How To Better Use Maps For Survival

In a world where GPS systems and cell phone trackers make it easier to navigate, many people are lulled into a false sense of security. Unfortunately, when SHTF, computer and satellite assisted navigation technologies may not be available.

Learning how to use paper maps and a compass can make an enormous difference, and should be a part of every survival plan.

The Compass and How to Choose a Good One

Without a compass, you will find it very hard to use a map. The compass has been in use for many centuries, and was originally used to navigate small wooden ships. Later on it was also used for land navigation.

A compass has two important parts: the needle which spins and points to the North, and an outer ring which reveals direction in 360 degrees. On a good compass, the magnetic arrow should move freely without binding in the case.

While smaller, light weight compasses may seem easier to carry, they can also easily give false readings because the needle does not have enough room to float and balance properly.

It is better to buy a good quality expensive compass than a cheaper one and have it fail when you need it most.

Choose a Good Map

To begin, your map should be an accurate representation of the area you are planning to be traveling in.

Some of the best maps are made by the US Government and are

easy to obtain for free or low cost through the government's catalog. There are also other map making companies, but their products cost more and have less usable information.

It is very important that your map is legible and durable. There should be no thick heavy folds, smudge marks, or tears in the material.

If the map or atlas does not come with water proof covering, you should get one for storage purposes.

Here are some important pieces of information that should be on every map you own:

- The Legend is a list of what each of the map symbols mean.
- Scale is the ratio of enlarging or reducing the size of a map. An example of this is one inch on the map is equal to 100 yards on the real landscape.
- The Compass Rose is a large arrow that shows you which part of the map is oriented to the North.
- Altitude and depression markings. When looking at your map, you will notice circular lines. These lines denote height or depression of the landscape. The tighter or closer the lines, the steeper ascent or descent. The farther apart the lines are, the less the steepness of the land.

How to Use a Map and Compass

To align the map to countryside you are working, you will need a compass to point out North in the region. Since compasses can be thrown off by hidden metals in the area, you should always try to compare compass readings to Sun position and other information available in the landscape.

Once the map and the compass are oriented, measure distance on the map from where you are standing to a location you wish to go to. Draw an imaginary straight line between these two

points. Pay attention to altitude markings along your projected path. If the path looks too steep, make a second imaginary line, or set of lines to go around the area.

Next, take a ruler and measure the length of each line that defines your path. Add up all the lines, and then multiply the number of inches by the scale on the map. This will give you the estimated geographic distance between the two points.

When trying to navigate, you may need to alter course based on the terrain.

For example, if you are going over a mountain try to cross in a low valley or walk the ridge to a point where your down path will not be too steep. Once down the mountain, set your course again on the flattest land you can find. Also try to stay out of deep valleys. They sometimes end up as a box canyon and you will waste valuable time.

Be a Good Judge of Time, Distance, and Altitude

When land navigating, be a good judge of time.

Know how to tell time without using a watch. Being able to read the position of the Sun in the sky will give you an idea of the time, and also help you stay on course. If you misjudge the distance, it might be too far to make it with the provision you have on hand. It is better to overestimate the

time and distance and get there sooner than to underestimate the time and distance and run into problems.

People acquainted with GPS systems truly do not realize the risks associated with lack of information about altitudes.

If the altitude above sea level is higher than you are accustomed to, breathing problems can occur. Low oxygen can make your thinking very slow, which can increase your risk of falls or making bad decisions. It can also cause unconsciousness, headaches, and finally death.

Keep a Notebook of All Map Information

Always keep a notebook log a complete record of the trip. Enter into it all course bearings, time and distance information, altitude, and weather conditions of the trip. If you missed any of your end points, there is written record of your information on what might have caused the problem.

The more you use and practice your map and compass skills the better you will get with them. You can start off with short trips in known areas, and gradually work your way up to more complicated landscapes.

Before you know it, you will find yourself wondering why any person would be happy with the lack of good quality information found on modern GPS systems.

*This article has been written by **Fred Tyrell** for [Survivopedia](#).*

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