

Experience is...

The great teacher

And here's an opportunity to learn from someone else's, namely Elspeth Callender's. We've had several people ask for her camping tips, so here they are!

Photos: Outback Regional Tourism Organisation

In the process of carefully packing my gear for what was to become a 6500-kilometre solo journey across Australia on a Honda CB250 during the winter of 2001, I diligently wedged a hardback copy of the *Macquarie Dictionary* between spare woollen socks and a tyre puncture kit. In my defence, it was a concise version.

Of course, experience has since taught me that spelling is not so important for such a trip. Even at the time I realised my mistake, though too late, and considered purchasing a thesaurus halfway across the Nullarbor to find out exactly how many different ways there were to describe someone who completely lacks sound judgement, but the roadhouses were clean out.

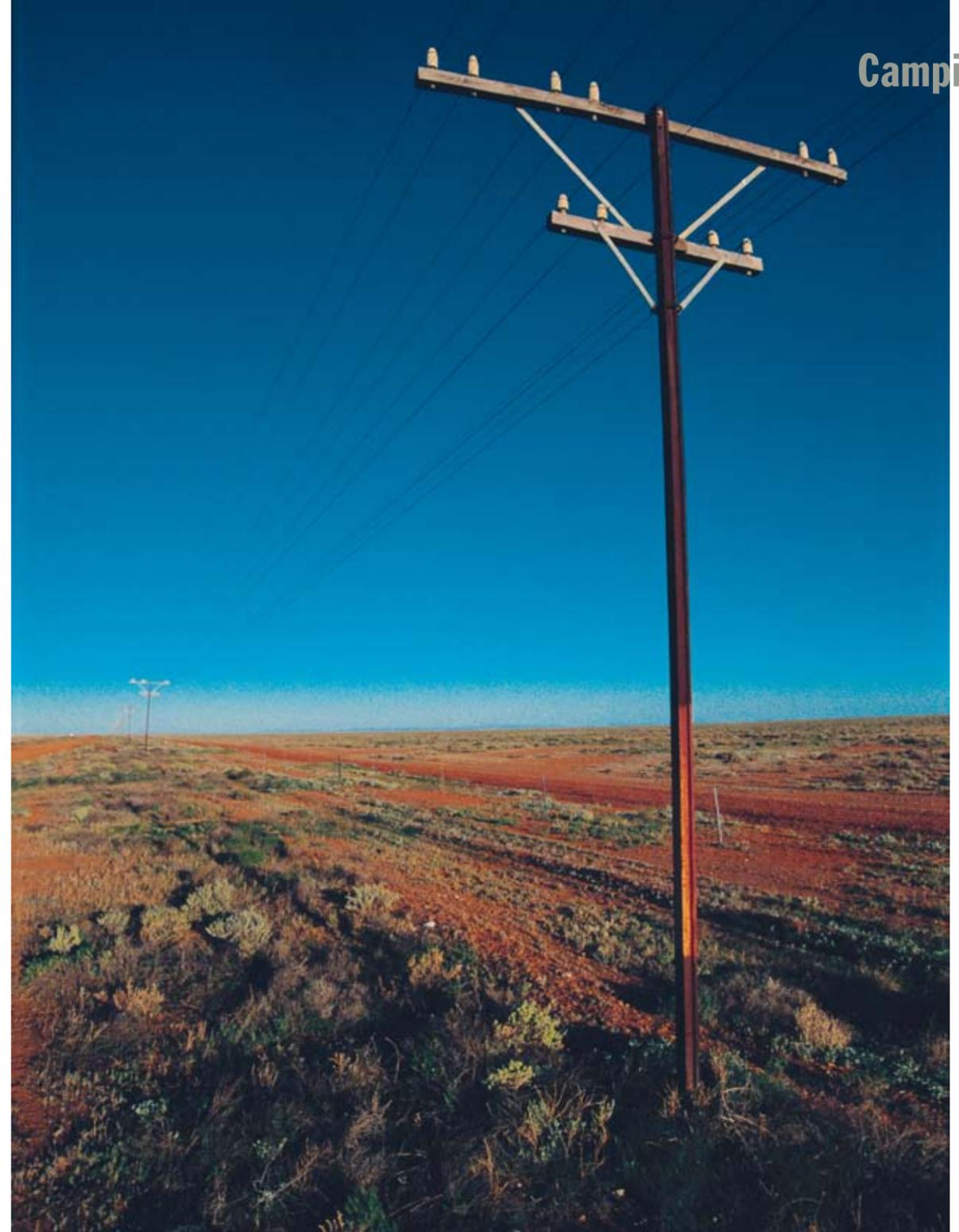
At the time, I knew quite a lot about camping, a fair bit about travel and not so much about motorcycles, so over half a decade later it's interesting to consider the choices of gear I made and what decisions I'd make differently now for the same journey. And because I'm as anally retentive as a constipated librarian, or perhaps because I somehow knew that one day I'd have a professional collision with a grizzly motorcycle magazine editor, this reflection is helped by the fact that I kept a record of everything I took.

My plan was to sometimes stay in pub accommodation, but also be fully equipped to camp anywhere — the side of the road, in the bush, at a camping ground — when I felt like it. The gear I took was specifically for a solo trip and one on which I was passing at least one roadhouse/service station each day.

What seemed like a good idea at the time and was:

- *helmet* — came in handy for keeping bugs out of my face as well as knots and the police out my hair
- *bike tool kit* — including digital tyre pressure gauge, puncture kit, fuses, chain lube etc
- *spare fuel* — in an airtight metal container
- *all-weather riding jacket* — with various layers to remove and replace depending on conditions
- *jacket fabric repair kit* — used early on when I threw my jacket over the wrong part of the seat and invited the exhaust pipe to melt a hole in one arm
- *waterproof pants* — never used but it would have rained non-stop if I hadn't taken them
- *fleecy balaclava* — which I now have in pure merino wool that is less bulky and just as warm
- *first-aid kit* — that I knew the contents of and how to use them
- *insect bite relief cream* — because it's hard to ride when you're itchy
- *gaffer tape* — for fixing all sorts of unforeseen problems and keeping hostages quiet
- *a good book* — relating to the countryside I was travelling through: Peter Carey's *The True History of the Kelly Gang* for Victoria, for example (I avoid horror stories and psychological thrillers on lone camping trips)
- *pen and paper* — because travelling alone can make you creative
- *sleeping bag* — that promised to keep me warm above -10° being winter and all
- *silk sleeping bag liner* — which is much lighter and easier to dry than cotton
- *waterproof bivvy bag* — though I must admit I haven't used it since
- *full-length inflatable camping mattress* — because it's not worth the lost sleep getting a three-quarter-length mattress to

- *save on weight*
- *inflatable camping mattress repair kit* — to make Baden Powell proud
- *camera* — because nobody else is there to see it at the time
- *metho stove* — is easy to use, lightweight and methylated spirits is available at most service stations
- *cooking pot that came with the stove* — for cooking up canned food for dinner, eating cereal out of for breakfast and boiling water for tea
- *watch or clock* — or clock on mobile phone
- *lighter and matches*
- *rubber bands* — because they always come in handy
- *bike cover* — which not only covered the bike overnight but all my gear when I was camping as bivvy bags are only made for one
- *mobile phone with recharger* — that a select few knew the number for, so it was a useful safety device that didn't interrupt my own space and time travel
- *few hundred dollars in cash* — just in case some ATM in the middle of the Nullarbor wasn't working that week
- *credit card, drivers licence, Medicare card etc* — for ID and going to the doctor for free
- *rego papers* — because I wanted to sell my bike at the other end and just in case my rego sticker thingy fell off
- *sewing kit* — from the last decent hotel I stayed in because a stitch in time saves a big gaping hole that lets the wind in, didn't your mother ever mention?
- *general toiletries* — which I won't list as these things are relevant to age, gender, physical needs and necessary level of maintenance, though I can advise toothpaste with a screw-on lid so that it's less likely to bust in your bag and have you screaming "why do bad things happen to good people!" at the end of the day, liquid soap in little dispensing bottles from camping stores and a few travel packs of aloe vera tissues
- *sunscreen* — also with a screw-on lid and 15+ lip moisturiser
- *one set of 'good' clothes* — for looking civilised in civilisation because you never know when you'll be going out for meal in Melbourne, a winery tour in the Clare Valley or a pub crawl in Kalgoorlie
- *shoes* — which looked good and liked bushwalking
- *tracksuit pants* — for comfort when camping
- *thermal gloves* — for under my riding gloves and for those cold camping mornings and evenings
- *thermal top and long johns* — essential though they should be good quality and fit well, which mine didn't
- *windbreaker vest* — an extra layer when riding, and for camping
- *a couple of T-shirts*
- *maps* — of the cities I was going to have to orientate myself around
- *National Parks of Australia map book* — that provided me with all the other maps I needed as well as information on national parks of interest, though a large and heavy publication
- *occy straps* — for strapping on my octopus (eh?)
- *sunglasses* — comfortable enough to wear under my helmet every day for hours
- *snap lock bags* — of differing sizes for carrying garbage, storing food and protecting maps
- *Platypus water containers* — made from transparent plastic that folds down as you empty them, roll down to almost nothing for storage and come in varying sizes
- *stainless-steel drinking mug*



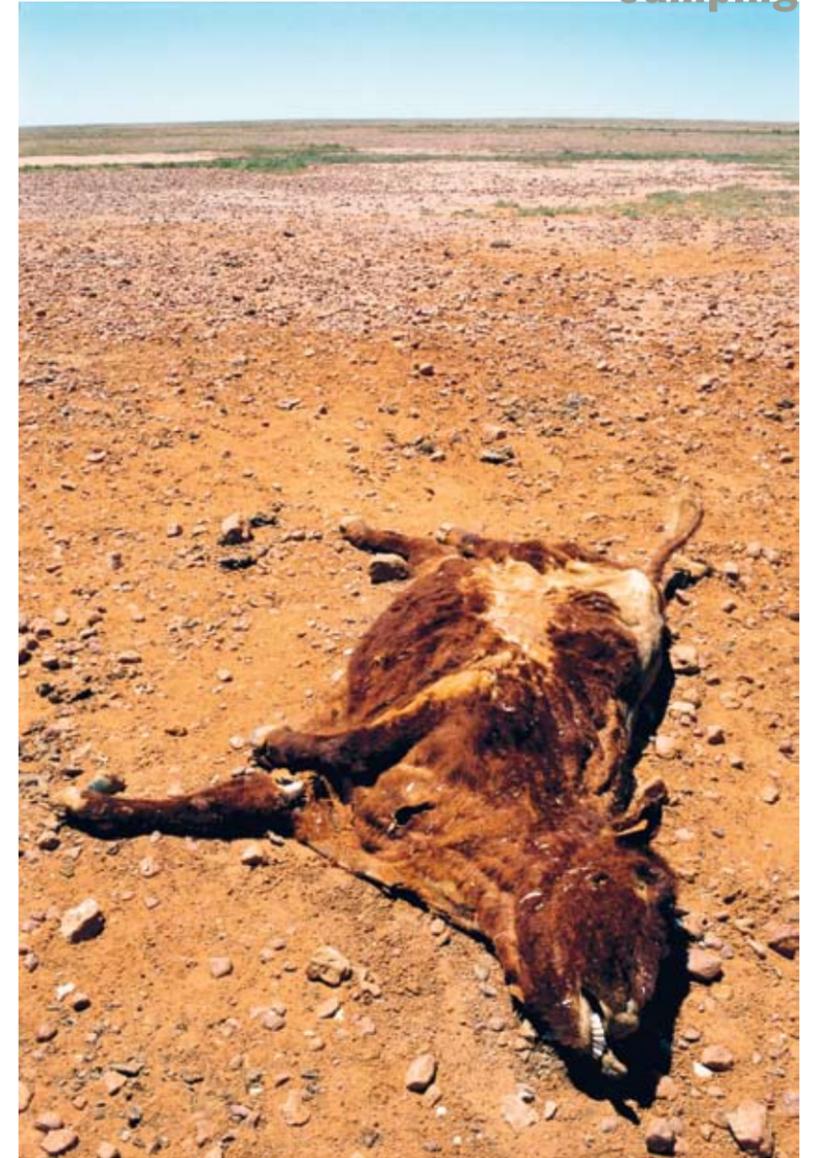
What seemed like a good idea at the time and wasn't:

- *shutter release cord for my camera* — which didn't allow for the attachment; a slight oversight though not as seriously stupid as the dictionary
- *travelling tripod* — rarely used because I found it more fun to improvise with what nature provided
- *torch* — was rarely used because I had to hold it
- *mini Leatherman* — just in case I lost my Leatherman, which I didn't
- *multivitamins and Listerine* — were unnecessary weight and space takers, and who was there to notice I was lethargic or to smell my breath anyway?
- *University Co-op bookshop card and warranty for my watch* — were fairly unnecessary except perhaps as bookmarks in the dictionary if I'd used it
- *six pairs of socks*
- *tin breakfast bowl* — wasn't used because I ended up eating everything out of the one saucepan I cooked in
- *bobby pin and a 2 cent coin* — that somehow stowed away in my bag from another time in history (later posted to Sydney University's School of Archaeology for careful examination) ▶

- *Nepalese tea* — because going travelling doesn't mean you're suddenly going to change your beverage habits and meditate more
- *extra cooking pots* — as I ended up using one for everything
- *an extra fleece* — was unnecessary, though it was important to have extra thermals in case the ones I was in got wet or too dirty
- *foldout camping knife, spoon and fork* — because I only made tea and ate tinned food and cereal, so a spoon was all I needed and a full sized one would have been much more comfortable to hold than a small camping spoon that made me feel like Alice in Wonderland after she ate the very small "EAT ME" cake that made her grow larger
- *full-sized scissors* — were unnecessary when I had a knife and a tiny pair in the first-aid kit
- *garbage bags* — which I never used
- *can-opener* — when all the tins I bought had a self-opening tab and there was a can-opener on my Leatherman if that broke
- *squares of aluminium foil* — for gourmet cooking, but on my own I kept it much simpler than expected
- *a jumper that looked warm and wasn't* — because there was no point taking anything that didn't also serve a functional purpose apart from my one set of "good" clothes
- *beanie* — when in fact balaclavas double as beanies
- *hand-me-down army-issued thermals* — in passion-killer green and scratchy to keep 'em tough, and I now know that it's always worth spending the money and only taking completely comfortable clothing that fits perfectly
- *an extra T-shirt that mum was throwing out* — when there are only so many T-shirts a person needs, however, that T-shirt was sewn (enter trusty hotel sewing kit) into a very useful camera bag along the way
- *wooden chopping board* — thinking I'd be preparing vegetables every evening, which I never did, but the chopping board made an excellent place for the bike's side stand when I was in sandy, muddy or grassy conditions until it cracked in half a few days later and became half a wooden chopping board that was an excellent place for the side stand to go until it cracked in half again a few days later

What I'd also take next time:

- *EPIRB* — (emergency position indicating radio beacon)
- *headlamp* — so both hands are free
- *tent* — which is more practical than a bivvy bag for wet conditions, comfort and a place for gear
- *better riding gear* — which I've since bought (such as my BMW Comfortshell trousers that are breathable, water resistant, fast-drying, stylish and so comfortable I nearly cry every time I put them on)
- *Two sets of gloves* — for variation in conditions
- *Australian Motorcycle Atlas* — because it's lightweight, ring-



- *bound and includes information specifically for riders*
- *spare keys* — because I was just lucky last time
- *Microfibre (or similar) cleaning cloth* — to effectively clean cooking utensils, rinse easily and dry quickly
- *superior clothing for cold weather* — rather than taking more gear that is less effective
- *MP3 player* — for those long stretches of road; not that music-free mediation isn't wonderful, too
- *Whisperlite* — as a second choice of cooking stove, which takes a wider variety of fuels but, don't be fooled, it ain't quiet
- *Back pack* — for bushwalking

At the time I'd wished for lockable panniers so that I had more freedom to leave the bike with my belongings to go bushwalking or exploring a town, but on reflection I think they can also make you look like you have something to hide and now I stick whatever I really don't want to lose in a backpack and leave the rest to fate and human kindness.

So there's a lot I'd leave behind for the same trip now, but not too many more things I'd do differently. Oh, yes there is ... I'd definitely be on a different bike. **EC**