

Lost! Fourth in our series of articles on what to do about getting lost; here the author presents a simple technique for using any GPS to find the way back that should work for those not technologically inclined.

by Andrus Voitk, FORAY NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR, Humber Village, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

The best medicine is prevention: do not get separated from your group.

Using a GPS

This article is not a How-To for GPS use, nor a rating of units and manufacturers. If you know how to find your way, can read a map and compass, or are familiar with the use and features of your GPS, this article is not for you.

However, *if you know nothing of these things but have a GPS, this article will tell you how to use it to find your way back*, should you get separated from your group.

TOOLS OF A KEEN NATURALIST

1. Insatiable curiosity
2. Paper and pencil (pen) for notes.
3. Digital camera to record finds.
4. GPS to record location of finds.

Although a GPS may not seem a requirement for mushrooming, it is a tool most naturalists may already have. If you have one, bring it along. If you are thinking of buying one, determine what you want from the unit first. Prices range between \$100–\$500, depending on the features you want. Keep in mind the Golden Rules of Gear.

GOLDEN RULES OF GEAR

1. Don't buy more than you need.
2. For what you do need, get the best you can afford.

If all you ever want to do is to record the position of your finds, do not buy units with advanced orienteering features. On the other hand, if you plan to use it for navigating in the wild, get the best unit you can afford, because you may depend on it. For our purposes, any unit that can be used to mark positions of finds can also be used to navigate back to a starting point. To do this, we do not need an expensive unit and do not need to know very much about how it works.

Any GPS can enter a WAYPOINT. Find out how to do it on your unit. This is how you record your rare finds or mark good picking areas. For our purposes, you do not need to set map data,

coordinate units or have map software. All you have to know is how to enter a WAYPOINT in your GPS. Usually it is a matter of holding down a specific button for several seconds. Find out from your unit's manual. When you know how, practice it a few times. If your unit notes accuracy, hold it still until it gets a 3D fix and says the accuracy is under 50 meters.

Most GPS units assign a number to the WAYPOINT. You need not name it. Just write down the number and location in your notebook, eg "Wpt 12—Northwoods parking lot". Some GPS units place a WAYPOINT in the database automatically, while others require that you confirm that you want it saved. Find out what your unit requires and practice that. You do not want to lose your WAYPOINT because you failed to press "OK."

Now you know how to enter a WAYPOINT. The procedure is the same, whether you wish to mark a collection site or a useful place to return. From now on, whenever you go on a foray, take your GPS and enter a WAYPOINT for the main camp. When you go on the trail, enter a WAYPOINT where you parked your car. If you follow a road or trail and decide to leave it to explore the woods, enter that location as well. This way, should you find that you are lost, you can choose to return to where you left the trail, to where you left your car or to the main camp. You may want to use all three.

In order to use the GPS to return to a WAYPOINT, you have to know how to do a GO TO. The procedure varies with each unit. In some it is a matter of pressing a button, while in others you must first locate the WAYPOINT you wish to reach and select GOTO on its screen. Find out how this is done for your unit from your manual and practice it a few times.

No matter how you initiate a GO TO with your unit, you need to be able to locate the WAYPOINT to tell your unit, where you want it to direct you. Therefore, find out how to find a stored WAYPOINT in your unit. Select the WAYPOINT to which you wish the unit to lead you. Find out how to select it with your unit. Practice doing that.

Once you have told your unit to GO TO a certain WAYPOINT, you are almost done. Now you need to be able to select the screen on your unit that shows direction. Find out how to select screens for your unit. You need to use either the MAP SCREEN or the COMPASS SCREEN. Almost all units have both and many show the GOTO route on either. See which one works better for you. Then always turn to it, when you use the GO

TO function. In the GO TO mode, the GPS indicates the direction you should follow with an arrow. Do not worry, if you do not have a map. Any background works, so long as the direction arrow is there. If using the COMPASS SCREEN, the GPS still indicates where North is but now the direction arrow points to the GO TO WAYPOINT, not North. Practice screen selection.

Almost always there will be some lag before it gives the direction and with most units you need to be moving for the unit to give you a direction. This can be disturbing, so practice this at home until you are familiar with your unit's behaviour. Now all you have to do, is follow the direction shown by the arrow to reach the desired WAYPOINT. If an obstacle is in the way, ignore the arrow and walk around the obstruction. The arrow always changes to point to your chosen WAYPOINT, so when around the obstacle, resume following the direction of the arrow. If you have a compass and can take a compass bearing, if you can aim for an object in the distance on your "route", or if you can orient by the sun in a general way, then you can switch your unit off and save batteries until you want to confirm your direction again. If so, make sure your unit does not cancel the GO TO, or you need to do it again.

Once at your WAYPOINT, select a GO TO to your next WAYPOINT, if needed. Most units will continue pointing to a selected WAYPOINT until told to quit navigating. Find out how to do that and practice it. Now select your next WAYPOINT and do a new GO TO. Soon you will be at your car. Depending on age and make, your GPS may be out more than 10 metres. If you get to within 10 metres (35 feet) of your car, usually you should be able to find it or at least the road by doing a circle around the area. If there is traffic, you should be within hearing distance and if there are other people there, you should be within shouting distance.

Three points of caution:

1. The GPS is a mechanical device and may fail, as mechanical devices sometimes do.
2. Many units do not make good satellite contact under canopy cover or in narrow canyons.
3. It runs on batteries. Therefore:
 - a. Ensure that you start with fresh batteries.
 - b. Always carry spares. Know how to replace them and how to recalibrate your GPS after battery replacement, if it needs it. Most do.
 - c. If your device eats up batteries, a workaround is to turn it on when recording a WAYPOINT, then turn it off. The disadvantage is that each time you will need to wait several minutes for your unit to calculate where it is, but you'll save battery power should you need it to navigate back.

The method described here is guaranteed to get you out. You don't have to know anything about maps or compasses, cardinal directions, meridians, grids or any other such things. You need to know the absolute minimum about your GPS, no tracking, routing, backtracking, etc. Just WAYPOINT, GO TO and follow the arrow. Practice these steps with companions at home. Ask someone knowledgeable to help set up your GPS unit so that you can do it with ease. If you are not a techie and do not do this often, write the steps down in a notebook you will carry with you.

SUMMARY

1. Always enter a WAYPOINT where you park your car.
2. Enter other helpful WAYPOINTS (eg leaving road or path into woods).
3. If lost, retrieve WAYPOINT from database.
4. Choose GO TO and select last (or most logical) WAYPOINT.
5. Select DIRECTION SCREEN.
6. Follow direction of arrow to get there.
7. Cancel navigation and then select GO TO to next WAYPOINT, if needed.
8. Practice at home with companions familiar with GPS use.
9. Carry spare batteries.
10. Know how to recalibrate after battery change, if required for your unit.