

Getting Your GPS Ready for Your Fall Hunt

By Blake Miller

With Elk season approaching, last month was range time with my favorite rifle. I spent several hours sighting-in that rifle and testing my preferred reloads. Altogether, I've spent probably five hours shooting, adjusting and cleaning my firearm. Then I am spending time getting gear together, going through my check list to make sure I won't leave anything behind. I am all done right; wrong.

If I am like the average hunter I am only about 90% complete. To ensure that all my preparations are done correctly I need to factor in my land navigation.

I have a few suggestions to get your GPS receiver ready for your trip.

- “Dump the Junk” – Delete those old waypoints from last year. Save old waypoints on your PC by using a free program found at www.easygps.com, or write them down on a piece of paper. Don't use your GPS as a filing cabinet.
- Open the GPS's main menu option and then select tracks. Select the option that allows you to clear your tracks or track log. Tracks are what folks call the “bread crumb” trail and can be seen on your map page.
- Visit your receiver's manufacture's web site to see if there are any software updates. You won't improve the maps that may have come preloaded but upgrades will improve the efficiency of your receiver's operation. Only download the upgrade that specifically matches your GPS.
- If you can download maps on to your GPS make sure you have your hunt area is installed in memory.
- Set up your map page on the GPS. I'd recommend you set your zoom setting at 800 feet. While you're moving on foot to your hunting spot, 800 feet allows the GPS to provide a good amount of topography, trail and road information.
- If you have a GPS with an electronic compass you will need to calibrate the compass each time you replace the batteries. To do this, select menu while you are viewing the compass page.
- Replace the AA batteries. I'd suggest you get new batteries and save those old ones in the drawer for you kid's electronic games. If you leave your GPS powered on during the day, all day, be prepared to replace your batteries nightly.

My last preparation will focus on my map and compass:

- Long ago, I got rid of my cheap compass. I replaced it with a Brunton 8010G. This new GPS allows me to adjust the compass for declination. (The angular difference between magnetic north and true north.) Declination changes with time and the declination data found on your map key may very well be out of date. You can find the declination for your hunt area at www.magnetic-declination.com
- I use a great software program made by MyTopo called Terrain Navigator. Using this program I have all my 1:24,000 scale maps for my state on two DVDs; that is almost 2000 maps. With that program I'll print out the maps of my hunt area and then make several sets. I leave one set at home with my family, a set for my hunting partner and an extra for myself. If the weather looks questionable, the set I carry goes in a gallon zip lock plastic bag. If you have questions about Terrain Navigator contact me through www.outdoorquest.biz.

Now I am ready to leave for hunting camp.

(Another editor's note: ANY GPS, no matter how technologically advanced or expensive, is only as good as its batteries. Replace batteries in all backcountry electronic devices regularly and always carry spares. Anything electronic can fail, and Murphy's Law states this will happen when you need it most! NO GPS is a substitute for a map and compass and the knowledge of how to use them!)



Blake Miller

Blake Miller has made a career out of staying found and knowing where he is at all times. His formal navigation training began when he joined the U.S. Navy in 1973. He served as an officer aboard several Navy ships over his twenty-year

career; many of those tours included the duty of Navigator. Blake began working with satellite navigation systems at sea in 1976, culminating with the then-new Global Positioning Systems aboard the Battleship WISCONSIN in early 1990.

In 1998 Blake started Outdoor Quest, a business dedicated to backcountry navigation and wilderness survival. Blake has taught classes to wild land firefighters, state agency staffs, Search and Rescue team members, hunters, hikers, skiers, fishermen and equestrians. He regularly teaches classes through the Community Education programs at Central Oregon (Bend) and Chemeketa (Salem, OR) Community Colleges.

As a volunteer, Blake teaches navigation and survival classes, to students in the local school district and conservation groups. He is a member of a Search and Rescue team.

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