

Beginners guide to a blockade camp

What is a blockade camp anyway? It is a temporary camp site set up generally near the site of a proposed project or activity that people are trying to highlight, or an area people are aiming to protect. Many successful campaigns have based their direct action from blockade camps and include the wins against the damming of the Franklin river, stopping the Jabiluka uranium mine, and the proposed gas hub at Walmadan/James Price Point. There are often camps set up to try and stop forest destruction, there have been short term ones to gather people protesting coal seam gas works, and there was one running several years near a coal mine in NSW.

It can be a scary thing, heading to a blockade camp for the first time. Here are some tips to get you started

What is it like to live at a blockade?

It can be great fun, and an experience of living in an intense community who have similar views to you. It can also be hard work – living communally under pressure means that all the problems that come with a dysfunctional share house, can be multiplied.

Depending on how long the camp has been established and the skills and priorities of the people there, will depend on the facilities. Most camps do not have running water, and minimal electricity – which is generally solar powered and intermittent. This will tend to be prioritised for campaign needs, such as power for laptops to send out updates.

From the other perspective, most camps are set up to save important and sacred places, so you will be living an awesome simple life, in the middle of a most likely very gorgeous place.

WHAT TO TAKE

Basically, all the things you would usually take on a camping trip, plus some extras according to your needs.



Camp Walmadan (James Price Point)

- Swag. Although you can totally get by with a camp mat and sleeping bag there is something awesome about swags. There just is.
- Sleeping bag (or two if it is cold) or sheet.
- Head torch. Hands free illumination! Plus spare batteries.
- Practical clothes that can handle getting dirty
- Boots can be handy if you might need to go bush
- A big water bottle, and strap or bag for it if you are walking
- Tent – if in hot weather make sure you have one with mesh sides so you can take the fly off and get air circulation. If it is rainy/cold make sure it is properly waterproof.

- Clothes for the season – long sleeved cotton shirts and hats for hot weather
- Thermals, lots of layers, warm clothes, decent rain gear, beanies, gloves if it is cold

Other things that might be useful

- Mosquito net
- Pocket knife/swiss army knife
- Camera, or recent model smart phone (and back up battery packs) and laptop if you want to participate in DIY and social media
- Rechargeable batteries
- Baby wipes – if you are into that kind of thing. You can get ones from renewable sources and they can help if you don't get a chance to shower much
- Binoculars
- A decent supply of any medical needs and vitamins if you might be away from towns for a while. Insect repellent, sunscreen.
- Food treats or if you have special dietary requirements. Most blockades run on fairly simple staples foods but do generally cater for vegan/vegetarians. It can be nice to have some special treats sometimes.
- Notebook, diary and books to read/share
- A sense of humour can come in handy

WHAT TO DO

- Find out whose country you are on. It is Aboriginal land first and we should all be mindful of this. If the local mob are involved in the blockade get someone at camp to explain cultural protocols to you.
- Listen – there will be people there with great experience and amazing stories to tell, of all different backgrounds – you will learn great stuff and hear about the land and the challenges of the campaign.
- Pitch in. It is hard work living without the facilities we are all used to. When 20 hungry people need dinner and the fire has gone out, it can take a long time to get food together for everyone if you have to get firewood, a fire started, and then boil water for cooking – it can be an excellent reminder of the comforts at home we all take for granted.



Long running forest protest camp - Tasmania

Keep the billy on and full and the fire burning. Everyone loves a cuppa around the fire, so don't be the person that takes the last of the hot water and doesn't fill it up ☺

- Take hygiene seriously. It is easy for bugs to spread around camp so make sure you wash hands regularly and keep food areas really clean.

- Understand that people that have been there for a while might need to warm to you a little. Lots of folks come through these camps, and occasionally some are disrespectful – staying a short time, drinking and leaving their rubbish behind – so just relax, ask how you can help and let people get to know you.
- Respect people’s space, and their own personal camps. Especially if you approach a traditional custodian or elder, ask permission before entering a space that could be private.
- Clean up after yourself – don’t leave crap lying around communal spaces, especially alcohol bottles if you have a few drinks at night – note though, that some camps might be ‘dry’ (alcohol free) spaces... and they should never be trashy spaces – it needs to be a welcoming environment for tourists, and the general public.
- Think about what skills you have that might be useful or ask about how best you can help. Whether it is cooking, strong muscles that are good for digging shit pits (basic toilets), communications and media skills, logistics and organisation, solar or DIY energy set up skills, mediation, artistic banner painting, a respectable car and license for town missions... there are ways for everyone to get involved.
- Welcome new people. You were new once!

Frequently asked questions

Food tends to be cooked communally, and there are generally vegetarian/vegan and meat options. Depending on the camp set up there may be a daily donation for food and logistics. Let people know if you have allergies, but if you have really specific needs you might need to partly self-cater. In some remote area’s food can be quite expensive so it may be quite simple. Pitch in and help share cooking and cleaning. Good cooks are well loved at camp

What happens with toilets? Toilets at camps are generally known as ‘shit-pits’ – basically, old style pit toilets that are dug deep in an area located away from the camp. Biodegradable matter only should go into the ground. There will usually be a set-up of some kind of toilet seat, and hessian or tree cover for privacy and you get a great view of the stars at night. Some camps have hired toilets when needed for large groups or OHS reasons or for older folk.

Shelter It is best to bring your own tent, and maybe a spare tarp for extra shelter, or shade if you are going to be there for a little while. There will be tarps and structures set up for kitchen and communal spaces.

Water will generally be provided communally – whether through tanks that get refilled or local natural sources.

First Aid, safety and welfare

Depending on how established a camp might be may depend how organised systems are. There will generally be a basic first aid kit, and people will know where the nearest hospital is for emergencies. If you have any medical issues let people at camp know.

Some camps have ‘grievance’ or conflict resolution mechanisms set up and others may have some kind of participants agreement or general guidelines covering what is considered appropriate behaviour – ie: no racism, sexual harassment. If you are having trouble with someone’s behaviour find someone else you trust to talk about it.

Have fun and enjoy the mayhem!