

Subject:

June 2016 Newsletter from Air Safe Hitches



Pismo Beach Vintage Trailer Rally

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Every May for the past nine years, vintage trailer owners have gathered at the Pismo Coast Village RV Resort in Central California for three days of fun activities and to share our appreciation for all things vintage-camping related. Over 320 trailers, teardrops, and motorhomes spanning eras from the 1930's to 1970's take over most of the beautiful ocean-side resort. Saturday is open house day, where the public is invited to tour this instant museum at no charge! All trailers are open for visitors to walk through, staged with vintage-era camping equipment, some restored to true original specs and some decorated in fun themes, and often towed with vintage vehicles. There are many vintage-trailer rallies and group camping trips throughout the year in California, but the Pismo Coast Vintage Trailer Rally is the granddaddy of them all!

<https://www.facebook.com/Pismo-Vintage-Trailer-Rally-445774472197676/>
<http://www.pismocoastvillage.com/index.html>



Pictures below show Andrew Broomhead 1977 trailer and specs and the [AirSafe hitch](#) used to keep the trailer safe and smooth while towing.



The Art of Towing: Tips, Ideas, and Hard-Learned Lessons

Towing a trailer for the first time is intimidating. Anyone who tries to tell you differently has forgotten his first hours towing a trailer when his heart seemed to stay in the throat and sweaty palms made it impossible to grip the steering wheel any tighter.

Like any new experience that involves risks to body and property, there's a certain fear factor that comes with attaching trailer hitch to tow ball. But such anxiety disappears quickly after one understands the basics of towing and gains a little experience. The key is to focus on how your own tow vehicle and trailer react as a package--and making changes in your driving style and habits accordingly.

Initially, this is anything but intuitive, but eventually you'll get the feel for how the trailer affects your tow vehicle's acceleration, braking, and steering; the line the trailer's wheels take as you round a corner; how the tow vehicle and trailer react going over bumps and dips in the road or to a sudden gust of wind; how quickly the trailer reacts to changes in steering while backing up; even how sharply you can turn before the trailer tongue puts a crease in your tow vehicle's bumper or bodywork.

With practice, you'll develop a feel for all these things, and just like driving a vehicle without a trailer in tow, it will become intuitive.

RIGHT TOW VEHICLE

The most critical aspect of towing any trailer is having the right tow vehicle. Just because your F-150 can get a loaded 30-foot toy hauler moving doesn't mean it's the right vehicle for the job.

Towing in a safe and sane manner requires knowing a couple of numbers and reading the tow vehicle's owner's manual. For instance, you need to make sure the trailered weight doesn't exceed the vehicle's maximum tongue weight or maximum weight-carrying capacity unless your tow vehicle is equipped with a weight-distributing hitch, sway control device, or both as stated in the vehicle owner's manual.

Tongue weight is the downforce the trailer applies to the back of the tow vehicle--and that force should never be more than 15 percent of the loaded trailer's weight. Weight-carrying is the conventional towing mode most often seen when towing a boat, utility, or ATV trailer attached directly to the ball/shank coming out of the hitch. Weight-distributing (W-D) mode is when the trailer is attached to a special hitch assembly that utilizes tension bars and adjusting chains like those commonly used on travel trailers.

Read the owner's manual and you'll find all Toyota pickups and SUVs require the use of an anti-sway control device on trailers weighing more than 2000 pounds (trailer/cargo). Ford F-150s require the use of a weight-distribution hitch on trailers weighing more than 5000 pounds, as do all half-ton Dodge, Nissan, and GM pickups.

THE TOWING SETUP

Before hooking trailer to tow vehicle, walk around each to check that they're fit for the road. Make sure the tires are inflated correctly (look in the owner's manual for tow-vehicle tire pressures, on the tire sidewalls for the trailer), and that hoses, belts, fluid levels, trailer spring hangers, and springs are in good shape. All cargo and gear must be stored securely.

Make sure hitch, drawbar, and trailer ball are the proper ones for the trailer you're about to tow--and that all are tight. ([Look in the AirSafe Receiver Hitches for smoother and safer ride.](#)) The size of the required ball is stamped into the body of the trailer coupler and the ball itself has its size stamped into the top.--and that all are tight. The size of the required ball is stamped into the body of the trailer coupler and the ball itself as its size stamped into the top.

This will take less than 10 minutes and can eliminate the vast majority of trailer problems that occur on the highway.

Drop the trailer onto the hitch ball, then lock the trailer coupler lever and place a locking pin or other bolt through the lever to keep it from accidentally popping open while you're driving. Attach the safety chains by crossing them under the coupler and hooking them onto the hitch loops in the proper orientation. Then attach the breakaway brake cable to the hitch.

Step back and observe the tow vehicle and trailer from the side: The trailer should sit parallel with the ground (or ever so slightly tongue low) and in line with the chassis of the tow vehicle.

If the trailer tongue is too high or too low, the load on/in the trailer may be too far forward or rearward, which will adversely affect how the trailer tows. Move the weight on the trailer until the level balance is achieved, adjust the spring bars on the W-D hitch to better balance the load, or change the hitch shank to one that brings the tow vehicle/trailer into proper alignment.

Insert the plug on the trailer harness into the receptacle on the tow vehicle. Test the turn signals and brake lights to make sure they're working on the trailer. When trailer and tow vehicle are properly set up, adjust the mirrors so you see down the entire length of the trailer.

BASIC ROAD RULES

Towing on the open road is easy when the tow vehicle and trailer are well matched and set up, which also makes it easy to find yourself driving at the same speeds you would without a trailer. Bad move.

One aspect of towing that you must constantly be aware of is the dramatic difference in vehicle acceleration and stopping caused by the added weight of the trailer. For example, a full-size,

four-door pickup going 60 mph (88 feet per second) typically stops in about 150 feet in an emergency braking situation on dry pavement.

Add a 4500-pound trailer package to the equation and that distance can easily be 220 feet--a difference of 70 feet or 47 percent. If a vehicle stops suddenly in front of you or a deer enters the roadway, 70 feet will make a big difference in whether you can stop in time.

As a guide to safe speeds, apply the four-second towing rule--leave at least four seconds between your vehicle and the one ahead at whatever speed you're driving, when road conditions are good. Leave six seconds of distance when conditions are bad.

Acceleration is also affected by the additional weight of a trailer. It takes almost twice as long for a vehicle towing a medium-size boat or tow hauler to accelerate from zero to 60 mph, or from 30 to 50 mph, than it does without a tow.

Towing requires undivided driver attention. That means turn off the cell-phone, quit fiddling with the navigation system and stereo, and do not be involved in any other activity other than concentrating on the road ahead and your immediate surroundings. You have to constantly be thinking a good half-mile ahead when towing any trailer.

The biggest challenge when towing for the first time is changing driving style. Slow down and be attentive to your surroundings and people sharing the road. Do that and you'll find towing trailers is actually easy--even for a first-timer.

The Legal Side

Having your tow vehicle properly equipped is the biggest factor in towing safely. It's also the biggest factor in avoiding serious legal and possible financial woes: Failure to have your vehicle and trailer properly equipped places you at great liability risk in the event of an accident where injuries occurred under what the legal system calls the Law of Negligence.

If the vehicle's owner's manual uses words such as "requires," "must have," or "not to exceed" in describing certain weights, limitations, and driving instructions related to towing and you ignore those caveats/instructions, you could be held liable for damages in a lawsuit brought against you by the injured party.

Towing Speed and Fuel Economy

Safety isn't the only good reason to slow down. Your wallet will appreciate it, too. According to the EPA, tests designed to imitate highway driving reveal that 54 percent of a tow vehicle's engine power is used to overcome aerodynamic drag. If you drive faster, the engine has to work even harder to push through the air, and it consumes more fuel doing so. A good example of how drag affects fuel economy is a truck that has an 18-mpg highway EPA number, which is based roughly on 65-mph speeds. Drive 70 and drag causes that fuel economy to fall about 1.5 mpg. Run at 75 and your mileage could drop another 1.5 mpg.

Put a trailer on the hitch ball and now fuel economy and drag play a bigger role. When the gross weight of the trailer is more than half the weight of the tow vehicle, the added weight and surface area moving through the wind can easily reduce your tow vehicle's fuel economy by 40 percent. As trailer weight goes up, fuel economy drops even further. If your tow vehicle gets 17 mpg at 70 mph in everyday use, it may get only 12 mpg with a small travel trailer or tow hauler in tow. Slow down to 60 mph and that mileage could easily jump two mpg.

Backing Up

Trailer towing isn't a race. Any time a trailer is in tow, slow down. This is especially important when backing one up: The slower you back up a trailer, the easier it is to control.

Here's a good trailer-backing tip: Place your hands at the 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock positions at the bottom of the steering wheel. This hand positioning makes controlling a trailer while backing up the least taxing on your brain. Use the side mirrors to watch the trailer--don't twist your neck into a chiropractor's dream.

When you want the back of the trailer to move to your left, just move the left hand up. Need the trailer to go right? Move the right hand up. Don't worry how it works; the less you dwell on the mechanics of controlling a trailer while backing up, the faster you'll learn the art.

Expert Towing Tips

Want to impress those at a boat ramp or campground with your trailering prowess? You may already do these things, but if not, they make short work in getting your trailer squared away in the shortest time possible.

If you're bringing a boat/trailer to the launch ramp or trying to park a toy hauler or RV trailer in a tight parking area, swing as close and parallel to the water's edge or opening as you can. As the back of the tow vehicle passes the ramp opening or parking space, immediately turn up the ramp like you are trying to make a sharp U-turn. Continue the turn in a tight S-pattern. As your tow vehicle turns back in the opposite direction, watch how quickly the trailer straightens, putting you in line with the ramp or parking space.

When you need to adjust the spring bars on a weight-distributing (equalizing) hitch, use the trailer's wheel jack to position tow vehicle and trailer so they sit level. Now adjust the links in the adjusting chains and lock the spring bars in place. When the wheel jack is cranked back up, the spring bars take the weight, and you didn't have to fight the load tension.

Who Is Buying RV's Today?

The following article sent in by Sally Haynes

There was a time when the word 'RV' was associated with older purchasers who, after a lifetime of work, finally retired and bought into an RV to see more of the country, and the world at large. However, research has shown that the RV industry is thriving (US News – RV Sales Booming) and the reason for this is that the market is getting younger with each passing year. According to the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA), the fastest-growing group of RV owners in 2013 belonged to the 35-44-year-old age group, which is just slightly less than the industry's largest group of owners (aged 45 to 54). In the 1980s, the average RV owner was aged 50; these days, that number is closer to 48, with further drops expected over the next few years.

The change has been spurred on by RV manufacturers themselves, who realize that to attract younger buyers (CNBC – RV Buyers Getting Younger), specific features must be given importance. Fitness, for instance, is an important consideration for those in their 30s and 40s and RVs today contain features such as bicycle and kayak racks, which are majorly tempting for those who typically head out to lakeside and forest destinations, to hone their fitness while getting up close to Nature.

Modern RV parks have also woken up to the demand for better fitness offerings, by offering clients a wide array of fitness installations, gyms, etc. Some parks offer guided walking activities in nearby natural areas, while others make life easier for clients via rental bikes, kayaks, and more. Indeed, in recent years, the concept of the luxury RV Resort has made RV life more tempting than ever for singletons and families with young children alike. If you are travelling to Texas, for instance, check out SunRV Resorts, an example of how these days, there is little difference between a stay at an RV resort, and a good three- or four-star hotel. Top RV resorts have shuffleboard courts, outdoor pools, games rooms, tennis and pickleball courts, and more. Also lined up are a host of activities, including dancing, parties, activities for kids, etc. RVs are therefore an ideal choice for families with small kids who wish to have fun while their kids are entertained with a host of led activities and games.

RV Parks are also catering their services and facilities to different demographics. Again in Texas, for instance, the Fort Amarillo RV Resort is built to please the discerning spa goer, with an indoor heated pool, hot tub, fitness room, and a stream-fed fishing pond promising to take stress levels back to zero.

The RV purchaser these days is also someone who longs for the plentiful Health Benefits of Nature, which have been verified by many recent studies. Forest settings, it seems, will lower levels of harmful stress hormones, but also help everyone from those recovering from cancer, to children with ADHD. RVs, then, appeal to health-conscious purchasers who are beginning to forego traditional city sightseeing breaks in favor of relaxing breaks in the many natural paradises that pepper America. Current studies show that the average American child spends as little as 30 minutes in unstructured outdoor play, and over seven hours each day in front of

an electrical device. An RV holiday is the ideal antidote for our over-reliance on technology.

Reduced costs are another reasons why RVs are becoming more attractive to buyers of all ages, across the globe. In the UK, RV sales are hitting record numbers, and a number of collateral markets have sprung up to cater to the burgeoning demand. Take the RV insurance sector – in the UK, Specific Insurance Coverage is catered to RVs of all types and sizes, covering any damage which may occur to the vehicle itself, as well as emergencies, campsite and vacation coverage, etc. Moreover, RV manufacturers now offer a wide range of vehicles catering to all budget types, so that cost is a lesser issue than it was even a decade ago. Banks are also more willing to finance an RV purchase, so that even couples in their late 20s are buying into the RV trend.

The RV industry has enjoyed solid growth, with figures indicating that the industry has enjoyed an 11 percent gain year on year, and a 116 percent gain since its recession low, in 2009. Experience has shown that as the RV industries expands, the demand from younger buyers continues to grow, meaning that the nature of RV vehicles, resorts and associated services, will probably be changing over the next few years, in more ways than we can imagine.

RV Camping For Dogs And Their Owners

RV Camping Goes To The Dogs!

Here at RV-camping, we're pet lovers. Now we know not all RV campers are and if you are not a dog lover, then go ahead and hit the back button now as the following information is for those of us that love dogs. Still here? Good! We just learned of an interesting place to take your dog for an off leash experience like non we've heard of before, and want to share their concept.

A Dog Vacation That Helps Rescue Dogs!

Imagine your dog running through gorgeous green fields, exploring nose-down as fast as possible, catching all the smells of the earth – being the happiest dog alive!

That's what happens in the countryside of Glen Highland Farm's Canine Country Getaway when vacation season is underway. Nestled in the rolling hills of upstate NY, canines and humans delight in discovering an off-leash paradise designed just for them to enjoy. But, this unique dog lover's vacation does good, too!

As you and your dog frolic through 175 acres of countryside, you can feel great knowing that your camp fee is helping dogs that are a part of the year-round rescue program at Glen Highland Farm (GHF). Your vacation dollars go directly to the dogs! Sweet Border Collie Rescue is on premises in a separate section of Glen Highland Farm, housing up to 40 dogs waiting for their forever homes. The rescue effort has led to the successful rehoming of over 1600 Border Collies to date. This misunderstood and high-energy breed endlessly lands in rescue. The beautiful little puppy never outgrows the need for a job, no matter what age and not everyone has the lifestyle that suits the mentality of an active working dog so the rescue program at GHF is always full.

The beauty of the Canine Country Getaway is that all the spots that you and your dog love, were created by the rescue dogs! They use the trails and fields for hiking too so every spot truly was designed by dogs FOR dogs! The land at Glen Highland Farm was once home to the Iroquois Indians who lived near the beautiful Butternut Creek, a curvy stream filled with trout, abundant wildlife, endangered butterflies and birds. The Creek winds through 175 acres of rolling meadows and winding trails and a 2-acre spring-fed pond, all perfect surroundings for you to enjoy a great vacation at the same time your dog enjoys an outdoor adventure.

The Canine Country Getaway has a wide selection of RV's to rent whatever your personal preference or budget for the ultimate in convenience, privacy and luxurious comfort. Got your own RV? Load up the dogs and come on over! We have RV hookup sites for you to rent. There are other lodging choices including spacious luxury tent camping and well-appointed cabins & cottages. The lodging rental fees cover not just accommodations, but also your enjoyment of the property that includes full use of the dining pavilion, pantry, bathroom & shower facilities, rest areas, agility field equipment, the Farm's trails, the winding creek, the pond and acres of fields and meadows. We provide the perfect backdrop for hiking, swimming and wading, playing fetch, bird watching, relaxing, napping, and more. Plus, there are bike routes for back-road country biking with gorgeous vistas of open land. And, for those who love

fishing, there is a spring fed pond filled with trout and bass as part of our catch and release fishing at GHF.

With 175 acres to roam, you and your dog will feel as though you have the Farm all to your own to explore. It's a very unique vacation experience to have so much land and so few people because dogs can enjoy it all off-leash! Even when the Getaway is fully booked, it's very private with a maximum of 5 -18 adult guests. Guests travel with their dog(s) from as far away as Canada, California and Florida! Some guests make the Glen Highland Farm their destination while others pass through while traveling. Read what a few guests have had to say:

For the past three years, we've gladly driven 10 hours to spend a few days of pure bliss at Glen Highland Farm's Canine Country Getaway. We enjoy cooking over a wood fire, roasting marshmallows, exploring the fields, and relaxing in hammocks next to the bubbling stream. The comfortable cabins and hot showers turn this into a luxury vacation. For the dogs... it's paradise. At Glen Highland Farm, our dogs can just "be". They can run, swim, and sleep to their hearts' content. It's not just a vacation with our dogs, it's a vacation FOR our dogs. Bless you, for giving us the chance to see what pure joy looks like on a dog's face. — Danica

Every year I always make sure I go to the farm for my birthday. It is my gift to myself and of course my dogs. They absolutely without a doubt, love love love it here. I hate to leave when the time comes! This year, as with all others was just great. It is wonderful to see your dogs just be dogs and have the time of their lives. — Vanessa

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5 Road-Tested Tips From an RV Rookie

We sent an RV novice out on the open road with nothing but a few good friends and a self-contained hotel room on wheels. She logged plenty of bumpy miles on her maiden voyage through North Carolina's Outer Banks—so you don't have to. Here is her story—and her advice. By Valerie Rains,

A few things might wake you up in the middle of the night the first time you climb under the covers inside an RV. Fearing that you forgot to engage the parking brake and are in danger of rolling down the hill to your death, for one. (You did, and you are.) Thinking someone left the light on in the bathroom and wondering whether that will drain the RV's battery by morning. (They did, but it didn't.) Hearing campers breaking the sacred "quiet after 9 p.m." rule and imagining they'll get busted. (They did.) Wondering if the bacon and eggs you bought for tomorrow morning's breakfast are now, effectively, toast, because you'd been told that the fridge will mysteriously stop working if the RV is parked on even the slightest incline. (They are.)

Funny, I'd spent half my life dreaming about setting off in an RV for parts unknown and maintaining perfectly level appliances never once figured into the fantasy. To me, RVing was simply the ultimate escape route. Maybe that's because my early family vacations revolved around campgrounds and car trips. Or maybe because buying an RV is the landlocked states' version of saving up for a sailboat. It's a vacation home wherever you want it, whenever you want it. It's freedom and security in equal measure. It's Lewis and Clark with a V-8 engine.

"I studied online forums for RV enthusiasts, campground-review sites, and the orientation video on the RV-rental website." Still, in the weeks leading to my maiden RV voyage, my anxiety was rising almost as fast as gasoline prices. The sheer size of the vehicle—and the fact that it would be filled with cutlery and combustible fuels—grew scarier by the minute. To quell the panic, I studied online forums for RV enthusiasts, campground-review sites, and the orientation video on the RV-rental website (twice). And I brought backup: Lindsay and Lola, a couple of friends I've known since college who have a generous way of seeing disasters as adventures. They tried to distract me by focusing on our packing priorities: hiking gear vs. lawn games, SPF 15 or 30. Not that it helped.

- ***ROAD-TESTED TIP #1: "Use an RV-specific route planner on a GPS. It'll factor in overhead clearance and other restrictions, such as which roads, bridges, and tunnels won't allow propane tanks through." —Richard Coon, President, Recreational Vehicle Industry Association***

And yet, when we arrived at the **Cruise America** rental lot in Durham, N.C., I started to calm down, in part because a petite 20-something gal handed me the keys, and I figured that if she could pilot a big rig, then maybe I could, too. We got a few simple pointers from the RV folks: Pull far into intersections before making a turn. Leave lots of room for braking. Always use a spotter when you back up. Drive-through restaurants are just not worth the risk. We learned when to use battery power, propane, shoreline electricity, and our generator; how to restart a dead battery; the necessity of turning off the propane tank before refueling; how to heat water for showers and how to tell when the water supply is nearly depleted; and how to level out the rig with a pair of two-by-four boards if our campsite is on a slant. And we learned the finer points of emptying the holding tanks—a polite way of saying draining the toilet—a task that quickly supplanted merging onto the highway as my most dreaded challenge. "Once you get the hose screwed on—and make sure you screw it on really tight—then open the valves and walk away," said Tommy, our orientation instructor. "Or run. I've gotten wet feet more times than I like to recall." The girls and I made a pact to use the campgrounds' rest areas whenever possible and added latex gloves to the top of our shopping list. Then we took a few trial spins around the parking lot, and with Lindsay in the navigator's seat and Lola on loose-objects duty in the back, we headed into the great wide open.

"We quickly learned that RV trips are all-hands-on-deck endeavors."

First came the rattle. With every bump in the road, each cup, dish, and saucepan in our kitchen cabinets shuddered like a beat-up shopping cart being pushed down a gravel road. (I learned later that putting paper towels between the plates helps immensely.) Then came the thuds. Turn left, and one set of drawers would slide open with a thwak. Turn right, and another drawer would do the same. We were already learning that RV trips are all-hands-on-deck endeavors. In addition to navigating, Lindsay was my second set of eyes for lane changes and would become my second-in-command for ticking off setup and breakdown duties. Lola wrangled drawers and cabinets, stood lookout at the rear window for minor back-up missions, and became galley chef for the length of the trip. "This is like a ropes course," Lindsay said after our first refueling stop, with its propane-off, propane-on, secure-all-items drill. "Maybe we should do some trust falls at the beach."

Six hours, three pit stops, and one possible bird collision (none of us wanted to check the grille for confirmation) later, we arrived at **Frisco Campground**, one of four in the area run by the National Park Service. We had just enough time to practice back-in parking before nightfall. That's when I realized my first RV mistake: Anywhere we wanted to go, we'd have to take the RV, repositioning it each time we returned. (The pros either bring bikes or tow a regular car—often referred to as a dinghy—behind the RV.) So we strapped ourselves back in to fetch dinner in Hatteras Village, five miles away, and performed the parking routine again an hour later—this time in the dark, with the girls wielding flashlights like traffic batons.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #2:** *"We try to bring or rent bicycles to visit nearby areas while camping. It beats packing up the RV to move it to a trailhead for hiking, only to find out there is no room to park a larger vehicle! Many times, you can access a 'bikes only' trail or (at the Grand Canyon, for example) trails for shuttle buses and bikes only." —Debby Schlesinger, BT reader, Grenada Hills, Calif.*

To celebrate—not just the parking but surviving the first day—we split a bottle of convenience-store wine around the RV's dinette, the only spot where all three of us could sit facing each other. "I've had worse apartments than this," I said, looking around. "Definitely worse kitchens." The furnishings were surprisingly modern—navy fabric upholstery and matching window coverings, new-looking appliances and cabinets. And even though I assumed we'd overpacked, there was plenty of unused storage space in the RV's dozen cabinets. More impressive to me was the fact that I could walk around the whole cabin standing at full height, without crouching or hitting my head on anything. That was, until bedtime. I called the bunk over the cab—possibly an unconscious compulsion to stay near the driver's seat. Maneuvering my limbs into the crawl-space-size cubby guaranteed a bumped elbow, knee, or forehead with every entrance and exit. The girls shared the double bed in back, since converting the dinette to a third bed would have required clearing the piles of maps, snack-food containers, and bug repellent cans that had already accumulated on the tabletop. Calling out our good nights and cracking jokes in the dark, it was the closest thing to an adult sleepover I could imagine—more intimate than sharing a hotel room, and sillier, too.

"Orchestrating our morning routines was easier than I'd thought."

Seeing the Frisco campground in daylight—just after sunrise, in fact, thanks to the chatter of the campground's early risers—provided a fresh perspective after that fitful first night's sleep. Orchestrating our morning routines was easier than I'd thought. The toilet and the shower—one of those flimsy jobs with a handheld sprayer that tumbles readily from its mount—were bundled in one closet-size room, about four feet by four feet, tops. (Its door was inches away from where Lindsay and Lola slept, another reason to make sparing use of its facilities.) Still, the teensy bathroom sink was just outside the shower/toilet stall; at the slightly larger kitchen sink a few feet away, two people could brush their teeth simultaneously.

Lindsay was the first one out, conferring with the park ranger and plotting the day's activities (hit the beach, visit a lighthouse, find lunch). The ocean's proximity redeemed the transportation issue. After all, who needs a car when you can walk to the beach? The geography of the Outer Banks—a 130-mile stretch of narrow barrier islands, less than a mile wide for much of its length—was the primary reason I'd chosen this spot for my trial run. There are 20-plus campgrounds along the strip, none much more than a mile away from the Atlantic Ocean or Pamlico Sound. At Frisco, \$20 a night buys you peace, quiet, and your own little slice of unlandscaped beachfront real estate. What that \$20 doesn't buy you: heated campground showers or any way to charge a cell phone. Hence, one night would be our limit.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #3:** *"If you're exhausted and not near a campground, Walmart stores sometimes allow campers to use their parking lots. Just check to make sure there's not a no overnight parking sign, and choose a spot near one of the lot's outer edges." —Kevin Broom, Director of Media Relations, Recreational Vehicle Industry Association*

The 30 miles of road between Frisco and Rodanthe, where we'd camp next, passes through a series of near-identical hamlets with dreamy names: Avon, Salvo, Waves. The longer we drove, the less I worried about all the folks in my rearview mirror who clearly wanted to pass me on the two-lane highway. Rolling down the windows and turning on the radio helped distract me. So did focusing on our next stop, an oasis where water and electricity flow freely and quiet hours don't start until a wild-and-crazy 10 p.m.

As much as I'd been obsessing about life inside an RV, pulling into the **Cape Hatteras KOA** was a revelation. Here, everyone was living *outside* their vehicles. All around us, colorful awnings, canvas camp chairs, outdoor carpets, wind chimes, string lights shaped like Airstream trailers, plastic gingham tablecloths, tiki torches, and dream catchers marked off each site's would-be front lawn. We envied our neighbors, a retired duo from Farmville, N.C., for their old-school, beige-striped Winnebago (our RV was plastered with rental ads) and simple setup: an AstroTurf swatch just big enough for their two folding chairs and a small table.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #4: "If you're staying parked in one spot for a while, run the RV engine for a few minutes each day to recharge the battery." —Tommy Summey, Cruise America rental agent, Hillsborough, N.C.**

We'd brought nothing—and I mean nothing—to make the outside of our RV feel like home. Alas, the homiest thing we could muster was to try out the RV kitchen. "Grilled cheese sandwiches, everybody?" Lola asked. With no real counter space, she spread plates across the stovetop to prep the ingredients, then shifted the plates to a little sliver of awkward space behind the sink. As the stove (and, soon after, the RV) heated up, she had a change of heart. "Cold cheese sandwiches, everybody?" she asked. The plan abandoned, we carried our sandwiches out to the nearest picnic table. And never turned on the stove again.

"Having a place to spread out is crucial."

Having a place to spread out is crucial—especially when you've crammed a family of four or five into a usable living space the size of a large toolshed. But it would also be a shame to stay inside; an RV park is a voyeur's paradise—people watching at its most reciprocal. Several times, I passed a man with a white ponytail sitting shirtless outside his RV, shelling peas. He asked how I was doing, and when I replied in kind, he said, "I'm just making do, trying to enjoy myself...it's not too difficult." He didn't need to wink—but I think he did anyway. Our favorite acquaintance at the camp was Kilo, a nervous but friendly tan-and-white Chihuahua that accompanied John, a KOA staffer, on all his rounds—showing new arrivals to their sites and helping campers set up. (The explanation for his name? "He's from Mexico." Roger that.)

Judging from all the group activities at the campground, it's safe to say that RVers are very social. Even those campers who'd rather spend their afternoons at the beach—as we did, most days—have ample opportunity for mingling after sundown. One evening, we caught the opening number at karaoke night—Cee Lo Green's expletive-free radio hit "Forget You," performed by a teenage staffer; the next, we watched an outdoor screening of *Kung Fu Panda*. We even organized some social events of our own, enlisting a couple of 30-something Texan guys to help us start a fire to make s'mores. Another snafu: not knowing the proper way to extinguish a fire when you're done with dessert. We poured panfuls of water from our kitchen onto the flames, sending out smoke signals to the whole campground that we were clueless.

"Just as we were leaving, I was getting the hang of it."

By the last day, we'd had more than our share of screwups, most easy enough to laugh off. But there was one RV task I really couldn't afford to botch. It was time for the Holding Tank. Lindsay followed me outside to offer moral support—and to remind me to run. Fortunately, I didn't get my feet wet, though I did leave a small trail of blue chemicals between our site's dump station and the RV (and hoped no one would notice).

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #5: "Be sure to get a tutorial on how to empty the holding tanks. One time, we forgot to add chemicals to the black-water tank after emptying it—the smell was terrible, and we quickly learned our lesson." —Laurie Huhndorf, BT reader, San Antonio**

The payoff for that 5 a.m. waste disposal came when we finally hit the empty road pointing north toward Nags Head, the sky slowly brightening with each mile. The only other travelers out were sea birds and jackrabbits, and I'd long since stopped fretting over every lane change, left turn, or loose kitchen drawer rattling with dishes. Even shutting off the propane at our last gas-station stop was second nature. Finally, just as we were leaving, I was getting the hang of it. Next time, I may even get up the nerve to grill a cheese sandwich or two.

Boondocking

Boondocking

RV-camping defines boondocking as remote location "dispersed camping", and the term "dispersed camping" is defined as "camping outside developed campgrounds". There is no official definition of the term boondocking however, but overnight RV parking places such as

WalMart or truck stops, NASCAR races, federal and state campground, and any time RV hookups are not available (dry camping) have been referred to as boondocking.

Boondocking isn't for everyone. Dispersed RV camping in remote areas requires research, exploration, and a sense of adventure to find those great campsites RV magazines like to show on their covers.

Boondocking Locations – Where You Can Camp

As a general rule, boondocking is allowed anywhere on federal public lands within a specified distance of any established road, except where otherwise restricted. That's not to say that you can cut down trees or build a new access way into your RV campsite. The idea is to utilize previously used campsites, or areas that will not be damaged by your vehicle. New US Forest Service route and dispersed camping rules have come out and each forest may have different requirements so you need to check locally. Keep in mind camping closer than 300 ft. of a water source is usually restricted. The USFS offers free travel management maps called MVUM (Motor Vehicle Use Map) that show exactly where dispersed camping is restricted and which roads are open for travel. MVUM Information

A few US National Parks allow overnight RV parking and boondocking, but generally camping is restricted to established campgrounds. USFS (United States Forest Service) and BLM (Bureau of Land Management) high popularity areas often have restricted access camping areas. For example, the area around Mammoth Lakes, CA is extremely popular with tourists, and many areas allow camping only in designated campgrounds. Information about camping restrictions are available at USFS Ranger District and BLM Resource Area offices.

Generally speaking, you can stay 14 continuous days for free, but subsequent camping days must be 25 miles away. This rule applies to most BLM and USFS administered lands, but there are exceptions. For example, the INYO National Forest of California allows 42 day stays at designated camping areas, while the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming has areas that it allows only 3 day stays near Grand Teton National Park. BLM LTVAs (Long Term Visitor Areas) allow stays of several months for a nominal fee.

We've only mentioned the USFS and BLM so far, but FWS (US Fish & Wildlife Service), USACE (Army Corps of Engineers), Bureau of Reclamation, State Parks, and State owned lands offer boondocking opportunities. Arizona for example has a permit available for a nominal fee allowing boondocking on State lands.

There are also boondocking opportunities to be found on private lands. Ranches and farms may have a corner of the "back 40" they will allow you to stay for free or small fee. If you find a spot you would like to camp that is on private land, it never hurts to ask. We've had good success in farm country asking permission to camp at nice areas near a river with good access for overnight boondocking...we usually share the space with cows.

We know of no public land locations that allow unlimited length of stays, and while BLM Long Term Visitor Areas (LTVA) permit multiple month stays, some Public Lands have specific length of stay limits of as little as two days. It is your responsibility to learn and follow the rules. Rules are published on official government Internet web sites, and are available at public land managers offices.

How To Find The Best Boondocking Locations

So now that you know that you can set up camp just about anywhere in the forest, how do you go about finding a great RV camping/boondocking site? This is where the work starts, but the harder you work at it, the better the RV campsite you'll find. If you live near the public lands area you wish to camp in, your task is easier as you can explore more frequently and learn the area completely. For those of us that travel and want to find great boondocking sites, we've found that doing our homework before we get to a new area will always pay off with a great boondocking site.

RV type and size sometimes determines where you can boondock. Pop up and truck campers have a distinct advantage for getting to really remote RV camping sites. When you have a large 5th wheel or motor home, boondocking seems more difficult, but with just a little practice, you will soon determine how to explore effectively to accommodate your rig.

The easiest way of finding RV boondocking sites in a new area requires that you:

- Have maps and navigational information.

- Contact Public Lands administrators for the area being visited.
- Locate a “base” campground.
- Exploration.

After determining a general location you wish to boondock, it's time to examine some general information. USFS – USDA Forest Service, the BLM – Bureau of Land Management, and other State and US Government departments have Internet web sites with recreation information. Getting official travel maps of a new area can help in finding a good RV camping site. Topographical maps are in our opinion the best way to determine where we want to camp. We prefer DeLorme Topo 6.0 maps for our personal exploration needs. MapTech is our choice for online topo mapping information. Examine the Topo map for areas that look interesting for your type of RV camping. It won't take long to find areas that look interesting to you.

The areas you find with your Topo map can further be researched by contacting the local public lands administrators. Ask about dispersed camping in the area you are interested in. You may or may not get the answers you need. Some of the folks providing information may not be aware of some great RV camping sites. Get information about designated campgrounds and if reservations are required.

Armed with the campground information, locate one near where you think you want to boondock. This campground will be your “base” camp to explore for that perfect RV boondocking site. You will often find a great RV camping site on the way to the designated campground, which eliminates the need for exploration, but always plan on needing to find your own RV camping site.

Exploring can be fun, but it's also frustrating from time to time. Our frustrations always come from finding great RV camping sites that don't offer a clear view of the southern sky for our satellite Internet connection. Most folks won't have that as an issue, and will easily find boondocking sites. The size of your RV is a major consideration when heading into remote areas, and be sure to consider potential weather changes and how they might effect road conditions where you want to camp.

Official USFS Rules

The following comes from the US Forest Service South Park Ranger District of Colorado's Pike National Forest. The same rules apply to RV camping, and finding some great campsites is easy once you get some experience finding the type of camping location you desire.

DISPERSED CAMPING

MINIMAL IMPACT CAMPING TECHNIQUES

PLAN your trip, know what it is you wish to experience, think about the time of year and expected weather. This is part of the outdoor adventure and should always be your first step. After you have selected the area you would like to visit, contact the South Park Ranger District for answers to any questions you might have and to learn about any special regulations in the area. When planning where you are going to go, be sure you are on National Forest Service System land.

CONCENTRATE your impacts in heavily used areas. Many of the areas that are easily accessible receive heavy use during the summer months. If there is a fire ring at the area do not build a new one, sometimes that means that you will have to clean out the old fire ring (don't forget that collapsible shovel). We all have to do our part to keep these areas open for folks who prefer this type of experience.

CAMP at least 200 feet from water. This practice is important for a variety of reasons. A campsite located on stream banks or lake shores can create visual impacts and detract from the sense of solitude. Accordingly, it is also important that you camp far enough from roads and trails that the site is screened from other campers. By camping close to water you risk contaminating the water. Remember, water is very important to the wildlife who live in the area, they need easy access to and from water sources and your presence may disturb their normal behavior.

PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT. Dispersed areas do not have trash services and rarely receive clean-up services. Please do not put glass or aluminum (even those food packages that appear to be made of paper often have foil liners that do not burn) into the fire. This practice is unsightly and makes the site less attractive to the next user. All food scrapes and trash should

be taken home with you, or take it to the nearest landfill if you are on a long journey.

PROPERLY DISPOSE of Human Waste. This is not something you were taught in school, maybe it should have been. Human feces not properly disposed of is not only unsightly, but can actually create health hazards. Catholes are the most widely accepted method of back country human waste disposal (again, that collapsible shovel comes in handy).

1. Select a site that is far from any water sources, 300 feet is a good, safe distance. The site should be inconspicuous and where someone would not naturally be walking. If you are camping with a large group or camping the same site for more than one night, you should spread the cathole sites over a large area. Try to find a spot with deep organic material, which will help decompose the feces. If possible, locate your cathole where it will receive maximum sunlight, this will also aid in decomposition. Choose an elevated site where water would not normally pool.

2. Now you are ready to dig. Your hole should be 6-8 inches deep and 4-6 inches in diameter. If you hit a rock or root which prevents you from reaching the correct depth, you should find another site (early planning comes into play). Toilet paper is a strong attractant to small rodents and should be packed home with your other trash. When finished, the cathole should be filled in with the previously removed dirt and disguised with native materials.

CAMPFIRE BUILDING and wood collection. Campfires were once thought to be a necessity and are built in history and tradition. Attitudes toward campfires are changing. The new perception of their use is a direct result of past misuse of campfires, and the sometimes ugly and negative impacts caused when fires are built incorrectly, built in the wrong locations or left unattended. If you choose to have a campfire, you are choosing a very large responsibility.

1. Your first step is to choose a location for your fire. If there is an existing fire ring, use it. If it is a bad location, move it to a better location and clean up all remnants in its original location. Never place a campfire within the radius of the largest branches on a tree. Fire can actually travel through the tree's root system and cause a forest fire. Never build a fire close to a rock or other natural object where the fire will scorch the object and leave lasting impacts of your visit.

2. Next, you will need to collect firewood. There is only one type of wood that is acceptable for building a low impact campfire; this is dead and downed wood. Breaking branches off of a live standing tree leaves a very discernible and long lasting impact. Firewood size is very critical. A good rule of thumb is if the wood is too large to break with your hands or by stepping on it, then it is too large to burn. Keep the firewood in its natural lengths, breaking into smaller pieces as you feed the fire. If there is any unburned wood left when breaking camp, it can be scattered around the forest and will blend in naturally.

3. Finally, remember to clean up after your fire. The intent is to get other campers to use the same fire ring. Cleaning up the fire ring of any food waste and trash, burning wood completely and scattering the cooled coals and ashes will make it more likely that it will be used again.

HELPFUL TIPS

BEARS – Help keep bears alive AND in their natural habitat! When you go to the mountains and forest, you are in bear country. Do not leave ANY food, refuse or other bear attractant unattended. It is prohibited by Special Order. Unless food is being eaten, prepared or transported/store it in bear resistant containers.

The wild animals in National Forests are part of an intricate web of life. When we feed these animals, we alter this natural balance. Unnaturally high populations may be created. The animals, ability to find food in the winter—when visitors are gone—may be damaged. We can be affected too. Animals sometimes bite and some of them are infected with rabies or fleas which spread bubonic plague. Help to protect the wildlife and yourself. Show them the respect they deserve and let the animals find their own natural food.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

A noxious weed is any non-native plant that grows unchecked by natural enemies, like insects or diseases. Noxious weeds displace native plants, thereby robbing wildlife and livestock of natural food sources and nesting sites. They steal water and nutrients from native plants and disrupt the ecosystem. Some are harmful or fatal to animals. Contact your local Forest Service Office, County Extension Office or County Weed Control Office to obtain more information on

recognizing, eradicating and preventing the spread of noxious weeds where you live, work and/or play.

HIGH ALTITUDE

You may notice that your breathing is faster or deeper and you may feel short of breath, especially when you exercise. This is the body's first and most effective response to altitude. Your heart is likely to beat faster also; this too is a helpful, normal reaction. Once you arrive, take it easy for the first day or two. Reduce consumption of alcohol, caffeine and salty foods. Drink more water than usual. Altitude illness feels very much like flu or a hangover, but is much more serious. Do not push. If you feel worse or the symptoms do not go away soon, get medical help!

SUNBURN

The sun has more power in the thin air, and a bad sunburn can spoil your stay. No matter how tanned you may be, use a protective cream. "Cold sores" are aggravated at high altitude but might be prevented by a medicine which your doctor can prescribe. Sunburn of the eyes is a real danger, even on foggy or cloudy days. Wear sunglasses or goggles with ultraviolet protection.

TICK/FLY SPRAY RECIPE

2 cups white vinegar
1 cup Skin-So-Soft bath oil
1 cup water
1 Tablespoon eucalyptus oil (available at drugstores & health food stores)

This homemade spray does not contain aerosols to pollute the environment, nor chemicals to contaminate the ground and it works. We have reports of successful use on animals as well.

Advanced RV Camping

Once you find that terrific RV boondocking site, it's time to settle in and enjoy the area. Conserving your resources is the key to enjoyable boondocking. Leave no trace camping principles should be your guide to help protect our RV camping resources for future generations. Boondocking offers the RVer the most options for outdoor recreation, but the responsibility of good stewardship towards the land is in your hands. You wouldn't want to find a great RV boondocking site that has trash and human and pet waste all over the area, and you shouldn't leave your site that way either. Always leave your RV camping site better than you found it.

Here are a few tips to extend your resources:

- Battery charge can be extended by turning off your furnace/heater at night and adding a blanket or two on the bed. Turn off lights when not needed. Minimize use of TV and other electrical appliances. Florescent lights use less energy. Solar panels and an inverter can set you free...electrically.
- Generators are popular for extending RV camping trips too, but try and limit their usage to battery charging so as not to bother nearby campers.
- Generators are popular for extending RV camping trips too, but try and limit their usage to battery charging so as not to bother nearby campers.
- Extend your RV propane supply by turning off your water heater and only use it when needed. Adding that extra blanket to your bed will save propane too. Put on a sweater or jacket instead of turning up the heat.
- Water...It seems you can never have enough. Carry extra water containers if you can. Take very short "military" showers. Wash dishes once a day after wiping dirty dishes off with paper towels. Wash dishes in a dishpan. Use disposable dishes, cups, and eating utensils. An electric transfer pump can move water from containers into your RVs fresh tank easily. Using an old milk jug filled with water for flushing is much more water efficient than letting your RVs toilet do the job.
- Bears poop in the woods, and you can too. As long as you are well away from water, digging a "cathole" is perfectly acceptable, and part of the Leave No Trace camping principles mentioned above.
- Your dirty dish water can be dispersed as long as you are well away from water sources. Don't dump it in the same place all the time as flies will become a problem. Some folks use their dish water for flushing purposes.

Boondocking locations can be found on the Internet on RV forums and newsgroups. Local

chamber of commerce offices and visitor centers are good places to inquire at too. Talking to other RVers is one of the best ways to find new places, but be aware that many people don't want to share their favorite RV camping and boondocking sites. Finding great RV camping and boondocking sites can be a bit of work, but with some research and exploration, you should find exactly what you are looking for.

The USA Camping Map on our home page has links to each individual states public lands administrators website. It's a great place to start looking for RV camping and boondocking locations.

To find boondocking campsites, you need a good map. We recommend Benchmark Maps and the Atlas & Gazetteer by DeLorme Publishing Company to find RV camping locations and as a great paper recreation atlas. Put that together with DeLorme Topo 6.0 Software (if you can find a copy for pre Windows 7 machines) and you have a powerful set of tools to help find the best RV camping sites.

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