WALTZING MATILDA

Steal the sheep. Beat the troopers.



2–5 players | 10+ | 20–30 min

"Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong… Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billabong; up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee… Down came the troopers, one, two, and three. Whose is that jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag?" Every hand plays the song in order.

HOW IT WORKS

A must-follow trick-taking game with two twists. One hand per player; the highest total wins.

- **Jumbucks are trump, and never dealt.** They wait at the Billabong. Win a trick and you may **grab** one.
- **The 1s are Troopers.** Every 1 played goes to the **Trooper line**, and **the third** ends the hand.
- A Jumbuck still in your hand when the hand ends is **caught**, and costs points.

COMPONENTS



Yellow billy | Green windmill | Red bush hat | Blue swan | Jumbuck (trump) | Trooper (a 1)

- **52 cards.** 40 camp cards in four suits, numbered 1 to 10; **12 Jumbucks**, numbered 1 to 12. The **1 of each suit is a Trooper**, so there are four.
- 1 **Billabong** card and 1 **score pad**. You also need a pencil.

YOUR TUCKER BAG

Your hand is your tucker bag. Every Jumbuck in it was stolen. It is trump, so it wins tricks, but it is also **evidence**. Play it before the troopers come, or you will be caught with it.

SETUP

Before the first hand

1. Write each player's name on the **score pad**.
2. The player who last slept outdoors is the first **dealer**.

At the start of every hand

3. **Billabong.** Put the Billabong card in the middle. Shuffle the 12 Jumbucks and stack them face down on it. Turn the top one face up: a jumbuck has come down to drink.
4. **Deal.** Shuffle the 40 camp cards and deal everyone the number shown in the table. At 2 and 3 players the camp cards left over stay out, face down and unseen, so **not every Trooper need be in play**.
5. The player to the dealer's left **leads the first trick**. Leave room beside the Billabong for the **Trooper line**.



The Billabong card



12 Jumbucks; the top one face up

Players	Cards each	Camp cards left out	Hands
2	12	16	2
3	12	4	3
4	10	0	4
5	8	0	5

PLAYING A TRICK

The leader plays a card, then each player in turn clockwise plays one. All cards go face up. **Lead a camp card** (a 1 counts). You may only lead a Jumbuck if you hold nothing else.

1. Follow

If you have a card of the **led suit**, you must play one (a Jumbuck, if Jumbucks are led). A 1 is a card of its suit like any other: you can lead it, follow with it, or play it on another suit when you can't follow.

2. Trump

If you can't follow, play anything. A **Jumbuck is trump** and beats every camp card.

3. Win

The **highest Jumbuck** wins. If there is none, the **highest card of the led suit** wins, even if that is a 1.

EXAMPLE: WHO WINS THE TRICK



Charles leads | Loretta follows | Jean trump: wins | Alan follows, a 1

1. Charles leads the Yellow 7.
2. Loretta follows with the Yellow 9.
3. Jean has no Yellow, so she plays **Jumbuck 4**, a trump.
4. Alan follows with the **Yellow 1**, an ordinary Yellow card.

Jean wins: a Jumbuck beats any Yellow.

AFTER THE TRICK

Take the trick

The winner puts the trick's cards **face down** in front of them as their pile, **except any 1s**.

The Trooper line

Every **1** played in the trick, of any suit, goes to the **Trooper line** beside the Billabong: one, two, three. This includes a 1 that **won** the trick; its winner still scores it.

The theft

The winner **may grab the drinking jumbuck**: put it in your hand, then turn up the next Jumbuck. Grabbing is optional, and **public**. If the Billabong is empty, there is nothing to grab. Then the winner leads the next trick.

A GRABBED SHEEP IS TRUMP, AND EVIDENCE

It is an ordinary card in your hand from now on: you can't lead it unless you hold nothing else, and it counts against you if the hand ends first. A sheep grabbed on the trick that **ends the hand** is caught at once.

EXAMPLE: AFTER THE TRICK (JEAN WON)



1 Jean takes Yellow 7, Yellow 9 and Jumbuck 4 face down: her second trick, and **1 Jumbuck** banked.

2 Alan's Yellow 1 does not go to Jean. It is the first Trooper on the line.

3 Jean **grabs Jumbuck 8** into her hand. Jumbuck 2 is turned up. She leads next.

END OF A HAND

The third Trooper ends the hand, after the trick in which it lands. A hand also ends after any trick when **a player has no cards left**, counting any sheep just grabbed. Then comes the reckoning.

1. **Caught.** Show your hand. Each Jumbuck still in it is caught. Camp cards cost nothing, 1s included.
2. **Price.** Each caught sheep costs **1 point for each Trooper on the line**, minimum 1.
3. **Score.** +1 for each trick you won, +1 for each Jumbuck in the tricks you won (whoever played it), minus what you were caught with.
4. **Pad.** Write your score on the pad.
5. **Next hand.** Gather all 52 cards. The deal passes left. Start again at Setup, step 3.

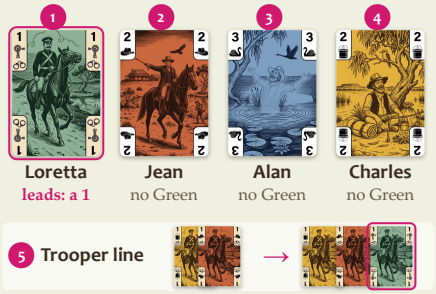
On the line	none	1	2	3
The line				
Cost per caught sheep	–1	–1	–2	–3

A SHORT LINE

If a player runs out of cards while the line holds none or one, each caught sheep still costs **1**. The squatter rides up anyway.

Rare exception: if another 1 lands in the same trick as the third Trooper, both count. With four on the line, each caught sheep costs 4.

EXAMPLE: A 1 WINS, AND THE THIRD TROOPER RIDES IN



1 The same hand, its last trick. Loretta leads the **Green 1**. Every other Green has been played, so nobody can follow.

2 3 4 Nobody plays a Jumbuck, so the Green 1 is the highest Green: **Loretta wins**, takes Jean's, Alan's and Charles's cards, and scores the trick.

5 The Green 1 goes to the line as the **third Trooper**. The hand ends.

AT A GLANCE

- **Your turn:** follow the led suit if you can. Can't follow? Play anything; a Jumbuck is trump.
- **Winning a trick:** take it, grab the drinking jumbuck or leave it, then lead. Any 1s played go to the Trooper line.
- **The reckoning:** each Jumbuck left in your hand costs 1 for each Trooper on the line (at least 1).

EXAMPLE: THE RECKONING

The line holds 3, so each caught sheep costs 3. After six tricks, Jean's tucker bag still holds two grabbed sheep:



	Tricks +1	Sheep banked +1	Caught –3	Score
Charles	1	0	0	**1**
Loretta	2	0	0	**2**
Jean	3	1	2	**–2**
Alan	0	0	0	**0**

Jean: 3 + 1 − 6 = **–2**. A negative score is fine.

END OF THE GAME

After **every player has dealt once**, add up the scores. The **highest total wins**.

Ties: if totals are tied, the tied player with the **most points in the last hand** wins. Still tied? Rejoice in shared victory.

THE WORDS

Swagman: a worker who travels on foot, carrying his swag.

Matilda: the swag, or bedroll.

Billabong: a pool cut off from a river.

Jumbuck: a sheep.

Tucker bag: a bag for food. Here, your hand.

Squatter: a big landholder who grazed sheep.

Troopers: mounted police. Here, the 1s.

Words from Marie Cowan's 1903 version of the song.

Game design: Dean Morris · Wombat Game Factory
wombatgamefactory.com
Rule book v7 · 24/11/2026 · Prototype art