

Refresh Your GPS Skills

By Blake Miller

Now is the perfect time to practice and improve your GPS skills. Spring hiking, scouting, predator hunts and camping trips offer excellent opportunities to get “dialed-in” with your receiver.

GPS will get you back to the truck or help you return to your favorite spot. Confident use of the receiver comes with practice and frequent use.

Here are some simple recommendations to try in the field.

- Dump those old AA batteries, put in new ones, and replace them again in 4 months. If you leave your GPS on all day in the field expect to change the batteries nightly. Consider using lithium AA's, they last longer and work better in cold temperatures.
- Verify that you are receiving enough satellite signals. Check this on the satellite status screen. Four satellites are the minimum.
- Keep you navigation simple. It's easier to work with a handful of waypoints rather than list of 300. Delete the old waypoints, the ones you will never use again. Log important waypoints (e.g., the elk wallow) on your PC or in a notebook. Visit www.easygps.com or www.garmin.com for a place to store waypoints.
- Give key waypoints names. Enter names like “camp” and “truck.” It's easier and more meaningful to find “truck” in the list of waypoints than is waypoint 542; or was it 245.
- Verify all waypoints saved by either checking on our map page or in your waypoint file (select “go to” or “find.”)
- When its time to return to a destination chose “GO TO” or “Find” on your keypad or menu. Select the waypoint from the list provided. Press the “Page” button and rotate through the many displays to the “Compass” page. With a “GO TO” selected, a large arrow should appear on the face of the compass. As you move towards your destination the arrow will shift causing you to adjust your course. When you are on course the arrow points to the top center of your receiver.
- Compliment GPS skills with a good review of map and compass fundamentals. Learn to back up electronic position fixing with bearing triangulation. Worst case, a broken GPS becomes a paper weight for your map while afield.

I suggest checking out Lawrence Letham's book GPS Made Easy from the library. This book compliments the owner's manual. An excellent reference for map and compass use is June Fleming's Staying Found.

Taking a class can further enhance you GPS knowledge. Classes are frequently offered through the local community college's continuing education program or at local retailers such as REI.

Blake has been teaching wilderness navigation to SAR teams, hunters, fire fighters, hikers and campers since 1998. He is a member of a SAR organization in his county. Contact Blake at www.outdoorquest.biz or 541 280 0573.

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