

Vintage TRAILERS

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The magazine for all vintage camper trailer collectors, restorers, admirers, and dreamers.

RESCUE

RESTORE

RALLY

Don't Let the Bad Guys Steal Your Good Time

Several rally participants had their e-bikes (and a scooter) stolen at a recent vintage trailer rally. Most of the items were cut from the cables that were “securing” them in the wee hours of the morning. Theft and other crime are not something we have had to deal with over the 15 years we have been camping. Many of the ideas in this article are good measures to stay safe while camping in general, and focus on preventing the theft of your personal property.

By Paul Lacinola

RV Campground Crime

Part of the appeal of camping is the wholesome family atmosphere created when you get together with friends and meet new like-minded people. In the past 15 years, we have stayed at over 100 RV parks. Our kids grew up roaming the parks enjoying the park's outdoor spaces without fear. I can only recall a couple of instances where anything was stolen. A recent weekend experience has caused me to rethink how we will camp in the future.

Even an upscale campground is not immune to criminals. It may even attract more nefarious thieves because the campers that stay at these resorts are more likely to have expensive toys. E-bikes, electric scooters, and bicycles were stolen each night at a recent vintage trailer rally. While some were unsecured, easy pickings, others were tethered to the trailer with locks and cables that barely slowed down a determined crook. In researching this article, I discovered that campground crime is not as uncommon as it used to be.

Crime on the Increase

News reports constantly convey that crime rates have increased, and RV Parks are not immune to this trend. Many RV parks are situated in areas surrounded by nature that provide an environment that makes them an oasis from our daily lives. These areas also attract “urban campers” that may lurk right outside the park—unsecured parameters make it easy for criminals to take advantage of a new group of campers week after week.

While many types of crime can occur at an RV park, I want to focus this article on preventing theft while camping—the kind of camping we do at vintage trailer rallies. We are surrounded by friends and fellow trailerites (and the park's long-term residents). I don't believe that these people are a threat. It is more likely that the lawbreakers from outside the park are preying on trusting travelers.

Stop RV Park Theft

I have very little interest in catching or confronting thieves. I want to direct my energy to keep them away, slowing them down or scaring them off. If campers take personal responsibility to safeguard their possessions, thieves will not return if it is not easy pickens. High-dollar, high-demand e-bikes bring the best return for the lawbreakers. Bicycles, scooters, and motorbikes can be an easy ride or roll away. They bring quick, easy money and are worth the risk for the prowlers. Here are some ways to protect your toys and collectibles and play an active role in stopping thefts where you camp. Don't let the fear of crime in RV parks keep you from having a great time. Camping is generally safe and a great way to get away from the daily grind.

Plan Ahead

Before you hit the road, do a little pre-planning.

- Read Reviews on any of the popular camping and travel sites.
- Check with local law enforcement for local crime information.
- Use Google maps to get a lay of the land. If you see areas of concern, ask the park about the security measures they have in place.
- Is the park fenced? Locked gates? Well lit? Motion detector lights or alarms? Patrols? If you can't tell, ask the park before making your reservations.
- If you have been trying to find statistics about the crime rate in campgrounds, you may have difficulty locating much information. The reason is simple: Crime in RV parks has historically been infrequent. However, with the rise in illegal drug use, urban campers, and the lack of enforcement, crime has moved into campgrounds.

Prevention

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Taking precautions while camping will ensure that you do not become a victim. The park should be making reasonable efforts to protect their guests, but ultimately, they are not responsible for your losses. Here are some ideas to help prevent you from becoming a victim.

- Be attentive to people in the park during the day. Thieves may prowl the sites during the day to locate their targets. If someone looks out of place, report them to the park immediately. (You may want to say hello to let them know they haven't gone unnoticed.)
- Lock up bikes during the day when you are away. (See lock recommendations next page.)
- Motion detector lights around your trailer will startle would-be thieves and make their activities more apparent after dark. Tri-Lynx makes battery-powered options that have magnets to attach them to a variety of spaces temporarily.
- Keep your site well lit. Leaving your decorative lights on may be a deterrent. Thieves prefer to work in the shadows.
- A tent room on your awning can provide extra living space and conceal your possessions from passers-by. If you don't have canvas sides, you may even use something like mosquito netting to keep ne'er-do-wells out of your space. Use folding tables or the park's picnic table to help secure your awning space.
- Although it may seem silly, a string of empty aluminum cans is almost impossible to move without making noise. In a pinch, you may have to get creative with a noisemaker. Booby traps that cause bodily harm are illegal.

Be Prepared

Camping gear and toys can be a substantial investment. Should a theft occur, be prepared with the information you will need to report a theft or recoup your losses.

- **Document** your possession's serial numbers. It can be as simple as a written record in your RV or an app on your phone.
- **Photograph** your possessions to document their condition and provide a good description should they be stolen.
- **Register** your bike with Bike Index or 529 Garage. Both are free services that store your bike's information in a searchable database that police departments and bike shops can access.
- Operation ID is a nationally recognized property identification program to deter theft and aid in recovery. You can engrave your driver's license number on items of value. A driver's license number is easily accessible by law enforcement to find the owner.
- Are your bikes insured? Check with your insurance agent to see if they have liability and personal property coverage for you and your bike. Homeowners, renters, or vehicle insurance may cover losses. Confirm that you are covered for items when "away from home" and "outside the vehicle."
- Velosurance is a company that specializes in bike insurance.
- Some insurances will cover items stolen from inside your vehicle or RV. Folding bikes (and some folding e-bikes) are small enough to stow away easily.



Folding Lock



Chain Lock



U-Lock



Cable Lock



Bike Cover

Bike Locks, Alarms, and Covers

(Use a combination of two or more.)

- Folding Bicycle Lock Made with 3MM Hardened Steel Links.
- Chain locks like Kryptonite are made from 3T manganese steel.
- U-Locks made from hardened steel are suitable for locking a wheel to the frame. Reducing the ability to roll the bike away simply will reduce the likeliness that you become a victim.

Note: With some exceptions, cable locks may be reserved for quick lock-ups where you are just trying to deter someone from walking off with your bike. Cables and padlocks are relatively easy to cut with bolt cutters.

A cover is an inexpensive way to keep your bikes out of site and prevent deterioration from sun, rain, and dirt. Choose a bike cover that has a lock.

Bike alarms like the Wsdcam Waterproof Bike Alarm with Remote are a great option. An anti-theft alarm is triggered by movement. A 113 dB loud alarm will help deter thieves and give you peace of mind. Storing your bike in the bed of your truck at night will utilize your vehicle's alarm if someone attempts to take your bikes.

Trackers like the Apple AirTag and Tile work with your cellular device and can help you locate your property if it is lost or stolen. These devices work primarily off Bluetooth and have a limited range of up to several hundred feet. Outside of the Bluetooth range, the device may "ping" the last known location if the device is in wi-fi range. A tracker like Tracki utilizes GPS tracking and can track items worldwide. This type of device requires a monthly service fee of around \$20.



Keep your site well lit. Leaving your decorative lights on may be a deterrent. Thieves prefer to work in the shadows.

"The best security is "out of sight out of mind." When we traveled, we made sure everything had a secure storage space."

Mark Koep
www.CampgroundViews.com



Some e-bikes have **locks and alarms integrated into their design**. Removable batteries can be a deterrent as well. Features like this will add value to the e-bike you purchase. Do not leave your charger plugged in outside your trailer at night unless you are SURE it is secure. If a thief gets the charger with the bike, that is a bonus! Make sure that you do not leave the keys in the ignition.

Cameras are another option to "catch" a thief. Trail cameras designed to capture wildlife images have features like motion detection and night vision to document what is going on outside your RV at night.

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BRIGHT WHERE
YOU NEED IT



"I would assume
just about anything
will get stolen if
not locked down."

Adam Longfellow, Founder
AllStays LLC
www.allstays.com

Report Crime

"It doesn't do any good to report a theft. The cops won't do anything." Nothing could be farther from the truth. If you don't report a crime because you think nothing will come of it, you facilitate the problem. Crime reports help direct future patrols and prevention and aid in returning your property to you if it is found. A police report may also be necessary for an insurance claim.

At a recent vintage trailer rally, two custom-painted aluminum propane tanks (\$1300 value) were stolen off the tongue of a 1948 Westcraft trolley top. The owners reported the theft, and later that day, a police officer located the tanks by contacting the vagrants in a nearby unauthorized urban living area. If the tanks had not been reported, they would not have been returned.



Be a part of the Solution

- Take responsibility for securing your possessions.
- Be aware of your surroundings and suspicious activity.
- Report concerns and crimes to the park and police.

This article contains live links to resources when you view it digitally. To sign in to your subscription dashboard, see page 45.