

Accessing the outdoors in a four-wheel drive

Making tracks: advice from an expert

Exploring some of New Zealand's rarely travelled public and private roads by four-wheel drive (4WD) vehicle is an exhilarating experience.

4WD enthusiast and member of the New Zealand Four Wheel Drive Association, Roger Seymour says "We are privileged in this country to be able to enjoy this thrill on certain access ways, like unformed legal roads. But this opportunity comes with responsibilities.

"We can't take this access for granted. We have to be mindful we are sharing the trails and access ways with other recreationalists. Our 4x4 vehicles are more intrusive than simply walking or biking and they can get a bad reputation. Caring for the environment and acting responsibly will not only reduce conflict among outdoor enthusiasts but will help protect access to recreational opportunities in the future."



Photo credit: Simon_sees at flickr.com/photos/39551170@N02/27381899147

The New Zealand Four Wheel Drive Association recommends that all people wishing to go off road should join a 4WD Club and take part in the Club trips. “It is safer, and clubs have already organised access with landowners so there are more options for places to go,” says Roger.

Roger’s advice for how to make the most of 4WD experiences include always travelling as two or more vehicles together on tracks. “We all think nothing will go wrong until it does but on rough tracks there are so many things to look out for. You can get stuck in water or mud or snow or deep ruts. The rough terrain can cause breakages in the vehicles and crossing rivers is particularly dangerous,” he says.

“When one vehicle is alone there isn’t much you can do if you have a problem. Three vehicles is even better to ensure a quicker recovery if one vehicle gets stuck.”

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What does the Outdoor Access Code say?

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission has more guidelines for responsible care and behaviour while driving 4WD vehicles in the New Zealand Outdoor Access Code published on its website. These include:

- keep strictly to formed tracks;
- minimise vehicle damage, such as deep ruts;
- don’t leave vehicles where they block or obstruct gateways, tracks or entrances;
- ensure that any access right or permission includes use of motor vehicles, if this is the intention;
- even where access with vehicles is legally allowed, such as on an unformed legal road, it is a courtesy to notify the adjacent landholder, especially where the access crosses unfenced farmland; and
- note that formed tracks may not necessarily be on the line of the legal road.

Further advice and guidance on accessing the outdoors by 4WD can be found on the websites of the New Zealand Four Wheel Drive Association.