

Good maps are vital to the wilderness experience!

Good maps are vital to the wilderness experience

Op-Ed By Robert Speik

Bend Bulletin Guest Columnist

Published on January 1, 2013

Environmental Reporter Dylan J. Darling, has been doing a great job in covering information useful to folks living in Central Oregon. The following adds to his recent story "Forest recreation map getting update".

It is essential to carry a map of the outdoors, one that covers the land from where you start, to where you want to go - and return. The problem is finding the best map for planning at home and for carrying and using on your adventure.

Maps have very different uses: there are road maps, bike trail maps, hiking maps (for on-trail and off-trail), wilderness maps, snow park ski and snowshoe trail maps, backpacking maps and U.S. Forest Service administrative maps, including National Forest Recreation maps.

Maps have very different information formats: Planimetric maps do not show land contours – they are flat diagrams. Topographic maps show land forms by simple land contour lines at convenient intervals, are color coded, very accurately based on aerial photographs and are essential to backcountry travel.

Many maps have geographic grid lines to assist the identification of points on the map (where you are stranded). Older Forest Administrative maps likely have the historic (1785) Public Land Survey grid lines to define land management and ownership in "metes and bounds," long preceding the DOD Global Positioning System (GPS). Some maps have Latitude and Longitude grid lines, now mostly used by pilots and mariners. Newer, more useful maps used by Search and Rescue Units have lines showing the UTM Grid, best used with any GPS hand-held receiver.

Some maps are "socialized," showing points of interest such as campground services, fuel, restaurants and rest rooms. Road maps for the car, as sold at local stores or shown on smart phones are examples of Planimetric socialized maps.

Some maps are huge and require a table to use. Some maps are sized for the outdoors, to be folded in a traditional way to fit a Ziploc bag in a pants pocket.

The Deschutes National Forest Recreation Map is a very large administrative map – Planimetric - with coded information naming management points. You can view it on line at the Deschutes National Forest website (under Recreation and Maps). There are better maps, however, to use for your outdoor adventures.

Benchmark Maps' excellent Road and Recreation Atlas for Oregon with "Landscape Maps, Recreation Guides, Detailed Roads and GPS Grids", is about \$22.95 at Bend Map.

Specialized maps include the pocket sized Salem based "Adventure Maps", a detailed and regularly updated chart of mountain bike trails in Bend, \$11.99 at Bend Map and sports stores.

The "Geographics" socialized topographic folded map of the entire Three Sisters Wilderness, (Mt. Washington, etc.) is available for about \$10.00 It has been in stores for years. It is only somewhat GPS friendly.

The "National Geographic Trails Illustrated Topographic Map" is the best local area map today. It is a socialized topographic map of Bend and the entire Three Sisters Wilderness, a best buy at REI and Bend Map for about \$11.00. It has the required UTM Grid (NAD 27) and very detailed topo, trails and features

from the USGS Quad data base. I carry this map and I count ounces. It is pre-folded, waterproof and rip resistant!

The best maps for specific backcountry adventures, including hiking, snowshoeing and skiing and bagging peaks, are the USGS Quadrangle (Quad) Topo Maps available at Bend Map for about \$8.00 each. They cover specific areas -- South Sister, Elk Lake, etc. Quads are the most accurate topographic maps, scaled to a detailed 1:24,000, with important features accurate to a few feet, including trails, springs, streams, lakes, peaks, bridges, buildings, etc. They have UTM grid lines and the ability to obtain very accurate True North base-plate compass bearings from where you are to where you want to go. Quad maps work best with your Suunto M3S Leader base plate magnetic compass (about \$25.00), and current model hand held GPS, about \$175.00 for the Garmin eTrex 20 or eTrex Venture HC, my preference, about \$100.00 on eBay.

Letter-sized examples of socialized Quad topo maps (with the UTM Grid imprinted by the Forest Service) are free at most snow park trailheads along Cascades Lakes Highway.

Dillon was concerned about the date of the Forest Recreation map. I note that land features, campgrounds, resorts, trails and trailheads change slowly over years. Even Quad maps from 1980 aerial photos are the most accurate for backcountry navigation in the Three Sisters Wilderness and the Oregon Badlands Wilderness.

Navigation with essential map, compass and optional GPS is number one of the suggested Ten Essential Systems.

Copyright©, 2013 by Robert Speik. All Rights Reserved.

-- Robert Speik lives in Bend and writes for his website: www.TraditionalMountaineering.org