

Wild Camping With Children

by Melissa Seims



An essential guide

Wild Camping with Children

If the idea of having a campervan (or motorhome) has ever appealed to you, if you possibly can, indulge that feeling. I did and it is the best thing I've ever done.

Nearly four years ago, I bought a 27-year-old Volkswagen T4 high-top camper - who came to be called Daenerys (yes, after her from Game of Thrones).

At that time, I had a 5-year-old daughter so it was important for me to consider how I could make road trips exciting and interesting for her. What about those rainy days? Or those days when the Scottish midges have got you trapped inside your van? (this can happen!)

I wild camp because of the solitude it gives me. When I'm half way up a mountain for the night and all dog walkers have gone home, it feels like it's all mine, just for a while. I also love staying in nature reserve car parks purely for the access it gives me to creatures of the night, along with all the strange noises and absolute silences that you can find there. My daughter has also learnt to find enjoyment in these countryside places and has been on many van trips with me.

Nearly four years later, I have spent over 200 nights in my van, wild camping 98% of that time. I figured I have learnt some pretty cool tips and tricks to make all aspects of wild camping as easy as possible and especially so, when you have kids onboard!

I decided to write this booklet as something that I would have loved to have read, right back at the beginning of my travels. Hopefully, it will give you some ideas as you too, start to experience a life, well-lived, on the road.

Seeing and feeling those priceless moments when your children get totally absorbed in the act of climbing a tree, or paddling in a stream, of simply being alive in that moment.



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(NB – All internet links should be clickable and are accurate as of January 2020)

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'Do Not Forget to Live'

What do I mean by Wild Camping?

By wild camping, I mean parking up somewhere for a night or two, usually for free and very occasionally, by donation. Most of the time, you will have no other amenities. Approximately half the time, you may have a litter bin or dog poo bin onsite, if you are lucky, you may find a toilet there and **very** occasionally, a tap!

I have found that when I tell people I wild camp in the van, many assume I'm staying in those laybys you see on busy roads. I have *never* had to stay in such a place. There are thousands of other, far superior options out there.

I should also mention that this booklet is not really about wild camping 'full-time' – that is quite a different kettle of fish.

At this point I should say something about the legal aspect of wild camping in the UK – technically, you can't wild camp in pretty much any area of England and Wales. The reality however, is that as long as you are sensible, tidy up, don't have raves or make a nuisance of yourself, most places won't even notice you.

Scotland is a bit different and sort-of legally allows wild camping for no more than a few nights in the same place. In parts around Loch Lomond, they have started capitalising on it and offer [overnight permits](#) for just a few pounds. This is enforced between March and September. In the far North and on the Scottish Islands they actively support wild camping by more readily offering up places to shower and get water. On the Islands where there is a lack of 'proper' campsites, you find private bits of land to park on, with honesty donation boxes. This way the owner can make a few pounds, which I think is fair and very reasonable. As such, Scotland is a good place to wild camp particularly if new to it, or feeling nervous.

That said, it's certainly not at all hard to wild camp in the rest of the UK, as long as you do a bit of homework and have access to helpful information and locations of wild camping spots, previously tried, tested and shared by others.

I will just say a few words about [Southern Ireland](#). It is easy to wild camp there and the people are amongst the friendliest you will meet. Plus, unlike on mainland Britain, many petrol stations will have publicly-accessible mains water and mini laundrettes. There's a near absence of single-track roads there but they can all be very bumpy.

I well-remember my first wild camp in Daenerys. I targeted a local Wildlife Trust reserve that had a small car park. I also set us a mission - to spot our first glow 'worm' (it's actually a beetle)! The season was right and I knew this reserve had some.

I rocked up with my then-5-year-old, only to discover that the WT themselves were holding a glow-worm spotting evening. Due to this, and most unusually for this reserve, there were about 15 people waiting in the car park. We weren't booked on the WT evening; nevertheless, we were WT members, so I parked up and we set about our own independent hunt.

After triumphantly finding a couple of glow worms, we went back to the van. My intention was to just sit there nonchalantly, waiting for them all to go home. One by one they left, leaving only a WT warden. I watched as she eyed the van up and down and then came walking over to me. Steeling myself to commence the speech I had mentally rehearsed about astronomy, wildlife happening at night and how they wouldn't know we had been there, I opened my door...

Smilingly, she said "Are you going to be staying the night? You should be fine; I have a campervan too and I've spent loads of nights at nature reserves. You may get the farmer come down early in the morning to check his cows, but it shouldn't be a problem."

I immediately invited her onboard for hot chocolate. She declined, having to get home, but left me with a very big smile on my face.



Wild Camping with Children

You've taken the plunge, have got or about to get yourself a vehicle. Plus, you have a kid or three with you. First thing they'll be interested in, is where their bed is.

From day one in the van, the 'upstairs' was 'Florence's room.' I velcroed posters of animals onto Daenerys's carpeted roof and stuffed cuddly toys up there including 'adventure tortoise,' a little red knitted tortoise that is always up for an adventure and 'appears' randomly on bushes and trees when we are out and about. 😊



In the 'upstairs' berth of a high-top you cannot sit up. It is purely designed for sleeping or reading on your stomach.

In the early days, Florence would lie across the van width-ways, cocooned. That didn't last long and I now have to pull out the extension for her to sleep on. I also recommend the use of bed-socks – keeping feet warm at night really helps with sleeping in cooler temperatures.

Over the years, the tossing and turning of the quilt put marks and scratches across the ceiling posters – but just a few bits of Velcro and a fresh poster, all is new again.

I have also been away several times with my daughter and her friend. They both sleep upstairs with no problem. That said, I could imagine that a more sensitive child may dislike the more claustrophobic feel of 'upstairs,' so it may be something you need to consider.

With pop tops, although you can sit up in the top of them, they are going to be colder and maybe not as much use over winter for you. Suitable onboard heating could help remedy that.

As for motorhomes – I've not had one but have been in a few and they are quite different given all the extra room. I think most of them come with some sort of heating so both sleeping and temperature issues are likely to be less. However, they will be more expensive to run and at times require a confident driver to get them

down some of those little country roads to where more interesting stuff so often lies.

Campervans on the other hand are robust, smaller, cheaper to run and, I think, simply have more character.

Choose wisely. 😊



Stuff to do, Places to Go and Things to See with Children

Every child is different and you must use your own knowledge to guide you on what your child would enjoy most. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Organisations and Memberships

I strongly recommend joining the [National Trust](#). It will give you free entry to all their properties in the UK. Additionally, The National Trust have some lovely country

car-parks. With your membership, you are able to park there for free and some of their rural car parks are excellent for wild camping in.

Over the last 20 years, I have seen the National Trust improve their attractiveness to children. They really do consider how to make their properties fun to visit. Many have 'trails' and activity sheets as well as playing areas for younger children. On a rainy day – just find your nearest NT property, it's an easy no-brainer.

[English Heritage](#) is another organisation you could join, but I am less of a fan. English Heritage properties are typically older and in a more ruinous state than NT ones. I also feel they never put enough information on display. You simply get more from a membership of the National Trust. Furthermore, a significant percentage of English Heritage properties are free to visit anyway.

The [Historic Houses Association](#) is another alternative – I've never joined them but am considering doing so, as I've started to wear out the NT properties. 😊

I'm also a member of my local county's [Wildlife Trust](#). I love this organisation; their nature reserves are so well managed and typically a cut above other council or government owned reserves. They have a great app you can use to 'find your nearest' or you can look at their online map [here](#). A lot of them don't have a car park and rely on people parking in pull-ins and on verges, but some do and they make great spots to wild camp at. Check for parking details using their app or on their website.

The [Woodland Trust](#) also offer an [online map](#) showing you all nearby publicly accessible woodland. Parking can sometimes be an issue with some of the sites but it's worth checking out if struggling for something to do.



Other ideas

Beaches – There's so much to do on a beach. I always carry a small bucket and spade in the boot of the van. Large forts and cities can be built out of sand and shells. If there are pebbles, then how about painting some? Then there's always beach fires, litter picking, kite-flying, wave-jumping, and beachcombing for 'sea-glass' and other objects that could be utilised in some arty way.



Geocaching – This requires a free app on your phone or device. It's a great little game that involves finding small hidden 'caches' (typically a plastic tub). There are thousands of them all over the place. If the cache is big enough, it may contain a small toy or trinket that your child can choose to take, so long as you put something else in its place. The free app will give you access to so many caches per day for free; beyond that, there is paid membership. I find the free access works well for us.

Munzee, Snatch and Pokemon Go – These are some of the many augmented reality games that can be put on a phone. They really encourage walking as you go on a quest for 'something.' Unlike in Geocaching, there aren't any physically touchable rewards in these games, but collecting the virtual badges / parcels / Pokémons is still a fun thing to do for many children.

Museums - you can find really cool museums in some of the tiniest places. Especially if they have a particular rich history of something. Many are great for kids and will have some sort of activity trail for them.

Exploring Nature – If you've opted for a rural car park, chances are that there will be some sort of walk based from there – go on it, either in the day or at night time with torches! You could also use apps and the internet to find walking routes near you. [Alltrails](#) is very good for this.

Outdoor activity centres – These can be pricey but if you have the money, then make one a focus of your time away. You can try things like coasteering, caving, climbing, high ropes, orienteering, snorkelling, gorge-walking and bouldering.

Leisure Centres – they have swimming pools, other sporting activities and most importantly, *hot showers*.

Play parks - swings, slides, fun. [Free Parks](#) is a great website which shows you many free and fun playing parks in your vicinity.

On this point, I have to mention the [Eoropie Dunes Play Park](#) on the Isle of Lewis – one of the best free children’s parks that I’ve come across. Don’t miss it!

Astronomy and birdwatching – I have been an amateur astronomer for over 35 years and love sharing my knowledge with my daughter. You can all have fun with Space - all you need are some binoculars and a basic astronomical constellation book or app. Ditto with birdwatching. If you’re near a bird reserve you will often find helpful birders more than happy to show your children whatever species are in the area. Encourage your children to ask them.

Turn your vehicle into a Scrapbook – Over the years, at any significant place we visit, I buy a postcard or grab a flyer. These get stuck / velcroed up on any available empty space I have, including all over the carpeted ceiling. It becomes a unique wallpaper, full of reminders of fun and interesting times.

If you have the room – take a folded-up scooter, if you have a bike rack then take some bikes. My daughter has happily whiled away an evening, scootering round a remote car park with the most fabulous sea views.

Gather firewood and have a fire – Gather dry sticks and hanging dead wood to have a fire. It goes without saying, site it responsibly and supervise children carefully.



On the Road

Depending on where you live in the country, part of your road trip could involve many hours of driving and children don't tend to like that. Here are some ideas for on-the-road activities to keep them amused.

- Play car colour or type, spotting games.
- Play a memory game such as 'I went to the beach and in my bag, I had....' If you play it using items in alphabetical order, it makes it a bit easier. There are many variants on this type of activity.
- Get them the [i-SPY book On a road trip](#) or [i-SPY On a car journey](#) or look out for Eddie Stobart lorries and record the cab's name. (They all have one)
- Spread a little joy and engage them in practicing the campervan wave. If you own a VW the wave is almost considered obligatory. Just wave maniacally and joyfully at people who catch your eye. In most cases it will cheer them up, and is a lovely gift to give to a random stranger. As a Star Trek lover, we also engage the 'Live Long and Prosper' Vulcan hand sign immediately after an acknowledged wave.
- If you have the time, break it up and schedule in fun places or an overnight stop.
- Consider introducing 'no-driving' days and let the kids choose where they would like to spend the entire day. Beaches are great for this but do let them give you some input.



Keeping Kids Entertained - Onboard Essentials

So, you've made your children walk miles around mountains, lakes, towns and tourist attractions. Now It's calming 'van-time.'

The following is a list of van must-haves that are small, easy to store and use.

- 1) Wild Camping Scrap book – for everything and anything that can be got in it! i.e. flyers of places visited, pressed flowers, drawings, postcards, sand.
- 2) Books – fiction and non-fiction including nature spotting ones.
- 3) Sticker books – to a child they are exciting in a different way from books with lots of words in.
- 4) Audio books – great for the driving too!
- 5) Card games – I suggest standard playing cards as well as the game [Uno](#) and if you can, stretch to it [Uno Extreme](#). The educational [Timeline](#) sets, frenetic [Dobble](#) and bluffing based [Coup](#) are also great card-based games for children and adults alike.
- 6) Other games – Try to get a hold of compact ‘travel’ versions of things like Guess Who, Connect 4, Chess, Draughts, Cluedo and Scrabble.
- 7) Kites - Always a winner this one, just be sure to check the area for pylons.
- 8) Colouring books, plain paper, puzzle books and felt tips.
- 9) Binoculars – great for astronomy and bird-watching.
- 10) Mini canvases and acrylic paints and paint brushes. Acrylic paints can also be used to paint seashore pebbles!
- 11) Glues and Sellotape for inspirational nature art and all manner of things.
- 12) Torches – kids just love them!
- 13) Small craft kits such as sequin art, scratch art, pom-pom making, model making. Check eBay periodically to see what sort of small, pocket money type craft kits they have. Charity shops are also worth checking.
- 14) Bouncy ball – endless fun - until they lose it and you discover yourself knee-deep in nettles, trying desperately to find it, with child wailing.
- 15) Badminton set or those Velcro mitten ‘catch’ games.
- 16) Engage them in basic vehicle checks and mechanics – tyre pressures, oil levels, water levels.

You will notice that iPads and computers are missing from my list. That’s because I think my daughter spends enough time on them at school and at home, so I generally implement a van-wide ban on electronic devices, other than my own phone, which serves as a satnav and fun finder!

The whole of the UK can be their playground, with rope swings to discover in woodlands, secret beaches at the end of long narrow roads and new friends to meet on windy shores. These things are real, rewarding and nourishing to the soul.

They are your kids though, so if you take devices, remember a 12V cigarette lighter to USB adapter and cables. This should be able to charge all of your phones, tablets and I-devices. For laptops, you can get 12V cigarette lighter adapters (google them) or you can electrically hook-up somewhere. An onboard inverter is a potential source of 'mains' power. I don't have one and so can't comment further. It's best to just do your homework.

Introducing Wild Camping Certification!

At school, clubs and organisations, young children are often encouraged through the use of certificates. From an early stage, I introduced the concept of wild camping certificates to my daughter. If you have a child who likes certificates, how about introducing it to your travels?

These are the 'badges' I invented:

First Wild Camp

First Solo Wild Poo 😊

First Wild Swim

First Campfire

'Official Runner' on Daenerys' water relay team (when we're topping up using bottles and a tap)

Wild Camping Bronze award – 50 nights

Wild Camping Silver award – 100 nights

Wild Camping Gold award – 200 nights

Wild Camping Van Mechanic – for checking things like tyre pressures, oil and water levels whilst in the wilds.



Keeping Clean

In the absence of any natural water body, then facial and baby wipes are an absolute must-have. For us, they sort of replace the traditional shower or bath. Their big advantage is that they use none of your precious water.

My daughter gets up and happily wipes her face with a wipe. Because it's a bit different from the usual shower or bath, these things take on a newness that makes them fun and all part of the camping experience.

Greasy hair can become a problem, but for that you can utilise dry shampoo, plaits and hats! This has become a good strategy for me after I once caught sight of myself in a mirror looking like a total tramp.

All that said, after a few days, things may be starting to feel a bit desperate.

This is a good example of when things are getting desperate



Don't worry - you have several options:

- If the temperature is good – find a stream or lake and have a good splash around – wash responsibly and use biodegradable soap.
- If somewhere hot – hang up a 'solar shower'. This uses the Sun's heat to warm up a bag of water with a shower head on the bottom.
- Find a leisure centre. Many will let you use their showers for a small fee and failing that, buy a swimming ticket – you'll get access to showers then.
- Go onto a paid campsite with shower facilities.
- Check out any public toilets you see; if they are quiet, you may be able to wash your hair in the sink. This is actually something I do quite a lot. Ensure the sink is a good size, or you will end up wiping water off the floor.
- Some ferry ports and harbours have showers that can be used by the public – more so up North, but it's worth inquiring if you're near one.
- Some of the larger train stations have showers for public use.
- In North Scotland and the Scottish islands, some community centres have showering facilities you can use.
- Some of the big Motorway service stations have public showers.
- There is a very good map that covers public showers in Scotland here: www.campsiecampers.co.uk/showers-in-scotland/

Toileting

When wild camping, the chance of you having access to a toilet outside your van, at night, is less than 10%. You may be one of these people with a toilet and chemicals onboard – but you then have another issue – disposing of it every few days. This often involves finding a campsite with a suitable disposal point. Whilst I understand that toilet cassettes can be emptied into public toilets, I have heard enough stories about missed targets and leaking cassettes, that the whole chemical toilet idea has never appealed to me and I've never used one.

Initially, I carried a small, trowel-like camping spade with which to dig holes. But rapidly learnt that being parked up at a location where you can quickly and easily dig a hole is more difficult than you might think. The ground was often too hard for the small spade to be effective, especially if time is short.

Now, the following may divide people, but I will start by stating a subjective fact based on my own observations:

**A dog poo bin is easier to find in the UK, than either a public litter bin or a public toilet! **

If we move on a step from this, why shouldn't I be able to put human poo in those dog excrement bins too?

In my time, I have mastered the art of the 'drop and squat' swiftly followed by the use of nappy bags to collect the evidence. I then just pop it all into a dog poo bin. Job done.

With time and practice, you can even take this one stage further and in windless conditions have a nappy bag lying open on the ground ready to catch your alchemical gold.

In the absence of a dog poo bin, for obvious reasons, some other form of nappy bag disposal becomes the prime task of the morning. I once initially failed in this mission and after arriving back at the van after a hot day's walking, my onboard bin really did not smell good. The thing is, 'it' wasn't even mine, it was my friend's!

As for the number ones - as we all know, there's always bushes for that wild wee!

Children who are introduced to these ideas from a fairly young age can usually get their head around wild toileting. As a parent, you may have to 'wipe and swipe' initially but this can be turned into a 'mission' for their first Solo Wild Pooing certificate! 😊

My friend's 8-year-old was so proud of having a wild poo and picking it up for the first time, that he insisted on showing his mum exactly where he had achieved this tremendous personal landmark!

If you have the space, a good 'bridging' device for the unsure child is a bucket (you can also buy collapsible ones). Place cling film over the top for the number two's.

I'd best stop writing this section now lest you think I have a toilet fixation. I don't, but I do love the concept of 'leaving no trace but footsteps'.

Your other option is to be totally on the ball regarding public toilets and where they are (there are digital downloadable POIs for toilets, but more on that later).

Take it from me, this country has lost many public toilets over the last ten years and there is no guarantee that you will rock up to one and find it open. For me, I can't be bothered with the uncertainty and faffing around.

Water and its Acquisition

You wouldn't believe how water becomes a major priority when on the road. My van has a large 74-litre tank but if all three of us are onboard, it tends to run out approximately every three to four days.

An absolute must-have for this issue is two large, 2-litre bottles plus a large funnel with a flexible, long spout. The latter can be got from eBay for just a few pounds.

You can't rely on taps having nice flexible hoses attached to them, nor can you rely on that bit of hose you may be carrying being easily attachable to any particular tap. The plastic bottle and funnel method is fail-safe. Make it fun, turn your children into relay water runners!

As to finding *drinkable* water – this is where the digital POI file sets come in very handy, but more of that in [Part 2](#).

In addition, harbours are pretty good for having a cold-water mains supply – if you see a blue standpipe, then it should be a cold-water mains supply. It's also worth considering petrol stations (but read on!). Plus, churchyards and cemeteries as they often have a water tap for use by people leaving flowers.

The most important thing in all this is **TASTE THE WATER BEFORE FILLING YOUR TANK!** I shall now recount how I learnt this most valuable lesson.

On this occasion, I was in Cornwall, by myself and running out of water. I noticed a water tap on the side of a petrol station and thought I would just fill up from that. 15 minutes later, water-laden, I pulled off and made my way to my WC spot for the night. Upon arrival, I decided to make a cup of tea. It was then, that I realised that this water was the foulest water I have ever tasted! I suspect it actually came from a big storage tank in the ground, rather than the mains supply.

Desperate for a drink and with little drinkable water on the van, I succumbed to supping lager all evening. The following morning, my main imperative was to dump my tank and find some proper water! This I did by utilising the fail-safe option; that is driving to a supermarket and buying about 20 bottles of the stuff!

The budget supermarkets will typically have 2 litre bottles of water for around 20p. Effectively, I can fill my tank for just a few pounds. However, I don't like doing this due to plastic waste and have only ever done it once. Sometimes, needs just must...

This leads to a **very important thing to have on your van** – spare bottles of water! I now typically carry 8 litres of bottled water with me at all times – it takes up valuable space but it's a comfort knowing it's there. After the air we breathe, it's the number two thing required in an apocalypse survival guide!

I also discovered a great tip if your sink ever gets blocked. I like a good cup of coffee first thing and use an AeroPress compact filter coffee device to make it. Once I had a bunged-up sink, so I used the AeroPress as a sink plunger and it worked amazingly well!



Wild Camping Cooking with Kids

If, like me, you try to avoid visiting supermarkets when out in the van, you will no doubt have a cupboard full of long-life foodstuffs. With some clever thinking, imagination and the right ingredients you can make some fun food.

You have to think about food differently whilst wilding. Important things to consider include: How much water is this going to take? How much washing-up is this going to create? Given the limitations of my 'kitchen', what can I actually cook so that it's all hot and ready at the same time?

When you're out and about, make a point of stopping to buying free-range eggs and freshly pulled home-grown vegetables for sale outside random houses. In Norfolk, you often see Samphire for sale, this seashore plant is certainly worth a try and goes well with fish.

How about gathering your own wild ingredients? Most people know the usual suspects: Blackberries, Apples and Nettles, all of which are fun to gather, in their differing ways.

There are some excellent wild foraging guides out there but it goes without saying: Do not dabble if uncertain and leave the fungi for those who really are in the know!

Pantry Staples – Suggestions

Bottled water

Wraps (longer shelf life than bread)

Tins – of everything including fruit

Dried flaked potato (such as Smash)

Packets of flavoured rice, pasta, custard and instant desserts

Long life milk

Tea / Coffee / Hot Chocolate

Milkshake powder

Stock cubes & gravy granules

Sugar

Pasta

Rice

Couscous

Crackers

Olive oil or similar

Jelly pots

Those small boxes of breakfast cereal kids always love.

Concentrated squashes (those handbag sized ones are ideal)



Other Cooking Tips

If you're in a good-sized motorhome, the following will not apply to you, but many campervans have just a small gas hob and possibly a grill or a small oven. This limits the type of cooking you can do and you have to think creatively to get a meal done.

'Smash' type desiccated potato is brilliant – It mixes up with hot water / milk / butter inside a minute and is instantly ready to serve. Spice it up with the addition of herbs or grated cheese before adding the hot liquid. Use a plastic jug – it's easier to clean.

Couscous – better than rice and another one that just requires a jug and some hot water for instant food. It's also good to add spices and herbs to.

Re-use hot water you may have cooked some veg in (so don't add salt), as washing-up water or as the basis for a soup or drink.

Using a Grill as a Sort-of Oven

I once discovered the best pie shack known to humankind. It's called *Croft 36* and is on the Isle of Harris in the Hebrides. This honesty-box 'shed' was full of gorgeous breads, cakes and pies all baked daily with produce from nearby crofts.

Having bought several pies, the way I managed to reheat them was by placing them under the grill, on a very low setting, with silver foil over them to stop them burning. I have successfully reheated several items, all the way through, in this way. Remember to keep your grill door as close to closed as you can manage, bearing in mind what your grill door is made of. (My grill door has plastic on its inner side from the handle and latch system.)



Child-friendly Campervan Recipe's

I have no weighing scales on my van and I'm a pretty ad-hoc, gut-feeling kind of cook – these recipes reflect this!

Soup based Stew

Pretty self-descriptive.

With soup as a base, chuck in whatever needs eating or whatever you have left. Heat accordingly.

Campervan Calzone (Rolled-up Pizza)

- Wraps (or pitta breads)
- Tomatoes in the form of puree, sauce, fresh or tinned
- Grated cheese
- Toppings

On a wrap, get the children to add their tomato base, cheese and ingredients.

Shove it under the grill – *keep an eye on it*. After a few minutes, roll it up and then put it back under, more cheese on top, for a few more minutes.

No Oven Campervan Cookies

- One packet of cookie mixture
- Water or milk
- Butter

Use the grill on low and cook for 10-15 minutes - *watch carefully* to avoid burning their tops.

Remove from grill, leave a few minutes for them to cool and harden slightly.

Eat quickly before the children see them!

Nettle Soup

Here's a fun one to gather if you think your children are up to the challenge of collecting it. Rubber gloves and scissors are a huge help with this one!

I'm also assuming that you will not have a food processor onboard.

- Nettle top leaves washed and cut into small pieces
- Vegetable stock or soup base
- Any veg you have to hand – parsnips, carrots, leeks etc chopped into smallish pieces

Cook the washed root vegetables in the stock for about 15 minutes

Add nettle leaves towards the end and cook for further 10 minutes. Season to taste.

Tuna Pasta

It's all in the title!

Planning a Wild Camping Road Trip

Everyone will have their own way of approaching a road trip. Some like to ad-hoc it as they go. Others like a full itinerary precisely worked out to the hour!

I am somewhere in between. One of the great things about travelling and holidaying like this is that you can and indeed should, leave yourself open to adventure. If you spot a brown tourist sign to something that sounds interesting, then go for it. You can relax, knowing that you have everything you need with you; the road really does belong to you and there are no time pressures to get anywhere by a certain time.

I use a mixture of a road atlas and my smartphone to show me maps, Points of Interest (POIs) and places to wild camp. I know not everyone likes using modern tech so I have split this section into two. The first section is how to plan a road trip using a conventional road atlas as your basis. The second, how to get most of that same info onto your phone or tablet and utilise digital maps.

Maps – The Road Atlas Way

Before any major road trip, I tend to get a good, physical road atlas covering the area I am going to, in as detailed a scale as possible, without it being a hefty tome! I use Philip's Navigator Britain. Use different coloured highlighters to flag up points of interest and wild camping spots from your pre-trip research.

I like the additional comfort of having an atlas in physical form. Electronic devices are great, but they can run out of battery, fail or could get lost and then you would be struggling. A road atlas is also more flexible when it comes to plotting Points of Interest. For example, you cannot easily find an electronic dataset of POIs that will show you all outdoor activity centres or laundrettes – so doing the research and plotting them on your atlas in advance is a good way to go.

Good road atlases will already have many places of interest already on them, but I like to highlight them as well so that they stand out. It saves time when you're on the road, trying to decide what to do that day.

Places of Interest, often found already marked in a road atlas include:

National Trust properties - In Scotland this organisation is known as the National Trust for Scotland. Membership of the NT will get you into all the Trusts' properties for free, irrespective of country.

English Heritage properties - A significant percentage of their sites are actually free to visit. In Scotland they partner up with Historic Scotland, in Wales, CADW. In Ireland, English Heritage are partnered with OPW and on the Isle of Man, Manx National Heritage. An English Heritage membership will get you reduced or no-cost entry to places owned by the other organisations.

Wildlife Trust reserves - Are brilliant and are generally of a better calibre than locally run council nature reserves.

RSPB reserves – Also very worthy of highlighting on the map.

Ancient sites - The really good ancient sites often find their way onto road atlases. As an ancient site lover, I additionally, manually add sites with a rating of above 3, from the online website [Megalithic Portal](#). This long-standing online site is the go-to site for all ancient sites. It's not the easiest site to navigate but once you've worked it out, you can easily pull up maps of counties and countries with site types and rating filtered according to your preferences.

Plotting other POIs

Whilst you may not be up-to-speed with using digital maps and apps, most people can use the Internet as a valuable source of information.

Please read [this section on finding wild camping spots](#) for good internet sources to consult. Some of the websites mentioned have maps that you can view. Use them to plot relevant wild camping sites on.

You will of course have your own interests, and there is certainly lots of information online and in books that you can use for your own personal research and from which you can manually plot things onto your road atlas.

Finally, and importantly – you need to factor in the children. Of course, this is going to vary for all children and depend on their age but here are a few ideas for places you might like to research and 'mark on your maps' and could include:

- Places like 'Go Ape' and other outdoor activity centres.

- Museums
- Steam Railways
- Woodland and countryside visitor centres
- Visit the website [Atlas Obscura](#). It lists thousands of quirky things to see, all around the world and is a must-visit website for lovers of the more bizarre. Many of the sites would amuse children too
- A final one-off, highly recommend and free 'walk' - The Elie Chain Walk in Fife – aka 'a free Via Ferrata' aka clambering around and up and down rocks holding onto a chain. It's great fun for the adventurous family and suits nearly all ages. Good advice and info on this walk can be found here: jamescarron.wordpress.com/features/elie-chainwalk-step-by-step-guide

Once you've plotted the relevant info, gleaned from whatever sources you like, you will be left with a paper-based map of the area you are visiting, with lots of exciting, highlighted attractions and stop-overs immediately obvious to you.

Maps – The Digital Maps Way

Rather than mess around with atlases and highlighting pens, you may prefer and be knowledgeable enough to use a more internet and tech-based approach. This involves having a good map app on your phone / tablet or laptop, into which you can import relevant sets of POIs (Places of Interest). This isn't perfect as it relies on being able to import POI datasets into your maps. For some areas of interest, it's not always easy to find the dataset you would like and you may have to laboriously and manually add them yourself.

POI files (containing 'bookmarks') are typically found on the internet in various file formats designed for use in different satnavs and in various mapping apps. The ones I have found most useful, as they can be utilised with a couple of good **free** phone mapping apps, have the file extension KML, KMZ or GPX.

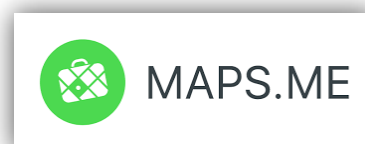
Once imported, a simple tap of the finger and your mapping app will open, revealing exactly where you are and will display all the POI markers (bookmarks) near you.

Different sets of POIs can be turned off or on from within the app, as and when required. i.e. if it's getting late in the day, I turn off all the visitor attraction POI sets and turn on the wild camping ones in order to find our view for the night!

For this electronic, map-based approach, I am a big lover of the Maps.me or Guru Maps Apps. Whilst not quite Ordnance Survey quality, they do still detail many footpaths, bridleways, churches etc.

First things first

Assuming you have a smart phone, (a tablet with GPS is good too!) the first thing to do is download Maps.me - it's free! [Maps.me](https://www.maps.me). The very similar Guru Maps - can be found here: [Gurumaps.app](https://www.gurumaps.app) they do a free, non-Pro version – search for it in your relevant App or Play store)



Take a look at both and choose one. Both companies also offer a paid / subscription service which includes advert removal and other perks but the free versions will work absolutely fine.

A great feature about either, is that you can also use them as satnavs. Simply select your POI and tell them to guide you there!

For convenience I shall just cite Maps.me from this point forth.

Once you have Maps.me on your phone or device, it will advise you to download all the relevant maps for the area you are visiting. Do it, for this means you will have maps always available - even without a phone signal.

You then have to download the relevant KML files which put all the POI marker sets (AKA bookmarks) on your 'Maps.me' maps. I will shortly explain where to find and how to add these POIs.

I just want to say that wild camping sites have typically been submitted by other people's own explorations, experiences and subsequent parking finds. This is something that I strongly encourage you to do too, and definitely tell the source if you discover a site, that for some reason, is no longer usable.

Importing and Finding Wild Camping POIs

There's a number of ways you get these POIs / KML files into your Maps.me app. On some phones you can click on the KML file from within your phones browser and it will ask you if you want Maps.me to open (and import) it. This assumes you already have Maps.me on your phone or tablet.

I typically email the KML to myself and then click on it from within my email app on my smartphone. This then allows me to 'open it' and automatically imports it into Maps.me. This method also gives me a 'saved' copy in my 'Sent' email folder.

After a few seconds, the import is done! Be sure to enable its view in the Maps.me settings if it isn't enabled by default.

How to Find Those Wild Camping Sites using POIs!

You should now have your chosen app in place and just want to add the relevant info to make it easy for yourself when you're on the road.

In my opinion, the best collection of wild camping stopover POIs can be found online at the Wildcamping For Motorhomes website wildcamping.co.uk

You can join for free, but to access the POI map, the downloadable KML files and a host of other perks, there is a low-cost, full membership charge. It is totally worth joining up as a full member, is a wild camping no-brainer and the first thing you should do.



They also have their own app which you could download and use as an alternative to importing their KML files into Maps.me.

After importing it (see previous section), your Maps.me app will then display for you, overnight wild camping places of various types.

You can also get this website's POI sets for water taps, pubs that are known to let you stay in their car park and toilets! Get them all – remember you can turn the individual sets on and off from within the Maps.me app.

A completely different set (though there will be some inevitable cross-overs) of free wild camping locations you can import into Maps.me or view online can be found here:

www.wildcamping.moonfruit.com/wild-camping-uk/4563550466

For this specific site in order to download the KML:

1. Click on the square box on the top right of the map and let it open in Google Maps.
2. Click the three dots and select 'download kml' - Do this for both the UK sites and the pub stopovers.
3. Import those KMLs!

There used to be a great, free wild camping POI available on the website motorhomeparking.co.uk but this is no longer accessible. However, the old KML download link still seems to work so [click here](#) download and import. **NB: This KML set is about three years out of date but may largely still hold true.**

Other excellent KML sources for Importing – not wild camping related

POIGRAVES - www.poigraves.uk/pages/files.php

The above site has downloadable KMLs for:

- The National Trust
- The National Trust for Scotland
- English Heritage
- Historic Scotland
- RSPB reserves
- CADW
- Historic Houses Association
- And several others which may or may not be of interest to you.

There used to be a Wildlife Trust Reserves KML file – but I can't currently find it online so they may have removed it. They do however have their own app which you can download and which displays them all.

I still have the old Wildlife Trust Reserves KML so email me (address at the end) and I can send it to you.

For ancient sites go to the Megalithic Portals download page for the KMLs here: www.megalithic.co.uk/topics.php?countries=1&kmldown=1

Other websites, Apps and Facebook Groups

Park4night

The Park4night website is also very good and free: park4night.com They include some chargeable campsites – just check the icon key for more info.

You can view their locations online at no cost (free sign up required). Or download their app (also free). If you subscribe, you get some extra perks that may be useful to you such as being able to download everything and use their app offline (i.e. when you have no internet signal!).

I haven't yet found a way to download their sites as a KML you could use with Maps.me but I do often take a look at the separate Park4night app on my phone.

Search for Sites

Another website is 'Search for Sites: www.searchforsites.co.uk I think you have to join and become a paying member to get access to the KML files but they do have their own app for both iPhones and Androids that will bring up the sites for you, for free, for a limited period of time, so check out the relevant app stores.

Brit Stops

There's also 'Brit Stops' – Their information is only available as a book you purchase with information in about 'hosts' that let you stay on their property for free. I've never had anything to do with them so have absolutely no opinion: www.britstops.com

Others

I've recently joined the Facebook group 'Campervan Overnight Parking'. I haven't formed an opinion about it yet but I like the vibe:

www.facebook.com/groups/139976009506064/

Finding New Wild Camping Spots

- Don't assume that all wild camping spots have been mapped – they haven't and they change.
- Keep an eye on the Maps.me app for those yellow shaded areas which usually indicate car parks. Sometimes they are next to a pub and may be a no-go, but other times they are simply in nice places and associated with woodlands and wildlife and are often good for a stopover.
- Try following brown signs alerting you to an ancient site or monument. - they often have small parking areas attached to them.
- If on the coast, follow those little isolated tracks down to the sea - there's usually a pull in, car park or layby at the end - this is especially true if you are in Scotland.
- If it's getting late and you're getting desperate, pull onto the country roads. You often see little pull-ins and scraps of ground that you could probably get away with parking on, for the night.
- If you find a new and previously unmapped location – submit it to a website such as wildcamping.co.uk or Park4night!

Finally, before embarking on the journey to your location for the night, if possible, **walk down the road on Google Street view**. Or, at the very least zoom in on the satellite view. This simple action can tell you a lot. Most importantly, if there may be a height barrier!

For the Nervous

If you've read this far and still feel nervous or unsure whether it's for you, don't worry; there are some good options out there which serve as a 'halfway house' between full-on campsites with all amenities and wild camping.

This country has two main camping clubs: The Camping and Caravanning Club and The Caravan and Motorhome Club. Both of these organisations, have numerous small campsites, often referred to as a CS (Certified Site) or a CL (Certified Location).

These tend to have no or very basic amenities. If you become a paid-up member then the additional charge for staying on these is usually towards the cheaper end. Many are on farms and so can be great for seeing animals! You can rest assured that you are there with full permission of the land's owner, yet still be having a taste of what it's like when a vehicle becomes your home.

The other advantage about going on to any sort of 'proper' campsite is that you increase the likelihood of other children being there – then your child/ren can have 'insta-friends.'

Another website that promotes 'wild' camping on a campsite with little or no amenities is coolcamping.com/campsites/nearly-wild-camping

HELP I Need a Last Resort for a Stop-over!

With the information here, you shouldn't get to this point but things can go awry and you may turn up to discover a temporary closure of a car park or the road to it. If it's getting late and you have tired children onboard, this may make you feel a bit panicky.

Don't worry - I figure you have at least two last resort options:

- 1) Find a pub, any pub and ask if you can stay in their car park - make sure you offer to buy food/drink!
- 2) Find a 'proper' campsite! - By far the best KML to import with just about all known campsites marked, can be found on Archies Campsites:

archiecampings.eu

Find the relevant country's KML (it has them all!) Download the zip file and import it into Maps.me. Turn these bookmarks on when you're getting desperate. Whether that's for a place to stay, somewhere to empty your loo, or grab a shower. Archies POIs usually give you the campsite's phone number when you select it in Maps.me so just give the campsite a call!

When you Rock Up

So, you've turned up at a place. The first thing to look for is a barrier or gate at the entrance. Does it look like it ever moves? If so, then you run a small chance of a warden turning up, locking you in, or turfing you off. Unless it has been reported as a wild camping location on a reputable site such as wildcamping.co.uk, in which case you should be good.

In my experience, several sites have gates, but they often never move from the open position - check for clues by looking for spiderwebs or plants growing in front of the opened gates.

Are there any visitors' centres there? If so, you run an increased chance of a warden or someone rocking up to check the building or being seen by surveillance cameras that may be watched by a security pedant. As such, they are not locations I tend to aim for.

Consider whether to selectively ignore any 'No Overnight Camping' signs. I have stayed at numerous, in-the-middle-of-nowhere places that may have a sign displaying the ominous words 'No Overnight Camping'. Now, my mind can reinterpret this in a number of ways. For example, I have been known to think 'I'm parking, not camping!'

Seriously though, what harm can one possibly do by parking up in a car park or lay-by, in a self-contained driving and living unit?! I tend to see these signs as a nonsense and a product of fear and scaremongering brought about by the poor actions of the very few. This type of overkill is something that really irks me.

The only time I have had to move as a result of parking in a 'No Overnight Parking' sign stop, was because my overly-conscientious 6-year-old spotted the sign and started wailing at me! [See here for the tale](#)

ALWAYS BE RESPECTFUL. If there's rubbish when you get there, pick it up and **LEAVE NO TRACE.**

ALWAYS AIM TO HAVE A PLAN B – another nearby wild camping place or countryside car park you can go to, should midnight ravers or aliens decide to descend on your chosen location. I have once had a load of youngsters turn up at 11pm blasting out music from boom boxes. Unfortunately, I was actually stranded at that time, due to a stuck-on brake shoe so I couldn't go anywhere!

Don't start getting out awnings and camping chairs thereby taking up additional valuable spaces in car parks, it's considered rude.

If another campervan / motorhome rocks up then feel free to say 'Hi' - we tend to be a friendly bunch and I've had some truly fabulous evenings in parking places with strangers who have become friends. If they have a musical instrument then you absolutely **MUST** go and introduce yourself!

You may on occasion get a car full of teenagers turn up - but the whipper-snappers have bedtimes! They usually want to park as far away from you as possible whilst they smoke their joints or do whatever it is that they do. Ignore them and they will be very happy to just ignore you. They will almost certainly be gone by 11pm.

Sometimes you may come across car parks being used for more sexually liberating reasons. If it doesn't float your boat, then shut your curtains and go to sleep. They are only there to play with willing people.

I have encountered such a car park, just once. It was a Friday night. The giveaway was that in a fairly large parking area, at night, when a vehicle arrived it came and parked close to me and had only one person in it. It's not human nature to do that in these circumstances, unless there is a reason...

Anyway, I was with my daughter but she hadn't twigged and just went to bed as usual. I then promptly shut my curtains and also went to sleep. Just don't flash your lights! 😊

The first car to wake you up in the morning will usually belong to a dog walker and they tend to be an affable bunch.

If approached by a disgruntled warden or self-righteous member of public, be honest and be polite. Stress you intend to leave no trace and to move on early. Express a love of night-time nature or the starry sky, of how you enjoy sharing that with your children. If the person continues to be negative, don't be a pain, move your vehicle on to your Plan B site (which you will hopefully have thought a little about).

Please note, the above situation very rarely happens. It is **more-likely** that people want to come and have a nose in your campervan or ask you about your travels.

In summary, to find your Wild Camping spot for the night:

- 1) Install Maps.me on a suitable device

- 2) Import KML / KMZ files with all those lovely POIs into Maps.me
- 3) Look at Maps.me, see where you are in the UK and look for your nearest Wild Camping site.
- 4) If possible, double-check any wild camp site by pulling it up in Google maps and going to Street view – this can reveal valuable information about the site such as whether there may be a height barrier that would stop you going in.
- 5) Install other relevant ‘apps’ such as Park4Night and use these as another source to check for locations.
- 6) Failing all this, then either ‘wing it’, or turn on the Archies campsites POI set and go to a paid campsite near you.

Miscellaneous but Relevant

Notes on Vehicles

I can’t really write much about the types of vehicles that come as campervans or motorhomes as I’ve only had a high-top VW T4.

What I can say, is that the larger the vehicle, the slightly more restricted you will become regarding your choice of wild camping sites. A little bit of extra thought will be required to check that it is a place that you can:

- a) Physically get to
- b) Turn around in!

If you have a pop-top van conversion then pretty much nowhere is safe from you! I have yet to come across any twisty, narrow, or hair-pinned road that you could not get a van with a standard height (let’s say 2m) and length (let’s call that 4.7m), down. That said, there are a handful of **very** low bridges in the UK that will bring any van to a halt or rip the top off it depending on how cognisant a driver you are!

With a high-top, I have, on occasion, come across otherwise splendid car parks, with height barriers on entry, which I simply can’t get under. These are typically no impediment to standard height or pop-top style vans. That said, I think the trade-off for a slightly warmer, all-season van is absolutely worth it.

Lengths and widths of vehicles can give rise to various issues on some minor country roads. You’d be surprised how often you come across the road sign indicating that there is a narrowing and warning you that only vehicles smaller than 6ft 6” wide,

can pass. Vans and van conversions should be OK at this width, but once you move into the motorhome class, well they tend to be a bit wider. To date, I have not come across an extremely narrow road that I have not been able to safely squish through.

Lengths of vehicles can cause issues with getting around very tight, hairpin corners and if very long, you have the additional risk of grounding on some country roads.

Whatever living space on wheels you find yourself with, I strongly recommend encouraging the concept of putting everything back in its place, as soon as you've finished with it. The amount of van Tetris I do on a daily basis can be significant, but this is a good thought pattern to get into and will help save you time in the long run.

Always remember to switch off any gas appliances you may have, overnight. Whilst a properly converted vehicle should have adequate vents in the side, you can never be too careful and horror stories do arise. I just sleep better knowing that if using gas, my 3-way fridge is turned off overnight. Plus, it will save you money too!

Carry plenty of cloths to wipe away condensation. In cooler temperatures, with several bodies, a huge amount of water vapour is breathed out overnight. Cloths will help clear it off the windows. Some vans and motorhomes are double-glazed (though the cab seldom is!) and may get less of an issue.

I always have a 'damp trap' tucked away behind my seat, next to the fridge. It's also worth noting that the use of gas, produces lots of water vapour.

If you have thick thermal screens, use them – especially in cooler temperatures. The difference they make to the climate inside is noticeable and of course the privacy, priceless!

In Summer, consider making some simple 'black-out' blinds from black-out fabric and use sticky-backed Velcro or magnets (depending on your set up) to secure it over the window. Alternatively, you can invest in proper fitted blinds or pre-measured, factory-made, suction options. There's lots of options at different price points that will give you the desired result of stopping the early morning sun in summer, waking you up at ridiculous o'clock.

Get to know your appliances and switches. Most vehicles will have a 12V system fed from a leisure battery. I have a 'Zig' unit that turns the 12V circuits on and off, controls the mains Electric Hook-Up (EHU) and gives me the ability to select which battery I use. Some will also have water gauges and other bells and whistles. It's best to try and understand how yours works.

Fridges or cool boxes are another thing found on most vehicles. Some will run on 230V mains and / or 12V (with engine on). Others can additionally be run on gas. In this last case, some fridges like the vehicle to be flat, or they don't work very well.

I have Campingaz on my van, the other readily available option is Calor Gas. Campingaz is a bit more expensive and I worked out that it was costing me a few pounds to run my fridge for half a day. It is worth questioning, if what you have in the fridge is worth that extra expense as it may be best just to gobble it up. Meat and cheese are the main concern here.

Spares – What to Carry when Space is Limited.

I often joke about how Daenerys is always zombie apocalypse ready. One of the beauties about having one of these beasts is that it really does make you appreciate what you *actually need* for raw survival.

I envisage that in the event of a zombie apocalypse, my van could be my escape pod, method of transport and living space. In my scenario – zombies can't run. So, spares are something definitely worth considering. No-one wants to have to hunt around cities full of flesh-eating monsters on a quest for a mere bulb!

That said, I think this is pretty common sense really:

- 1) Number one is not a spare wheel – it is spare bottles of water – water pumps can fail or even freeze in very cold weather and then you have an issue!
- 2) Container of spare fuel – especially if going to more remote parts.
- 3) Spare gas canister for your stove and gas-powered fitted appliances.
- 4) A spare wheel and tools to change it.
- 5) Spare bulbs for your vehicle's lights, especially the main vehicle ones.
- 6) Jump leads for winter battery let downs.
- 7) Tow rope
- 8) Spare windscreen wiper(s)
- 9) Oil and Coolant
- 10) Gorilla Tape – I have found this really strong tape very handy at times for things like dodgy wing-mirrors or securing a storm blown aerial, tortuously and persistently tapping on your windscreen in the middle of the night.

Very Handy Items

Apart from your bag of clothes, here are some things that have proved really useful.

25 litre bin bags (I hang mine off the back of the driver's seat)

Washing-up Liquid

Aluminium Foil

Tea towels (more than you might at first think)

Empty tubs for leftovers, shell and stone collections

Hand brush (to sweep the van out with)

Toilet roll / baby wipes / facial wipes

Hair brush & bobbles

Toiletries

Medicine / First Aid Kit

Small fire extinguisher

Towels

Swimming costumes

Spare pair of shoes each (Croc-style are ideal 'emergency shoes').

Spare hoody or coat

Stick incense - for those evening when the van is full of stinky shoes. Tip: Securely stick the end into a sponge-scourer, in your sink then light it.

Breakdown cover!

As far as rubbish is concerned, aim to find a suitable public litter bin or community recycling centre every day. This isn't usually a problem. If possible separate rubbish and recycle. Keep the bags small as it makes them much easier to dispose of.

And finally...

A Note from Florence to all Would-be Wildlings

Hi for you kiddos out there I've got some tips on wild camping I'm going to tell you about what to bring for warmth and entertainment

WARMTH

If it's summer I suggest taking shorts and a t-shirt with a cap but if it's winter I suggest to take warm pjs with extra blankets because it will be cold in the winter. You should take a warm coat with you.

GAMES

I suggest taking smaller games like top trumps if you are in a campervan because there is less room, but if you have a motorhome you can take bigger games like Monopoly.

I suggest taking books, maybe a kite, scooter or a bike and other outdoor things like that.

If you are camping in a tent then you should take a small toy in a bag with a book

That's all from me byeeeeeee

Contact and Thanks

This booklet is an ongoing process. If you come across some great POI datasets, or have any suggestions and ideas regarding wild camping with children, please let me have them!

If you have a child who has perhaps written about their wild camping adventures, I am happy to include their writings too.

Email me at: wisewoman@outlook.com

For more inspiration, road trip ideas and wild camping insights, please read my wild camping blog at: daenerysvan.tumblr.com

BIG THANKS

To the members of the wildcamping.co.uk forums – you lot are simply the best.

Also, many thanks to the crew of Wolfie and Vandalf for super photos and shared stories.

Lastly, thanks to Florence and all the people who have travelled the roads with me.

Just because there's no destination in sight, doesn't mean the road is not worth travelling