



ASK THE EXPERT

How to Avoid Getting Lost

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When finding your way in the woods, modern GPS navigation systems can be useful, but they can and do fail, especially under tree cover, in canyons and when their batteries get too cold. For navigating outside, Nelson says simple is best. “The most important equipment you could have for not getting lost are your eyes and your brain. Rather than relying on a GPS or cell phone, think. Take time to know where you’re going, where the nearest roads are and which direction is north. That’s what people did before GPS, and that’s what they should still know how to do.”

—Lexi Krupp '15

MAKE A PLAN

“Plan your trip presuming something will go wrong. Good wilderness ethics is to be ready to help someone else out, not be in the position where you need assistance. Knowing when to turn around is important. Decide what time you’re going to reach your turnaround point and when you’ll be back at your car and back home. Let someone else know what your plan is and what to do if you don’t get back when you say you will.”

ORIENT YOURSELF

“You should have a map and a compass—the best kind has a clear back and a dial you can rotate. Before you start your trip, be able to orient yourself on the map. Identify where you are, where you want to go and any topographical features that you’ll encounter. If you have only a compass, you can still use it to reach a destination. Point the direction indicator on the compass to your destination and turn the dial so the north needle is lined up with the north indicator on the compass.”

USE A COMPASS

“Orient your map so it lines up with the landscape and put the edge of your compass where you are on the map. Turn the dial so the north-south lines line up with the map, and rotate your compass so its needle aims north on the map. You’ll be facing the direction of your destination and can read off your bearing—from 0 to 360 degrees. This works fine for general direction but keep in mind that true north on the map is different from magnetic north.”

IF LOST, STAY PUT

“If you do get lost, rather than running the risk of getting injured and wandering farther from the trail, staying put is a good idea. If you know you’re not going to make it out before dark, stop and make a camp rather than waiting until it’s too dark to see what you need to do to make yourself comfortable. It’s perfectly possible, with a little preparation, to be warm and safe without a tent or sleeping bag.”