



Four wheel drive safety – what you need to know

South Australia is full of amazing and picturesque locations and what better way to truly immerse yourself than to enjoy cruising the coastline or one of our National Parks in a four wheel drive (4WD)? Before you set off for your trip, you need to assess your vehicle's suitability to be driven on sand and tracks. You should consider the following:

- only use a 4WD with low range gear selection
- ensure your vehicle has sufficient clearance from the diffs to the ground
- ensure that your vehicle is loaded safely to allow a safe weight distribution
- upon arrival to the beach or track select a suitable tyre pressure to drive on.

Planning your trip

- ensure that you carry a map of the park or sand track that you intend on driving
- check the weather including the tide times before commencing your journey; always travel during low tide or within two hours either side of low tide
- ensure that you have told someone where you intend on going before you leave and consider giving them a map detailing your journey including what time you expect to arrive at different locations
- travel in a group, where possible.

Things to take with you on your trip

- ensure that you take the appropriate recovery equipment
- carry an air compressor to re-inflate tyres
- always ensure that you take your mobile phone with you; consider other communication equipment such as a CB radio, satellite phone or an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) for the event that mobile phone service is unavailable
- ensure that you have enough food and water to last an extended period of time
- ensure that you have a first aid kit
- consider downloading and using apps such as 'What 3 Words' to allow emergency services to access your location in an emergency.

Considerations when driving on sand

- all Australian Road Rules still apply when driving on sand; this includes ensuring you have the appropriate licence, duty to have registration and insurance and to drive within the legal prescribed concentration of alcohol
- always drive to the left
- drive on the designated track if one is available

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- drive at a speed that allows you to take action if another vehicle is travelling in the opposite direction on the same track
- if you are driving on a narrow track and another vehicle is coming towards you in the opposite direction, always look for a bay to pull into to allow them to pass
- if you are unsure about your or your car's ability to navigate a section of a track, always park your car in a safe location and walk through the track before attempting it
- drive at an appropriate speed in heavily populated beach areas considering children and pets that might walk out from behind a parked car
- be aware of the fact that sand is soft and just because something looks firm does not mean that it is; avoid driving too close to the shoulder of sand as it can give way under your vehicle's weight
- if you are driving on a track that allows access to driving on sand dunes always assume that the top has a very sharp drop off; before driving over always walk the track and check the other side.

Hazards to look out for

Stick to marked tracks; riding off marked tracks in some locations is dangerous and you could be committing an offence. Many areas have cultural significance to First Nations people and care should be taken at all times.

- Seaweed – always avoid driving over seaweed; inside the seaweed there could be sea life, rocks or other hazards. These can sometimes cause flat tyres or the vehicle to roll.
- Rocks – large rocks can be found on the beach. With the change in tide and behaviour of the sand a small rock may be much larger underneath. These rocks that can be covered in seaweed are extremely slippery and sometimes sharp.
- Night driving – our beaches, coast lines and parks become extremely dark overnight. It is extremely difficult to watch the tide's behaviour or to see hazards in enough time to safely take corrective action. You should plan your journey around sunrise and sunset times and plan to arrive at your destination well within daylight hours.
- Changing track conditions – it is the nature of sand tracks to be affected by a number of different factors. These include vehicles driving on them, the wind and the tide. If you plan on driving back on the same track you should assume that it will change and is slightly different.
- Tyre pressure – if you have lowered your tyre pressure ensure that you re-inflate them once you are back on normal road conditions. Lowered tyre pressure on normal road surfaces is a significant hazard. Sharp turning, especially at high speeds can cause the tyre to roll off of the tread and potentially cause a collision. If you are unable to immediately re-inflate your tyres you should drive at a much lower speed until you can re-inflate them. This should be done as soon as practicable.

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Setting up camp

- when you find a place to camp or set up, always park away from a track where people are driving.
- take into consideration high and low tide times leaving enough time for you to safely depart
- ensure the ground in which you are setting up is stable and you are able to securely set up
- do not park on vegetation or sand dunes.

Have a great time exploring our beautiful state but slow down and be considerate to other road users.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this document is for advice and considerations in keeping you safe whilst driving on beaches or coastal four wheel drive tracks. This is not an exhaustive list of all considerations and is in no way sufficient to provide you with all of the skills and information necessary to safely undertake a four wheel driving trip. Before commencing any type of four wheel driving you should undertake a practical course that teaches you all aspects of four wheel driving.

The SA Police Road Safety Centre is a leader in road safety education, playing a vital role in reducing road trauma through enhancing the awareness, knowledge and skills of all road users through lifelong learning. For more information on our range of programs visit www.police.sa.gov.au/road-safety or use the QR code below to take you straight to SAPOL's road safety page. To book a FREE road safety session email SAPOL.RoadSafetySection@police.sa.gov.au



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