



Camping on the private property Wingalea, NSW

## Sharing the farm

Catie James, Angela and Lionel Edwards are two of a growing number of rural landholders opening their gates to campers as part of the Youcamp online service. They've registered their property Wingalea, just outside Yarram, NSW, with Youcamp, and are enjoying some unexpected rewards. "It's great to share our special place with others and to earn some extra income," Angela says. "In time we hope to see the camping become a bigger part of our business so that we are not so reliant on rain and cattle prices."

Campers along the Edwards' 4-kilometre Macintyre River frontage enjoy fishing for yellowbelly, kayaking, bushwalking and horse-riding. Youcamp co-managing director James Woodford says hosts like them commonly make new friends and begin to see their customers with fresh eyes. "Hosting responsible campers is giving landholders an extra incentive to protect special features, like a creek or a forest," James says. "Some are putting the money they earn in camping fees into landcare works and things like creek rehabilitation."

The range of accommodation includes everything from basic grassed camp sites to shearing sheds and more established farmstays. Private landowners can set their own rules, which means that guests have a greater chance of finding exactly what they want – be it a paddock for a family celebration or a quiet stretch of river in which to relax. It's proving a boon for campers fed up with crowded public camp sites. Despite some ongoing insurance and local government regulatory challenges, Youcamp has some 200 private properties around Australia registered, equating to 3-5000 individual camp sites, with another 200 about to come up on the site.

"Camping on private land is one of the last frontiers," James says. "It's become harder and harder to find authentic outdoor experiences, and Youcamp provides benefits for both the guest and the host."

"We had a family on a remote western New South Wales property who even let families visit for free because they wanted their children to have more social interaction. And city families are enjoying the exposure to real rural life."

*Arabella Buckley*