst others are only \$30 per week per vehicle.

Permits to access a range of locations on the Gove Peninsula can cost between \$15 per week and \$15 per night per vehicle in addition to the \$35 cost of your Recreation Permit, but the permit to transit the Central Arnhem Road is free. You do need to do your homework. Permits to visit some communities are only available from the local community itself, e.g., some communities on the western side of Cape York, communities near Cape Arnhem and on the Gove Peninsula, and some communities in the Kimberley region. However, the permits to access the tracks leading to some of those areas are issued by the Land Councils or Government Departments.

It is always worth doing your homework well before you intend to leave, and applying for the permits that you will need well in advance. Some permits can take up to 2 months and more to be issued or refused, whilst others may only take a few days. And don't forget, if the track you want to travel extends into two states or across two Land Council areas you will probably need a permit for both areas. So ensure that you leave yourself plenty of time to gain them. There are some great websites around, such as Exploroz, (www.exploroz.com.au) and generally the large scale HEMA maps have excellent information on them regarding access and permits. And remember, always obey the conditions imposed, and thus ensure that those people coming after you retain their access, or improve it as a consequence of your good, exemplary behaviour.

This article continues below with information setting out just where the various permits are available from, and some additional information on a few specific areas in the various states where some sort of special situation applies.

So where do you apply for permits?

Part 2 – by John Greig

The following information is provided to assist you with the gaining of permits for your travels. It is not a totally comprehensive guide. It has however, endeavoured to pick up on most of the areas that four wheel drive tourists tend to visit. For those areas not covered, you will need to undertake your own research. Again, the Exploroz web site can be invaluable for such purposes as can the large scale Hema maps and contact with the appropriate Land Council/s, National Parks Service and/or nearby towns and communities.

Western Australia:

Generally, most transit permits for aboriginal lands are able to be issued by the Aboriginal Lands Trust of WA. The Trust is a part of the Department of Indigenous Affairs. Applications can be made on-line at www.dia.wa.gov.au and simply follow the prompts. The Trust can be contacted at: The Permits Officer, Aboriginal Lands Trust, PO Box 7770, Cloisters Square, Perth, WA 6850. Telephone (08) 9235 8000 or Fax (08) 9235 8088.

Central Reserves Area (which extends some little way over the borders into both NT and SA), includes: The Great Central Road, Gunbarrel Highway and the abandoned section of the Old Gunbarrel Highway, Giles-Mulga Park Road from Warakurna to Wingellina and Surveyor General's Corner, the Gary Highway, Gary Junction Road and the Sandy Blight Junction Track. It also includes the Docker River area (but not the Community) which is actually in NT. (Docker River is one of those areas where you will need two permits. The WA side takes you essentially from the Docker River Community, west across the border and on down the Great Central Road. For the NT side, see NT below). Apply to the Ngaanyatjarra Council, P.O. Box 644, Alice Springs, NT 0871. They are located at Shop 6, 56-58 Head Street, Alice Springs. Telephone (08) 8950 1711. Fax is (08) 8953 1892. Even though the vast majority of the Central Reserves Area is in WA, the Land Council office is located in Alice Springs.

Permits for Surveyor-General's Corner are \$100 per vehicle plus \$20 per person, but you do get an escort/guide to take you out there and tell you a bit about the history of the Corner.

The Sandy Blight Junction Track and the Gary Junction Road are two other examples of tracks where two permits are required. One permit is required for the parts that fall within Western Australia (Ngaanyatjarra Council) and another for the parts that fall within the Northern Territory, (Central Land Council). Access to the Sandy Blight Junction Track has recently been reviewed and permits to transit that part of the track which falls within the NT are once again being issued by the Central Land Council.

Permits are not being issued for travel on the Gunbarrel Highway between Jackie Junction and the Heather Highway/Gunbarrel Highway intersection. Access to/from the Gunbarrel Highway must be via the Heather Highway. Very special conditions apply for travel along the Abandoned Section of the Old Gunbarrel Highway between Warakurna and Warburton. Details may be obtained from either the Ngaanyatjarra Council or the WA Department of Indigenous Affairs website.

If you wish to access actual communities, then it is also best to ring that community and speak to them direct regarding any requirements.

Inquiries from the Kimberley Land Council at Derby, telephone (08) 9193 1118, showed that if you wished to visit any communities in the Kimberley, the best way is simply to report in to the Community on the day of your visit, (but not weekends), and purchase a permit on the day. The Kimberley Land Council's Broome Office telephone is (08) 9193 6199.

To visit Kalumburu you will need to gain a Permit via the Aboriginal Lands Trust in Perth. This can be done on-line, and is free. (See above). This Permit however, only gives you permission to enter the Kalumburu Reserve. Once you get to the Kalumburu Community you will need a Kalumburu Recreation Entry Permit. These can be obtained, at a cost of \$35 per vehicle, from the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation Office, the Kwini Store or the Kalumburu Catholic Mission. Alternatively, you can apply by post to the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation, enclosing a cheque for \$35 made out to the same body. Allow at least a month for the permit to be returned to you. The Corporation's telephone number is (08) 9161 4300 and the fax is: (08) 9161 4331. Their email is kac@bigpond.com. Fuel is not available in Kalumburu over the weekend. The Corporation Office is also closed over the weekend.

Once you arrive at Kalumburu there is only one place to camp in the Community itself, and that is at the Catholic Mission. It's a very cool, grassed and shaded camp site with good showers and toilets. Well worth the modest charge. Camping on the coast is only available at Honeymoon Bay, McGowan's and Pago. These camping areas are all operated by members of the Community, and offer very basic camping only at about \$10 per person per day. You can also camp within Drysdale National Park. Access is through the Carson River Pastoral Station which is operated by the Community. A Recreation Entry Permit is required to access any of the camping areas and to gain access through Carson River Pastoral Station.

Access to Truscott Airfield; west of the King Edward River and to Winanghie Beach is prohibited.

If you wish to visit Cape Leveque contact the Broome Visitors Information Centre on (08) 9192 2222. Whilst you don't need a permit to visit the Cape, you do need booked accommodation to enter the area. The Visitors Centre can make a booking for you at the camping area at the Cape, which is highly advisable.

To drive the track which parallels the Hamersley Iron Railway Line from Tom Price to Dampier you MUST apply IN PERSON at any of: the Tom Price Tourist Information Service (08) 9188 1112; the Karratha Visitor Centre (08) 9144 4600; the Roebourne Visitor Centre (08) 9182

1060 or the Pannawonica Office & Library (08) 9184 1038. You MUST do this in person as you will be required to sit through about a 15 minute video which mainly concentrates on the rail safety aspects of the trip, and then you will be issued with your permit.

Telfer Mine Road: To use this road you don't need a permit, but you do need to notify the Mine Manager of your intentions. A few weeks before your visit write a letter to: The Village Manager, Newcrest Mining, Telfer, WA 6762, informing the Manager of who you are; where and how you can be contacted; the numbers and details of vehicles including: make, colour, registration number and State of registration; driver and passengers names; and the likely date/s of being on their road; your direction of travel and destination. Don't forget to thank them for the access. You will have to stop at a Security Check Point.

Trans Continental Railway: You can now only follow the rail line from Kalgoorlie to Rawlinna. It is illegal to travel east of Rawlinna and absolutely no permits are being issued. In South Australia you are also permitted to travel the few kilometres along the rail line past Tarcoola to pick up Googs Track. The track beside the rail line is now on private property. This was a result of the corporatisation of Australian National Railways. Regrettably, there had been far too many instances of travellers breaking down, or needing help, and they were, incredibly, flagging down the trains! Management have now simply barred access and will have transgressors dealt with as trespassers. The fine can be quite hefty. You have been warned!

You should also bear in mind that many WA National Parks charge both an entry fee and a nightly camping fee. Quite a number of those fees are payable by way of self registration when you enter the park. Other parks have ranger stations to which you must report, and others are controlled by the very friendly, effective and efficient "Park Hosts" system. If you are going to be in WA for some time, you might like to consider gaining a "WA All Parks Pass" before you go. This Pass in 2008 cost just \$75 or \$50 if you have a concession card and gives you access to all WA National Parks as many times as you like within a 12 month period. The Pass does not however cover any camping fees which may be payable. The Pass is obtainable on-line from Exploroz, or from the WA Department of Environment and Conservation direct at PO Box 104, Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983. Telephone (08) 9334 0333 or fax (08) 9334 0498, and ask for a Customer Service Officer.

Canning Stock Route:

From April, 2006, the holding of an appropriate Permit has become necessary if you wish to visit any of the very numerous Aboriginal Sites located either on, or adjacent to, the Canning Stock Route. There are a whole series of such sites.

Essentially, all of the land adjacent to the Canning Stock Route Reserve between Well 5 and Well 40 has been granted to the Martu people under the Native Title Act, 1993, and is now restricted access land. So in essence, if you wish to leave the actual Canning Stock Route vehicular track, a permit to do so is now required. And, even though some of the sites are actually located within the Stock Route Reserve, they are nonetheless registered and protected under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972, and as such, a permit is required to visit them.

The actual gazetted Canning Stock Route Reserve itself is generally about 8 kilometres wide. In the main, the vehicular track that you follow stays within the Reserve. However, there are a number of locations where the track itself is actually outside of, the gazetted Reserve. At times, it is up to 10 kilometres outside it. This should not however cause any difficulties, provided you remain on the track itself, and do not deviate from it unless you have an appropriate Permit.

If you simply wish to travel the Canning Stock Route itself, and have no intention whatever of deviating from it, (and that includes for the purposes of camping at night, and collecting water from any of the wells, etc. located off the track), then you can do so without the need for a permit. However, the moment you actually leave the vehicular track, you run the risk of entering an Aboriginal Site. The best course of action therefore is to apply for, and be in possession of a Permit that covers you for all of the areas that you may wish to visit.

The Australian National Four Wheel Drive Council website (www.anfwdc.asn.au) currently has up to date information relating to the new requirements for the Canning. And, from 1 May, 2007, the Council, via its website, is the main point of contact both for information, and for the issuing of Permits. The website has download material available; including a listing of those areas where public access will be permitted, and those where it may be restricted, together with an on-line Permit application and payment process.

The Permit, its attached conditions and an information package will be available for download and printing once your purchase is approved. If you would prefer the package to be mailed to your address, there will be additional postage charges to be added to the purchase. Current prices are \$50 per vehicle Permit and \$15 postage for the package if it is to be mailed to an address within Australia. Postage outside Australia is \$27. Permits are valid for a one month period.

When you log on to the ANFWDC website, there is a red (Canning Stock Route) button on the lower right hand side of the home page. Click on the button and you will be taken to the Permit Application pages. Just below the red button there is an "Access Update" which will take you to the most recently updated information. It is suggested that you have a look at the update before you go to the Permit application process.

If you require any further information about the conditions that now apply along the Canning Stock Route, or if you want to discuss any proposed plans with an expert, and the information you require is not available on the ANFWDC website, there are two (2) contact points:

1. For any additional information between Wells 1 to 15, (Wiluna and Birriliburu areas), you can contact Lisa Maher, Senior Project Officer, Central Desert Native Title Services in Perth on telephone (08) 9425 2000 or fax (08) 9425 2001. Their postal address is: P.O. Box Y3439, East St. Georges Terrace, Perth, WA 6832. The street address is: Lower Ground Floor, 170 Wellington Street, East Perth, WA, 6004. Lisa's email address is: lisahmaher@centraldesert.org.au

2. For additional information and assistance between Wells 15 to 40, (the Martu area), including applications for Permits to visit the Calvert Ranges, you can contact Terry Morgan of the Western Desert Lands Aboriginal Corporation on mobile 0429 965 720 or email him at terrymorgan1951@yahoo.com.au

N.B.: Do not apply to the Ngaanyatjarra Council in Alice Springs for a Permit in relation to the Canning Stock Route.

Steep Point:

Steep Point, the westernmost point on mainland Australia, is located on private property. A Ranger, with some powers, has been appointed by the property owners, and is resident in a cottage on the major access track. You can't miss it going in, there is a big sign advising all travellers to report to the Ranger Station. In 2008, a day trip cost \$22 per vehicle, payable at the Ranger Station. Entry fees for camping were \$22 per vehicle plus \$5.50 per person per night. Camping sites are located on and behind many of the beaches. The ranger can point you in the right direction depending on bookings and wind direction. A trip from Hamelin Pool Caravan Park and Telegraph Station (08 9942 5905) to Steep Point and return can easily be completed in a day. As long as you get an early start you will have ample time to savour the views, take photos, and perhaps return via the Zuytdorp Cliffs. Make sure you have an operating air compressor with you as you MUST lower your tyre pressures to 20 psi when you come to the first sand dunes, and you will need to put them back to your normal dirt road pressures when you exit. The Rangers at Steep Point (Paul and Pam) can be contacted on 08 9948 3993.

Northern Territory:

(See also the paragraph regarding the "intervention" in the NT in the first part of this article titled "Heading Outback – Do I Need a Permit?")

For transit permits across aboriginal lands in the northern areas contact the Northern Land Council. Their Head Office is in Darwin, whilst the Darwin/Daly Area Office is at Palmerston in Darwin. They also have offices at Jabiru for West Arnhem, Katherine for the South Region and Nhulunbuy for East Arnhem. Offices are also located at Ngukurr, Tennant Creek and at Timber Creek. The Head Office postal address is GPO Box 1222, Darwin, NT 0801 and the street address is 45 Mitchell Street, Darwin, NT 0801. Telephone (08) 8920 5100. Fax is (08) 8945 2633. You can download lots of good information, including Permit Application Forms from their web site at www.nlc.org.au; use the "Visiting Aboriginal Lands" button. Click on "Contacts" for all other addresses and contact details.

For central area permits including the Mereenie Loop Road (which cost \$2.50 per vehicle), contact the Central Land Council, 31-33 Stuart Highway, Alice Springs, NT 0870 or PO Box 3321, Alice Springs, NT 0871. Telephone (08) 8951 6211 or Fax (08) 8953 4343. Again, you can download lots of good info and Permit Application Forms from their web site at www.clc.org.au. Permits to travel the Mereenie Loop Road can also be obtained from the Glen Helen Camping Area Office and from the service station at Kings Canyon. You also need to apply to the Central Land Council for a permit to transit the Docker River Road from west of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park boundary to the WA border via the Docker River Community. (This is the second of the two permits needed when transiting the Docker River Road. For the other permit see under WA, Central Reserves Area above).

Please note that permits to transit the Colson Track from the French Line in the Simpson Desert to Numery Station are simply not being issued. (Again, this is due to past problems with damage caused to a number of sacred sites contained within the aboriginal land through which the track runs).

For permits to access the Coburg Peninsula and to camp there, you need to contact the Coburg Peninsula Sanctuary and Marine Park Board, Permits Office, PO Box 496, Palmerston, NT 0831. Telephone (08) 8999 4814 or Fax (08) 8999 4524. A weeks camping (7 nights) at Coburg will cost you (in 2008) the princely sum of \$232.10 per vehicle containing up to five (5) passengers. If you have a Troopy for example, and it is licensed to carry more than five passengers, it will be an extra \$11 per person carried (above five) per week. Permits are only sold by the week so if you wanted to stay for say 8 nights, it would cost you another \$232.10. Note also that as at March, 2008, there are absolutely no commercial activities operating at Coburg. The Gurig Store is closed till further notice. This means that absolutely no supplies whatever are available at Coburg. The fishing and boat hire charter business has also closed and that means that the commercial boat tours to Victoria Settlement are no longer available. Visitors therefore need to be totally self sufficient for their entire stay, and, if you want to visit Victoria Settlement you will need your own boat. Coburg Cottages which had a small number of quite comfortable cottages for rent has also closed. The Ranger Station is of course still open and operating. Check with the Sanctuary and Marine Park Board as to the current status of commercial activities when you apply for your permit.

If you would like to experience and explore the delights of the Gove Peninsula, you will need a permit from the Northern Land Council to traverse the Central Arnhem Road to access Nhulunbuy. You can camp for a night in a few nominated spots on the Central Arnhem Road as the distance to Nhulunbuy is in excess of 700 k's. Some of these small sites charge camping fees of around \$15 per night per vehicle. There is however, one free location. All the locations are shown on the mud map of the Central Arnhem Road which you will receive with your permit.

The Mainoru Roadhouse, (08 8975 4390) which is located on the Central Arnhem Road about 220 kilometres from Katherine, just outside the boundary of the aboriginal land, also offers camping at \$20 per vehicle per night with a limit of 4 persons per vehicle, anything above that and additional charges apply. If you are on your lonesome, it's only \$10 per night. The camping area is a grassed, shady site down behind the Roadhouse on the banks of a quite large creek. It's a pretty good site in comparison to the others. Campers have access to a flush loo and a cold shower. Camping at the Roadhouse breaks the 700 kilometre trip into two easy legs. Whilst the locals generally drive the Central Arnhem Road in one day, that is not advisable for first time visitors. If the Roadhouse telephone doesn't answer for some reason, try Mainoru Station which is about 17 kilometres inland from the Roadhouse on 08 8977 4107.

Once you arrive at Nhulunbuy, you must gain a Recreation Permit to visit and camp at most locations where camping is permitted. The permits, which cost \$25 per person, are valid for a 2 month period. Some special environmentally monitored camp sites are also available at an additional cost of \$15 per vehicle and are valid for 5 days. One other special site is also available at a cost of \$15 per vehicle per night. Advance bookings for this site are essential. Recreation Permits are available (on a personal visit basis only) from the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, PO Box 1551, Nhulunbuy, NT 0881. Telephone (08) 8987 3992 or fax (08) 8987 3224. If you also wish to access Yirrkala, then you will need to write to the Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association Inc., CMB 1, Yirrkala, NT 0880. Telephone (08) 8987 3433 or fax (08) 8987 2304. No camping is available anywhere within the Yirrkala area.

To gain a permit to visit the Gove Peninsula you MUST also book at least your first nights accommodation at one of the two commercial accommodation operators at Nhulunbuy. And, as the Land Council Office is not open over the weekend, you will need to book 2 nights accommodation if you intend to arrive on the Saturday. The cheaper accommodation in town is the very comfortable Gove Peninsula Motel, PO Box 314, Nhulunbuy, NT 0881. Telephone (08) 8987 0700. The cost in 2008 was \$143.00 per double room. The only other accommodation is the Walkabout Lodge and Tavern on 08 8987 1777.

Please also note that the Northern Land Council, under strict instructions from the dozens of affected traditional owners, are simply NOT issuing permits to transit the unnamed track which runs primarily west/east across Arnhem Land from Oenpelli, past Gumadeer, Maningrida and Ramingining, and then turns south to link up with the Central Arnhem Road.

Also, the Central Land Council are NOT issuing permits to transit the Wiso Track (also known as the Warrego Mine Road) which runs from Tennant Creek to Lajamanu, as they consider it impassable. However, permits to transit the NT section of the Sandy Blight Junction Track are once again being issued, but no camping is permitted anywhere along the NT section of the Track. (Also see the comments on the Sandy Blight Junction Track under WA above).

For permits to travel the Hay River area north from Poeppel Corner to Jervois Station (on the Plenty Highway), contact Jol Fleming at Direct 4WD Awareness at Alice Springs on (08) 8952 3359. Permit numbers are strictly limited each year to ensure the area remains unspoilt. Bush tucker tours are available en route at Batton Hill Camp courtesy of Lindsay Bookie, Chairperson of the Central Land Council, or a member of his family. This is a "must do"!

All of the Parks and Reserves in the NT under the control of the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory have free access, but most charge modest camping fees for an overnight stay. Some have Ranger Stations, whilst others have self registration processes in place. The NT Parks and Wildlife Commission can be contacted at PO Box 496, Palmerston, NT 0831. Telephone (08) 8999 4555 or fax (08) 8999 4558.

Bear in mind also that neither Uluru nor Kakadu National Parks fall under the control of the NT Parks and Wildlife Commission. Access to Kakadu is now free, however a camping fee of \$5.40 per person per night is charged in the Park run camping areas, (in 2008). The commercially run sites charge considerably more, usually around \$25-\$30 per site per night. Kakadu can be contacted on (08) 8938 1120.

Uluru still charges both an entry fee and camping fees in 2008. The camping fees for an unpowered site are \$14.50 per person per night for one or two adults, plus \$13.00 per night for any additional adults. Children under 16 are \$7.50 each per night. Powered camping sites are available at \$17.00 per person per night. Camping is only available at the camping area at Voyages Ayers Rock Resort Camping Area who can be contacted on 08 8957 7001. The cheapest Park entry fee is \$25 per person for 3 days. However, if you have a Transit Permit for the Docker River Road, and are entering the Park for the sole purpose of your transit, then no entry fee is required to be paid. Your Permit will however be inspected and you will be told that you are not permitted to stop within the Park. Uluru Park Service can be contacted on (08) 8956 2299.

If you are travelling the Savannah Way from Borroloola to Burketown ensure you carry sufficient fuel for your journey as both the Wologorang and Hells Gate Roadhouses are now closed. The only fuel available on that trip is at Doomadgee. Hours of fuel availability at Doomadgee may also be unreliable.

South Australia:

For travel over aboriginal lands in the northern part of South Australia, which includes for example, the Giles-Mulga Park Road from Kulgera to Wingellina, contact the Anangu Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Land Council on telephone (08) 8954 8104 or fax (08) 8954 8110. But bear in mind that currently the Land Council does not normally issue transit permits for that part of the Giles-Mulga Park Road, nor for any of the other tracks in the area. However, if you simply wish to visit any of the very worthwhile art galleries located on AP-Y lands at Indulkana, Fregon, Amata and Papulankutja, then it is strongly suggested that you simply contact the Manager of the particular art gallery concerned. The web site for Amata is www.minymakuarts.com.au and information on a number of other art galleries in the area is available on www.marshallarts.com.au. If you do manage to gain a permit to visit any of those areas you will find that it is the most beautiful document you will ever have been issued. The permits are a work of aboriginal art in themselves.

To visit Surveyor-General's Corner, the normal access is from Warakurna on the Great Central Road down to Wingellina (where you pick up an escort/guide) and then out to the Corner. Applications for permits are made to the Ngaanyatjarra Land Council – see under WA above.

For travel over aboriginal lands in the central part of South Australia, for example to traverse the Anne Beadell Highway, contact the Maralinga Lands Council at Maralinga Tjarutja Inc., Att. Permits Officer, P.O. Box 435, Ceduna, SA 5690. Telephone (08) 8625 2946. Their fax number is (08) 8625 3076.

Also bear in mind that a range of other permits are also required to travel the Anne Beadell Highway, including a Desert Parks Pass (see below), or at least a permit to access and camp in the Tallaringa Conservation Reserve and one for the Unnamed Conservation Park. And very importantly, you will need a pass for the Woomera Prohibited Area. As the Desert Parks Pass does not include in its coverage the Unnamed Conservation Park, you will still need a permit for there even if you have a Desert Parks Pass. Contact the Department for Environment and Heritage, Outback Region, P.O. Box 78, Port Augusta, SA 5700. Telephone (08) 8648 5300 and fax (08) 8648 5301.

You must also have a permit to traverse and visit locations within the Woomera Prohibited Area. Contact the Defence Support Centre, Att. Wally Broome, P.O. Box 157, Woomera, SA 5270. Telephone (08) 8674 3370 (which is a 24 hour number) and fax (08) 8674 3308. And, when travelling through Mabel Downs Station which is located at the Coober Pedy end of the Anne Beadell Highway, ensure you observe the signs and leave all gates exactly as you find them.

Permits to travel the Mt Davies Track, which most maps show as running from Anne's Corner on the Anne Beadell Highway north west to Iltur, are also NOT being issued by the Land Council. Apparently the track has never been used since it was first put in by Len Beadell in the 1960's and in the main simply no longer exists.

South Australia is also very similar to WA in that many of their parks require the payment of an entry fee. Camping fees can also apply. The SA Department for Environment and Heritage offers a very wide range of Passes (with an equally wide range of costs) for entry into their parks - (see their website address below). From a four wheel driver's perspective the best pass is the Desert Parks Pass. This pass covers both entry fees and camping (where permitted) in the following parks: Simpson Desert Conservation Park; Simpson Desert Regional Reserve; Witjira National Park; Innamincka Regional Reserve; Coongie Lakes National Park; Strzelecki Regional Reserve; Lake Eyre National Park; Tallaringa Conservation Park and Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park, (camping where permitted). But again note that the Desert Parks Pass does not include the Unnamed Conservation Park. The current cost (March, 2008) of a Desert Parks Pass is \$95 for 12 months. However, when you renew the next year, the cost is then only \$60, and renewals remain at the cheap rate for the next following 2 years. (N.B.: The cost of a Desert Parks Pass will rise to \$105 on 1 April, 2008, with renewals rising to \$65).

When purchasing a Desert Parks Pass, you get a lot more for your money than simply the Pass. You also receive a full information kit, including a series of maps. Any updates are issued with renewals. So it does represent reasonable value for money. Most of the parks covered by the Pass charge entry and/or camping fees. Some examples would be: \$37.50 for a two night stay at Coongie Lakes; \$22.50 per park for a one night stay at each of Witjira, Dalhousie and Lake Eyre; and \$12.50 for a one night stay in Tallaringa Regional Reserve. So two nights spent at Coongie and a night each at the other locations would cost a lot more than the 12 month Desert Parks Pass which gives you unlimited visits and camping at all the locations covered.

The Department for Environment and Heritage Help Line in Adelaide is on 08 8204 1910. Their very helpful website is www.parks.sa.gov.au There is also a Desert Parks Pass Hotline which is on freecall 1800 816 078.

To access Googs Track you will need a Permit issued by the SA Department for Environment and Heritage at 11 McKenzie Street, Ceduna, SA 5690. Their postal address is PO Box 569, Ceduna, SA 5690. Telephone (08) 8625 3144 and fax (08) 8625 3123. Permits (in 2008) cost \$5 per night per vehicle. So a 3 night stay will only cost you \$15. Most of Googs Track is now located within the Yumbarra Conservation Park and the Yellabinna Regional Reserve. Best camping areas are at Googs Lake and at Mount Finke. You will get a small information package and mud map with your permit.

South Australia also operates what they refer to as Public Access Routes. These are mainly old stock routes, most of which traverse private property or leasehold land. They have now been upgraded to the status of tracks, and vehicular access is provided. No specific permits are required to traverse these tracks, however where they are within, or give access to, a National Park or Reserve, then a permit may be required to both access and/or camp in the Park or Reserve. Examples of these tracks include both the Level Post Bay and Halligan Bay Track within Lake Eyre National Park. A permit is required to access and camp in the Park. The most recently opened Public Access Route that I am aware of is the Walker Crossing Track which runs from the Birdsville Track some 122 k's south of Birdsville through to Innamincka.

To traverse the Bore Track which runs from the Birdsville Track south to Bollards Lagoon near Cameron Corner, a \$10 per vehicle fee is payable at Bollards Lagoon Homestead on your arrival.

Queensland:

There are no major Land Councils or other such organizations in Queensland where permits to transit or visit aboriginal areas might be generally obtainable. However, if you want some general information regarding aboriginal lands and any general requirements, particularly the liquor laws, contact the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs on (07) 3224 2111. The telephone number for the Cairns Regional Office which has responsibility for the Cape York Region is (07) 4039 8177.

From my experience however, it is simply a matter of contacting the particular community and ascertaining their requirements. Camping fees generally apply at most communities where camping is available. The fees seem to range from about \$5 per vehicle per night up to about \$30 per night. Others charge an entry permit of about \$30 per week. There may also be a small per night camping fee on top of that. Again, the Exploroz website can be very helpful, and the Hema Maps of the area also contain contact details for the various communities. For areas on the west coast north of Weipa, contact the Weipa Caravan Park on (07) 4069 7871.

The only permit currently required to access the tip of Cape York is one from the Injinoo people. This is however included in the cost of the ferry across the Jardine River. A small information booklet is also normally provided. Currently, (March, 2008), the ferry trip will cost \$88 for your vehicle and an additional \$11 for a trailer. However, a new Injinoo Council takes office later in March, 2008, and it is highly likely that there may be an increase in ferry charges. The ferry charges include your return trip, so make sure you keep your ticket. Be warned that

the old vehicle crossing is now too deep to cross. The Jardine Ferry shop can be contacted on 07 4069 1369 for up to date charges. Camping at the very nice camping ground adjacent to the ferry and shop on the south bank of the Jardine is available at \$5 per person per night as at March, 2008. Some contact details for camping at the Tip include: Loyalty Beach 07 4069 3372; Seisia Camping Ground 07 4069 3243 and Punsand Bay 07 4069 1722.

As far as I can ascertain, there are no annual or other permits generally available from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, which is a Division of the Qld Environment Protection Agency. The Parks and Wildlife Service has a Customer Service Centre which can be contacted on 1300 130 372. The Environment Protection Agency can be contacted on telephone (07) 3227 8186. Their website is at www.epa.qld.gov.au. Camping charges are levied for all Qld National Parks and State Forests. Generally, the charge is \$4.50 per person per night. If you are visiting any of the more popular National Parks or State Forests, particularly during any busy season or school holidays, it is highly advisable to book well ahead. It is a real pain I know, but you will need to know the exact dates of your visit to do so. Ballot systems may also apply, so check it out well in advance. A booking service for all of the more popular National Parks and State Forests is available on telephone 13 13 04.

Vehicle Entry Permits, which cost \$35.40 and are valid for a one month period, are required for Fraser Island and Moreton Island. Camping fees of \$4.50 per person per night and ferry charges also apply. On Bribie Island, as well as camping fees of \$4.50 per person per night, a weekly Vehicle Entry Permit to the National Park also applies at \$33.90. A self registration process for camping fees might also be available at Bribie Island.

For the more remote national parks you will either need to call into the appropriate Ranger Station to book your camp site and pay your fees, or in some cases, for example in Cape Melville and Lakefield, self registration requirements apply, which includes the camping fee of \$4.50 per night per person.

Tasmania:

Entry fees and camping fees apply in all Tasmanian National Parks. A range of entry permits are available; In 2008 a daily permit for a 24 hour period is \$22 per vehicle; a Holiday Pass is available for a 2 month period for \$56; and an Annual All Parks Permit is available for \$66 Low Season purchase or \$90 High Season purchase – concession rates are available for the All Parks Permit.

Camping fees vary markedly in cost. They can range between \$6 per couple per night, to \$15 per family per night, and up to \$45 per couple per night depending on: the facilities offered within the Park; whether the area you intend to stay in is run by the Park Service or a commercial operator; and of course whether you want a powered or unpowered site or simply a tent site.

In peak periods, some of the Parks operate a ballot system due to demand, so you may need to apply many months ahead of the anticipated date of your visit. Out of peak season however, some of those same areas simply operate self registration systems. So check the website which is noted below. The Tasmania National Parks Visitor Information Service is contactable Monday to Friday on 1300 135 513. The direct number for the Park Entry section is 03 6233 2621.

Their very informative web site is at www.parks.tas.gov.au.

Their postal address is Parks and Wildlife Service, GPO Box 1751, Hobart, Tas. 7001.

Victoria:

There are no areas in Victoria where any form of aboriginal permit entry system operates. However, in a number of the more popular national parks and conservation areas entry fees and/or camping fees apply. In winter, the costs increase in those parks where snow areas and/or ski resorts operate. For example a day entry pass (summer) in Mount Buffalo is \$10, but in winter a day pass is \$14. Other Parks charge similar amounts for the summer entry cost. A few others are considerably cheaper.

They also have a system of Annual Parks Passes and Multi Day Passes for a number of National Parks: Wilson's Promontory, (\$50 Annual - \$15.80 for a 2 consecutive day pass); Mount Buffalo, (\$51.50 Annual - \$15.80 for 2 consecutive days); and Mornington Peninsula (\$23.50 Annual). These offer considerable savings over day passes if you are planning on multiple entries.

A National Parks Pass is also available covering multiple entries to the following Parks: Wilsons Promontory; Mount Buffalo; Mornington Peninsula; Baw Baw; and Yarra Ranges. Cost is \$70.50 in 2008 for a 12 month period from the date of purchase.

Day passes are available from the Parks themselves, as are the Multi Day and Annual Passes. The National Parks Pass is also available from Parks Victoria Information Centre on phone 13 19 63.

Camping fees, which vary from park to park, also apply in many National Parks regardless of whether or not an entry fee is payable. For example, camping in Grampians National Park is \$12.50 per vehicle per night. A second vehicle on the same site costs an additional \$5.30 per night.

Some good information is available from the Parks Victoria web site at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au and click on "Parks and Reserves".

New South Wales:

In our home state, there are no aboriginal permit requirements that I am aware of, however, a number of our National Parks and Reserves (about 10% of them, which includes most of the more popular Parks) do levy an entry fee. And, in some there is also an overnight camping fee. If you are in the habit of spending quite a few nights away in our own national parks, or you visit a number each year where charges are levied, then you might want to consider a National Park Annual Pass. They are available from a number of outlets, including Royal National Park and from the National Park Shop located in Cadman's Cottage at Circular Quay. They can be bought to cover a 1 or 2-year period. By way of examples: an All Parks Annual Pass including Kosciusko is \$190 per annum or \$335 for a 2-year pass; excluding Kosciusko reduces the rates to \$65 and \$115. Single Park and Multi Park Passes are also available. They can also be ordered on-line via the NP&WS website – see below.

Daily rates of admission can be reasonably high. Rates vary from a general minimum of \$7 per vehicle to \$11 per vehicle. Sydney Harbour National Park and Burratorang State Conservation Area are only \$3 per vehicle. Oxley Wild Rivers National Park does have some special entry costs to particular areas which can be up to \$25 per day. During the skiing season a day entry to Kosciusko National Park is \$27 whilst for the rest of the year it is \$16. The website contains all the details.

The New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service website is: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

And of course if you enjoy driving on the sand dunes at Stockton Beach, then you will need your Recreational Vehicle Area Permit for such activities. These are available at a number of outlets in and around Newcastle, including the Birubi Beach Service Station, Gan Gan Road, Anna Bay (02 4982 2201) and the Birubi Beach Caravan Park in James Patterson Street, Anna Bay (02 4982 1263). They are also available at Out of Town 4WD at Barnsley (02 4953 3288), and at the Metro Lavis Service Station, Nelson Bay Road, Williamtown, (opposite Lavis Lane which is one of the entry points to Stockton Beach). The Metro Lavis can be contacted on 02 4965 0401, and is probably the closest location for persons from Sydney. The minimum three day permit costs \$10 per vehicle, and a 12 month permit costs \$30. (N.B.: The Recreational Vehicle Area at Stockton, together with some other nearby areas has recently been handed over by the Port Stephens Shire Council to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. They in turn are to hand some of the area back to the aborigines. So in the not too distant future there may be some changes occurring in relation to the current access processes at Stockton).

The 3 kilometres or so of public beach access from Saddlington Drive in Hawks Nest to Lemon Tree requires an annual pass issued by the local Council. They are available at a cost of \$45 (June to June) from the Tea Gardens Visitor Information Centre, Myall Street, Tea Gardens or from the Hawks Nest News agency.

Currently, (March, 2008) the beach run within Myall Lakes National Park is only open from Lemon Tree to Little Gibber. The rest of the beach, both north and south is closed till further notice. Permits (which are essentially your National Park entry fee), are available either on a daily basis at \$7 each or \$22 for a 12 month period from date of purchase. They are obtainable from the same locations as the Council Permit above, and from the Booti Booti National Park Office. The beach area is very much subject to erosion from wind and tidal action and is subject to closure from time to time. So if you are planning a visit it would be well worthwhile ringing the National Park Area Office which is located within Booti Booti National Park on 02 6591 0300 to ascertain the latest information.

General:

Don't forget, if you are dealing with a National Park Service or any Government Agency, and you have a Seniors Card or a Pension Card of some description, always ask whether a Seniors Discount is available. In most cases the answer is, yes!

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this article, no responsibility can be accepted for either the accuracy of the contents or for any errors or omissions.

With your assistance we might also endeavour to maintain this information in an updated form. So if you wish to amend, or add to any of the information contained in this article, please contact the undersigned on (02) 9523 9266 or email at john.greig@bigpond.com

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