



Come! Sit! Stay!

Paw Wheel Driving – Wheeling wild and windy with dogs

Photography by Animax

It's widely known around my circle of friends and work mates that my idea of roughing it is a 4-star hotel offering limited room service past 10:30 pm. So when I announced to the office that I was going camping this weekend, I expected a few raised eyebrows. My mention of what I had planned was actually met with stunned silence then quiet snickering. "It's a special dog camping weekend where we get to do some off road, 4-wheel driving action", I say. This is met with some surprised looks and audible giggling from some of my co-workers. One helpfully points out that the weather forecast for the weekend involves gale-force winds and rain. "So", I retort, "I'll just pack a couple of extra towels for the dogs and take my rain coat." Secretly, I'm afraid of getting wet and being cold-with no running water, electricity or instant access to a soy-half-and-half-decaf.

The evening weather forecast predicts high winds, cool temperatures and expected precipitation and I'm starting to feel uneasy about spending a windswept and soggy time in a tent. There's no way that I can possibly get out of going as I've arranged for a girlfriend to accompany me and she's had to reshuffle some social commitments to come along.

I awake on Saturday morning to pelting rain and wind so strong, it makes the house shudder. This does not look good. My childhood camping memories were trips away over the summer break where the weather was fine, skies were blue and you only got wet after diving into a refreshing lake or river. I ring the tour operator, Johnno Graczol, to check in with him and make sure that he's decided to cancel the trip. Johnno tries to reassure me that the weather is nice and fine down South and we should be in for blue skies. I'm sure he can hear the panic in my voice and he soothingly tries to reassure me that the trip will be fun, we'll be leaving the bad weather behind us in Sydney. He says all of this as I watch a tree in my backyard bend in the wind to a 90 degree angle.



I gather up everything a girl and two dogs will need for this weekend and pack another sweater and a Gore-Tex jacket that I've worn once on a snow-capped Swiss Alp. My girlfriend arrives and we both load the car up with our bags and a total of three dogs-her Border Collie and my two Dali's. As we drive to our first meeting point, neither of us mention the wild weather-though it's obvious from her après-ski apparel, that the weather is a concern of hers as well. We're to

meet Johnno from Paw Wheel Drive and other campers at a large service station past Campbelltown.

Paw Wheel Drive is a specialist 'tag-along' camping company that arranges trips to dog friendly locations. Husband and wife team, Johnno Graczol and Mel Warren, created the concept a year ago. Johnno's had ten years experience organising tag-along camping tours and came up with the 'dog friendly' idea due to his and Mel's love of dogs. They have three dogs (Jack Russell, Josh and Foxy Terriers, Bibs and Bobs) who accompany them on



animax photography

if it moves, we'll shoot it!

Studio & Home Shoots

Gift Vouchers

Commercial Photography

www.animax.com.au

0402 003 266

0405 457 667

Specialising in bringing your pets' personality out on film

their many 4-wheel drive, camping adventures. As Johnno explains, "We set up Paw Wheel Drive so that we could combine the many things we enjoy—good food, great locations, camping in comfort and canine companionship. We talked to a lot of our camping customers and established that many people want to bring their dog along for a trip—whether it's a weekend or longer."

We meet up with two other teams of campers and after introductions set off, following Johnno and Mel's lead car. We travel for about an hour to reach a waterhole in the Penrose State Forest for morning tea. The dogs (there's a total of nine between eight people) take an icy plunge, while us humans enjoy a morning tea courtesy of the Paw Wheel Drive team. The dogs compete with each other, chasing floating tennis balls and buoyant frisbees. I'm quite content on not venturing into the water and instead make short work of the freshly brewed coffee and selection of tempting cookies.

From the waterhole we do some easy off-road driving that involves crossing a small and manageable river. We then drive through some very scenic Southern Highland towns like Bundanoon and Exeter and head over the historic Hampton Bridge. Here Johnno signals us all to pull into the parking lot. He explains that this is the oldest and most photographed Sandstone suspension bridge in Australia. We stretch our legs by walking down to the river under the bridge. It's really just another opportunity for dogs to take another cold, watery plunge and for us to laugh at their antics.

Johnno and Mel once again take the lead and we're off to the tearooms at the Cambewarra Lookout for lunch. We perch on the grassy-sloped picnic area that has stunning views over the Shoalhaven and Jervis Bay. The wind seems pretty fierce—it is a launching area for hang-gliders—however, we've got a quiet, sheltered spot. The Paw Wheel Drive team have organised fresh focaccias and salads for our lunch and it's really a great location to suck in the views and woof down some food.

We leave the lookout and venture into the township of Nowra to collect any last minute items or supplies. From Nowra we head about 28 kms west to the camp-site of Yalwal by the Danjera Dam. There's some easy off road driving and when we get to the campsite we're quite taken by the scenery. Yalwal was once a substantial goldmining town—the last of the goldmines closed in the 1920s. Some of the homes were dismantled in World War I as building materials were in short supply. The 1939 bushfires destroyed most of what remained and the former township was entirely covered by water in 1972 when Danjera Creek Dam opened. Yalwal Cemetery is all that remains from the original settlement.

From here we set up camp—actually we watch Johnno and the other campers set up camp. I've never set up a tent in my life and wouldn't know where to begin. Thankfully Paw Wheel Drive cater to the softer side of potential campers and can organise tents, beds and arrange pretty much everything. Within a short time there is a roaring camp-fire and all tents are erected including the company's roomy dining tent. It's quite windy at the camp-site, yet many of my fellow campers are certain that the winds will die down at sunset—I'm more pessimistic believing the wind is getting wilder.

Mel emerges from the main tent with platters of homemade dips and delicious gourmet cheeses and nibbles. This is a great opportunity for everyone to sit around the campfire and get acquainted while the dogs get in some dusk playtime. I'm curious as to Johnno's background and enthusiasm for camping. It turns out that his family has a history of spending time in the bush. As Johnno explains, "My Gandfather 'Pop' like his dad, was a cattelman of the high country and used to run stock through the Snowy Mountains. The area is now classed as Wilderness within the Kosciusko National Park and can't be accessed by the public. Pop built two cattelman huts in the Mountains and as a family, we would stay up there for two weeks at a time. I believe the huts are still standing. The huts didn't have power, gas or refrigeration. Pop was a master cook and taught me everything I know about bush cooking and camping."

As if on cue, Mel summons Johnno to the kitchen and shortly he emerges with several large cast iron camp ovens and loads them into the camp-fire. "We try to keep the heat even on the top and bottom of the ovens. Cooking and camping with Pop as a young child, fuelled my passion for camping."

It's a treat to watch the sparks of the camp-fire fly until our concern turns to a usually ball and stick obsessed dog—he's now busy trying to catch the wildly flying embers! Our little group of campers are illuminated by the fire and there's a lovely night-time calm around the fire. Occasionally Johnno will check on the food cooking in the ovens and we're greeted by the delicious smells wafting from the heavy ovens.



About Paw Wheel Drive

Paw Wheel Drive also operate 4-wheel drive tours around Moss Vale, Watagan Mountains, Belanglo State Forest, Lithgow and Barrington Tops. They can cater for as few as two people or as many as twenty. They can arrange hire of a 4-wheel drive if needed and camping equipment including tent, beds and lantern. People with dietary restrictions are catered for and the operators just need to be advised a week prior.

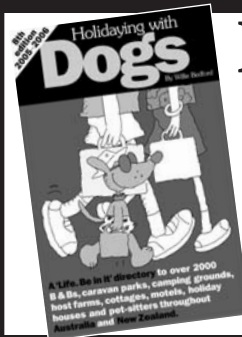
Prices for a weekend start at \$175 per person. High school children are \$50 each and primary school and under are free. All meals and refreshments are included in the price. Dogs are free.

What you will need to bring:

- warm and light clothing
- sleeping bag or doona
- swimming cossie
- torch
- towels
- toiletries
- BYO alcoholic beverages
- dog food/waterbowl/dog bowl/dog treats/dog poo bags & dog

Contact: Johnno Graczol, Paw Wheel Drive
ph: 0406 333 899
web: www.pawwheeldrive.com

www.holidayingwithdogs.com.au



Holidaying with Dogs

THE DOG OWNERS TRAVEL BIBLE
WITH OVER 2000 PLACES TO STAY

Locations include city & country; beach-fronted cottages; peaceful hideaways; top-rated caravan parks & spots along major tourist routes.

Many welcome dogs inside.

rrp \$19.95

Available from Bookshops, Kmart, Big W, Vets, Map, Outdoor & Pet shops or on-line www.holidayingwithdogs.com.au or phone 'Life. Be in it' 03 5237 6622.

By the time dinner is served, the wine and conversation is flowing. The roast dinner awaiting us is delicious and has all the trimmings. We're all gob smacked that such a sophisticated and gastronomically pleasing meal could have been cooked so well by such a seemingly, simple method. Mel and Johnno are the consummate hosts with fascinating and often funny stories of their camping adventures.



After dinner and desert, the day's travel, the fresh air and possibly the pinot has taken its toll—sleep beckons. Despite my fellow campers suggesting that the winds would die down after sunset, the weather seems even more gusty than earlier in the day. My girlfriend and I settle in for the night in our spacious, shared tent. Dogs take up their preferred positions next to us and I try to shut out the noise of the wind and work hard at falling asleep.



Staying asleep through the wild weather proves to be quite a challenge. When the light peeps through the tent I can tell that, like me, my travelling buddy hasn't had a good night's sleep. Dogs are stirring so I take all three out for a glacial, Gore-Tex encased romp along the edge of the dam. When we return to camp, Johnno is busy stoking the fire and has prepared a fresh brew of coffee. We get a 'room service' delivery of coffee to jump-start our morning and are told that breakfast will be ready in about fifteen minutes.

Breakfast consists of large quantities of bacon, hash browns, eggs, toast and juices. It's all delicious, washed down with more coffee. Johnno confesses that he checked on us all several times during the night to ensure that we hadn't been blown away. He's keen to see if us campers are interested in taking a drive and bush walk with the dogs. The bush walk is one of the Paw Wheels Drive team's favourite as it takes in some stunning views of the dam, passes the old goldmines and has an interesting trek with a surprise view (which we won't reveal).

A light lunch awaits our return to camp and we're amazed at being served up a scrumptious cake that's come hot from the campfire. We all pitch in to pack up camp and have time for dogs to have one last romp and plunge in the dam.

We make our way to Berry where we drop into pet emporium, Barking Mad, and then say our goodbyes before making our own way back to Sydney. Pardon the pun but we're 'dog tired'—humans and dogs alike. In fact the dogs are all passed out in the back of the car and don't move even when we fill up at the gas station. We've got lots of great stories from our trip to tell our respective 'stay-at-home' partners but I'm so tired I just fall into bed for a 12-hour sleep.

The Paw Wheel Drive adventure is a great way to experience camping. The team really try to ensure that you have a comfortable and enjoyable time. Johnno and Mel have spent a great deal of time sourcing interesting locations and planning their various menus. We only wish that they could have more control over the weather!

Disclaimer: Normally Urban Animal reviews 'Come Sit Stay' pet friendly accommodation and locations without the prior knowledge of the establishment/operator—whether or not the operator is an advertiser. As the operators of Paw Wheel Drive had visited our office and met our staff and dogs, it was impossible for us to do this feature without their knowledge. We should also point out that Paw Wheel Drive are current advertisers.


**Paw Wheel
Drive**
Bring ya dog along.



4WD camping holidays
for you and your dog.

Dog walking and minding services
also available.



mob 0406 333 899
www.pawwheeldrive.com