

Maps or GPS? Why Not Both?

A GPS (global positioning system) is a fantastic tool to have at your disposal--except in those instances when it isn't.

A GPS can be especially problematic in WV, because often to a GPS, a road is a road is a road. But as we well know, a gravel road is NOT the same thing as an interstate, so a “shortcut” that attempts to save you five miles could add more than half an hour to your trip. Or be completely impassable by car.

If you use your smart phone to navigate instead of a dedicated GPS, you can also have a problem when you find yourself in an area without cell service; the GPS in your phone can tell you precisely where you are, but without data, your coordinates are just a spot on a blank map.

Another issue is that if you go to an area and rely entirely upon GPS to get around, you'll not only never learn go places without the GPS, you're also likely to miss the sights as you focus on where you're going rather than where you are and what is around you.

All his life has he looked away to the future, the horizon. Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing.

--Yoda

And sometimes a map can tell you information a GPS can't. We were in the eastern panhandle last fall, and an accident completely blocked a two-lane road. The GPS only wanted to route us back to the closed road, and the spot was in a holler with spotty cell coverage, so we pulled out the Gazetteer to find an alternate route—and while looking we discovered a small botanic area around a bog where we took a short hike.

For the those reasons, I recommend having [maps](#) and a road atlas and even a [gazetteer](#) in your car. Just in case.

However, in an area with cell coverage, a GPS can be a great way to navigate new areas and find new restaurants.

I Want a GPS!

So what should you look for?

If you are planning on exploring rural WV (or another state that has areas with sparse cell coverage) I highly recommend getting an actual GPS unit for your car. There are many different units available, ranging from \$75 - \$400, plus accessories.



Speaking of accessories, you'll want the following: a power adapter and a dash or windshield mount. You'll also want to consider the maps available--a GPS sold in the US should come with US maps. So if you're thinking about taking it somewhere else, you need to see about how to add maps. You also have the option with some models to get lifetime map updates.

If you are going to be spending your time in cities, you can get away with just using your cell phone as a GPS. In this case, you'll need to decide which mapping app you want to use--and there are going to be a ton of options. Android phones come automatically with Google Maps, iPhones come with Apple Maps, but you can install a variety of other navigation apps yourself from the app stores. You'll also want to make sure you have a dash or windshield mount for your phone, to make it easier to use those apps while driving.

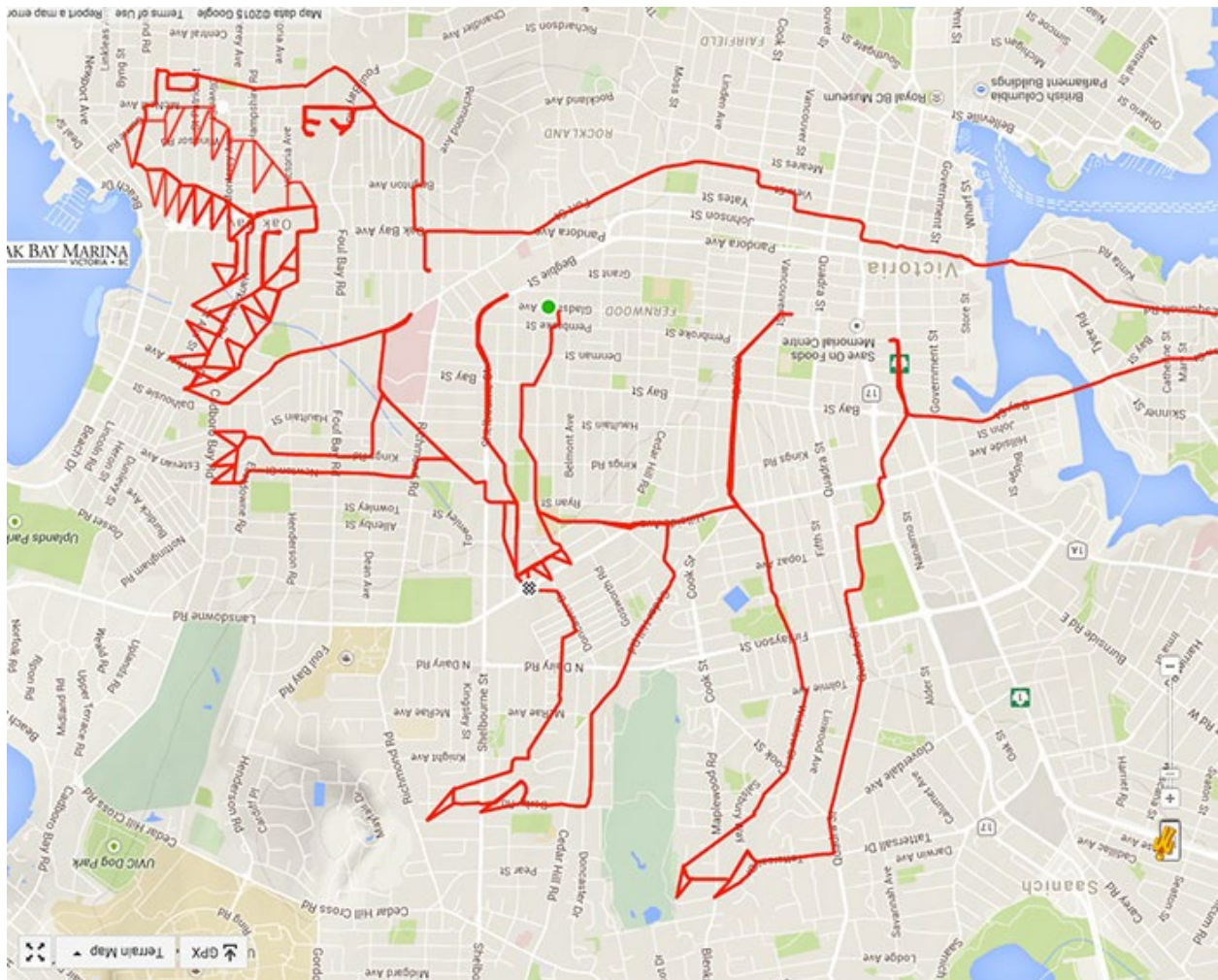
If you want a GPS for walking, then your cell phone is your best bet, since you'll already have it in your pocket.

For runners, there are a variety of GPS watches and smart watches available, however when you use the GPS, you'll probably need to charge your watch every single day, which can make a GPS watch more trouble than it's worth, and many models don't show current tracks, and so can't necessarily be used if you get lost.

If you like camping and hiking, you may want to invest in a hand-held GPS unit. Although you can use a GPS watch or your phone for this, being able to change out the batteries in a handheld unit adds extra security if you're worried about getting lost. Plus, most units use rechargeable Li batteries, but can use disposable batteries in a pinch.

Now What?

Once you have this GPS, what do you do with it? For automobile models, generally you just leave them in your car, but for bikers, walkers, runners, and hikers, it can be fascinating to look at your data and do comparisons, which means downloading the data to your computer--companies like Garmin have software like [Basecamp](#) that allows you to save your route data as well as export it to give to other people.



You can also download data from various websites--or even add your own. There are lots of websites that provide GPS maps for hiking and biking.

[The Hiking Project](#)

[All Trails](#) (+cell phone app)

[Trail Link](#)

[Gaia GPS](#) (+cell phone app)

[WV Trail Inventory](#)

[GPS Doodles](#)

So don't be afraid to get out and explore--there are plenty of devices and apps to keep you from getting lost and to help you keep track of where you've been.