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He may carry extensive knowledge of the latest adventure gear and greatest outback gadgets...

but our outdoor expert Ben takes pride in a minimalist campsite setup! In this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, we learn how Ben transforms packable camp clobber into his fool-proof family setup. From stackable tubs and collapsible stools, to swag bags on roof racks and multi-use tools - Ben's mammoth outback road trips contrast with his pared-back car boot that lasts him.

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Mentioned in this Episode:

Podcasts:

[Ep38 - Awnings, Shelters & Shades for Summer](#)

[Ep59 - Shelters for Rainy Days](#)

[Ep69 - From the Ground Up: Talking Groundsheets](#)

Brands:

[Exped](#)

[Sea to Summit](#)

Coleman

Products:

Camp Toilets

Oztent RV-5 Canvas Touring Tent

BlackWolf Tuff Dome Twin Tent

Oztent RV 30-Second Tents

Swags

Coleman Instant Up 4P Gold Evo Tent

Dome Tents

Tent Pegs

Rope & Cord

Tarps & Matting

23Zero Outbreak Double Swag 1550

Exped MegaMat Duo 10 LW+ Self Inflating Sleeping Mat

Self Inflating Sleeping Mats

Swag Bags

AOS Swag Bag - Double

Coleman Heavy Duty Tent Dry Bag

Multi Fuel Stoves

Companion 4kg LCC27 Gas Cylinder

Outdoor Connection Multipurpose Compact Stool

Coleman Utility Table

Camping Tables

Helinox Chair One

Popup 15L Tub

MB Agencies Plastic Water Jerry Can with Pourer 10L

Sea to Summit Watercell X 10L Water Storage

Engel MT-V45F 40L Fridge Freezer

Collapsible Space Saving Non Stick Pot Set

Campfire Billy Teapot

4WD Awnings

Drawer Fridges

First Aid

Repellants

What the People Want

One of the most asked questions across our social media platforms has surrounded the nature of Ben and Lauren's setup. While a walk-through video of each would be a useful feature on the Snowys YouTube channel, the logistics of doing so have so far proved it difficult to achieve.

Even so, this is still on the cards; Lauren plans to film a walk-through of her setup at the Australian Camp Oven Festival later this year. Throughout certain episodes, Ben and Lauren have referenced their setups in various contexts; this episode consolidates everything mentioned about Ben's setup into one forty-minute conversation!

✘
He may carry bulk knowledge of the latest adventure gear, but our outdoor expert Ben takes pride in a minimalist setup! Credit: Ben Collaton

Ben's Vehicle

With two young daughters, Ben's style of camping and adventuring is 4WD family outback touring, often beyond the beaten track. In that, Ben tends to avoid locations with existing facilities - though admits that his toilet setup requires modification to allow better self-sufficiency.

Ben and his family travel in a 2011 Nissan Patrol. This vehicle boasts standard wheels, basic extras (such as an auxiliary battery), and an upgraded suspension system for touring. The latter is nothing too complicated; an ARB Old Man Emu suspension, since fitted with better quality shocks and springs.

Ben's Nissan is predominantly the daily driver for family commutes, as well as for long road trips. For this reason, he chose to invest in good quality, all-terrain (70-30) tyres to cover most journey types.

Ben's Tent and Sleep Shelter

Having used many tent styles in the past, Ben has now resorted to his Oztent RV5. This includes side walls for creating both a sleeping and awning area, where he freely selects walls to either fully enclose a space or allow an opening. The walls deliver as either a windbreak, additional shelter, or privacy screen - and despite preferring a less closed-in setup, Ben appreciates them for their protection from the sun, wind, and rain.

Before children, Ben and his wife slept in a large, BlackWolf twin dome hiking tent. Now with a family, Ben admits it was a significant jump to their current family tent - weighing in at 20 kilograms. On camping trips lasting three to four days, Ben takes the twin dome tent instead of the RV, given its third room offering both more sufficient shelter and a covered living space during adverse weather.

Growing his Setup with his Family

As his children grow older, Lauren queries whether Ben plans to eventually either close off a space in the RV5 as a separate room, or invest in an additional tent. Ben admits this isn't an idea he's put much thought into yet; as much as he'd happily sleep out under the stars in a swag, he confirms the setup will depend on what the girls decide they'd prefer at the time. At the moment, they're young enough to enjoy sleeping in the same space as Mum and Dad! Whatever the new setup will be - it'll have to align with Ben's minimalist style of packing! In the past, he's used a lightweight Instant Up 4-Person tent. This required anchoring to the vehicle during a sandstorm - and after two weeks on outback roads, was hammered! Nonetheless, Ben admits it was a lightweight option occupying little space in the car, proving less reliable than what he uses now.

Lauren points out that the term 'lightweight' mostly refers to the texture of the tent's fabric/s. The frame of an Instant Up model tends to be heavier than others, due to its rigidity

that allows it to free-stand. A standard dome tent would otherwise better withstand storms, given its heavier and arguably more durable fabrics. Considering this, Ben confirms that his RV5 provides a good balance.

Lastly, Lauren queries whether Ben bothers to peg every point when the weather is calm. During short stopovers, Ben is usually content with only pegging the four corners – though often goes the extra mile of pegging the four guy ropes too. This saves him the hassle of doing so in the middle of the night when the wind picks up, or the weather takes an unexpected turn.

Ben's Awnings or Additional Shelters

As mentioned in previous episodes, Ben has removed his awning from his 4WD for convenience – and is yet to miss it!

As well as the awning on his RV5 tent, Ben carries a number of tarps: a mesh groundsheet for under the tent and awning (the Oztent RV mesh, and the OZtrail Ultramesh Tarp), and a waterproof poly tarp. He prefers the former for multi-use during both outback showering and as a shade awning, using clips with shock cords and hooking the eyelets of the groundsheet to the roof rack. From there, he applies the extendable awning poles and guy ropes to create a simple, lightweight awning on the side of his vehicle. This delivers in both versatility and a pack size smaller than most alternative shelter options.

Additional awning poles work together with the two provided by Oztent; the eyelet on his tarp awning roughly aligns with the width of the awning on his RV. It may not appear as pretty – but Ben maintains that it's certainly functional, and easy to pack!

Ben's Sleep Systems

The family assemble their bedding towards the back of his Oztent RV5. Ben and his wife sleep in a simple, envelope-style double swag, which has lasted impressively since he purchased it years ago from a store in Alice Springs. He's since upgraded the sleeping mat to a double, 10-centimetre thick, self-inflating mat by Exped, while his daughters each have a self-inflating mat by Sea to Summit. Side by side, the sleeping mats are compact, tightly tiling the tent floor.

While the kids sleep directly on their mats in a sleeping bag (a BlackWolf Kids Eskimo, and a Coleman model), Ben and his wife sleep under a doona and sheets within their swag. When it's time to hit the road the next morning, Ben lies the doona and sheets flat inside the swag, piles the sleeping mats on top, and rolls everything up within the double swag. The sleeping bags are packed separately. Along with a waterproof roll, and a dry bag stuffed with their pillows – *everything* is then fitted into a swag bag and fastened to the roof of the vehicle. With this approach, Ben avoids any issues in keeping his gear dry.

Ben's wife prefers to bring her pillow from home, while his daughters use Sea to Summit Thermarest compressible pillows. As for himself, Ben combines the Sea to Summit Aeros and Foamcore pillows to achieve a comfortable balance of both height and suppleness (the 'Ben' pillow, as it's been aptly named!).

Ben's Swag Bag

An [Aussie Outback Supplies](#) (AOS) number, Ben's [swag bag](#) is relatively basic in design with a polyester construction. After his most recent trip into the outback, Ben admits he wouldn't use this bag again; the seams are beginning to stretch after consistently tight packing, and the bag itself has become weathered by both the sun's UV and four months of outback travel on the top of his roof racks! While he still acquired his money's worth in use, Ben plans to invest in a bag of heavier-duty canvas and PVC to better withstand harsh Aussie conditions. On this, Lauren notes a [heavy-duty waterproof tent bag by Coleman](#), ideal for transporting on roof racks. The bag is essentially a giant dry sack, designed to carry any tent in [Coleman's](#) range.

Ben's Camp Kitchen

Like all aspects of Ben's setup, his kitchen is basic:

- A [multi-fuel stove](#). This requires no [gas bottle](#), and therefore saves him space and weight.
- A traditional crosswire-leg stove stand, which folds flat and expands like a clothes rack. Ben notes that this can be a pain to pack, often poking at his gear and rattling against the roof racks.
- A cross-legged [utility table](#). This sits by the stove, often used at lunchtime and for cooking.
- Four [Outdoor Connection collapsible stools](#) for sitting on at the dining table.
- A 4-person [dining table](#) for both food preparation and eating. At this point, Lauren must ask: why pack a table, instead of simply eating from the chairs? Ben clarifies that the stools often double as tables, while the table is also great for playing board games on.
- Four [Helinox or sling-type chairs](#) for relaxing in. Again, Lauren must ask: for a minimalist, how can Ben justify packing *8 chairs?! Ben admits that, mentally, it's a challenge to accept* - however, he reminds Lauren that his 8 chairs are still lighter and take up less room than four larger camp chairs!
- A [tub](#) for washing up. In the past, he's also taken the Sea to Summit kitchen sink - but maintains that a good plastic tub offers more versatility.
- Stackable tubs for kitchen utensils and food, stored in the back of the car. For weight and space reasons, Ben doesn't operate a 4WD drawer system.
- A couple of [10-litre jerry cans](#) and [Sea to Summit water cells](#) for carrying water. The latter are of a durable fabric, and sit flat.
- A [40-litre Engel fridge](#), with no additional Eskies. That said, Ben has taken an icebox in the past before deciding it occupied too much space.

Activities and Games

On longer road trips, Ben's family enjoys Operation and Go Fish, both requiring only a deck of

cards.

Ben's wife likes Rush Hour too, which involves a mini carpark, and different cards corresponding to certain levels on which to set up small car figurines. Players aren't allowed to pick up the cars to escape the car park - only move them forward and backward. Other games include magnetic Chess, Mastermind, and (only if there's room in the car, of course) Finska and slacklines.

On trips lasting two or more nights, Ben also fastens the bikes to the bike rack so the kids can tear up the tracks.

Ben's Cooking Utensils


It couldn't be any less complicated: a collapsible pot or saucepan, and a couple of billies!

Pros of Ben's Setup

The simplicity!

As an understated camper, Ben is always looking to make processes and approaches simple. For this reason, he advocates for his setup: it's easy to pack, just as easy to unpack, and allows him to effortlessly keep track of his gear at the campsite.

Ben's love for hiking stems from his appreciation of having everything he needs on his back, with only water refills and food drops as external requirements. Likewise, when camping, everything Ben needs is packed in the car. Avoiding complexities in his setup makes for a more relaxing experience overall.

 *Ben's setup is easy to both pack and unpack, and allows him to keep track of his gear. Credit: Ben Collaton*

Potential Changes

Instead of his current utility table, Ben hopes to install a folding table in the rear of his vehicle that allows him to operate entirely from out the back. That said, this will require work in modifying the door of the boot. Still unsure if this is the best solution, Ben nonetheless hopes it goes hand in hand with a better stove and stand combination, given the lack of flexibility offered by the latter.

Due to the limited space of his current kitchen setup, dishes often need to be done before the family settles in for after-dinner activities around the same table. Considering this, Ben hopes to find another space to wash up.

Ben's Past Setups

Before kids, Ben and his wife toured with just a hiking tent, a couple of storage tubs, and fridge full of food. Since having children, Ben reiterates the evolution of the tent - plus a 4WD awning, and at one stage a 'bug room'. The latter is no longer a part of the family setup, after Ben sought to save additional setup time by investing in necessary bug-repellants.

Another past item of equipment was an all-in-one table and chairs setup, as well as children-

focused gear like a Port-A-Cot during their years as a younger family.

Ben's Future Setup

In the coming years, Ben's daughters will likely have their own cars. He and his wife will then look into a dual-cab, rooftop tent scenario, with a kitchen and an awning. With a setup like this, no ground space is needed - just a space to park the car! As well as this, he envisions a lightweight mesh awning option, including a sail track to slide in with two awning poles. Ben also hopes for a better fridge setup. Currently, the fridge sits on a shelf in his 4WD, which elevates it enough to prevent the lid from opening to its full extent. Given a fridge slide weighs in at almost 15 kilograms, he doesn't use one for space and weight considerations. He ponders on installing a drawer fridge under the 4WD shelf instead... though sheepishly admits he's likely to have his trusty Engel for another few years yet!

Bits and Pieces

As well as a basic toolkit, First Aid, sunscreen, and repellants slotted into various nooks and crannies of the car - Ben carries only one spare wheel.

Strapped in the middle seat is also a tub of coloring-in books and games for his kids, and on the backseat are a couple of bike pannier bags to stash headphones, MP3 players, and sometimes snacks.

Ben's Roof Rack

Ben has a flat tray roof rack without sides, known as a platform rack. Here, he straps his swag bag packed with sleeping gear, an ammo box with Shellite, the stove stand, pool noodles, and occasionally his fishing rods on top. Sometimes instead, Ben uses PVC pipe to collapse the rods down into, before tying them to the cargo barrier.

Lauren points out that some campers have concerns about fixing their RV to the roof racks; Ben explains that platform racks provide adequate support, negating the need for an RV roof rack plate. For added security, he simply cuts a nylon strap into thirds to fasten across the centre.

Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our Facebook group and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.

Catch you out there!