

GB Outdoors GPS Review Summer 2011

It seem like only yesterday we were writing last years GPS review; which reminded us what a significant year in the world of GPS it was, which in turn led to wonder what new delights are in store for us in the coming year. Most product news from manufacturers is released in early summer with new product becoming available soon after, we think we have enough information now to be able to flag up the new product on its way in the next few months.

Last year was the year that most GPS manufacturers finally delivered on Ordnance Survey mapping and addressed the Maps for your GPS & PC issues (albeit in different ways some being more user friendly than others). Premium OS maps have never come free (we don't see that ever changing) to counter this most GPS offers now come bundled with access to OS Whole GB 50k mapping for your GPS & PC as part of the deal.

All of which has had a major impact on the established suppliers of PC based OS mapping like MM & Quo. They have had to adapt to this changing world by offering a compatible GPS or lose out. The end result of all these changes has we believe worked in the favour of the consumer as in most cases GPS owners can now carry out all the essential data management, route planning and send to GPS tasks using the maps that come with the device. If you are thinking of making a GPS purchase and can't do so then think again!!

Many of our users like to take a GPS on their travels; one area that benefits from all these changes is access to international mapping & auto routing key features to many users making many systems more complex to accommodate all these features; making most Whole OS GB Landranger & GPS Bundles a significant purchase in the region of £400 depending on the GPS & Routing features.

Many outdoor enthusiasts carry a GPS simply to have the confidence of confirming their location and see no need for a more complex device; maybe we have lost sight of the view that not everyone wants or needs an all singing & dancing device just to go Geocaching or Hillwalking. Some manufacturers have realised this and this year there are some interesting offers in this area.

Geocaching has become a global activity with the trend towards paperless geocaching. This year has seen major changes in the way players can access the sport with the launch of the Opencaching website as a competitor to the long established website Geocaching.com. If you're a geocaching enthusiast and a fan of paperless geocaching; then how user friendly the GPS manufacturer makes the device is the key to getting the best from your sport.

So as you can see there are once again exiting times ahead in the world of GPS; all of which gives us an opportunity to run through the current GPS ranges from the major manufacturers and introduce any new products & ranges most of which can be purchased from GPST with the added security of support & training from the GPS experts.

When seeking to review & introduce the new & current GPS ranges we have introduced the manufacturers in alphabetical order and tried to highlight the good & bad points in the ranges in an impartial way. When reviewing Mapping GPS we have taken into consideration access to Whole GB 50k Ordnance Survey mapping and whether the package includes access to maps on your GPS & PC and auto-routing as standard.

Garmin

The past year has seen the steady development of the existing Garmin outdoors ranges and a series of updates has seen a stream of new features added; however in our opinion the greatest improvements have been added in the area of mapping & BaseCamp and the creation of free to all geocaching website Opencaching.com

Garmin confirm that going forward; any OS Discoverer or BirdsEye Select mapping bundled or purchased for your Garmin device can now be used in the free to download software application BaseCamp. Simply open BaseCamp > connect your GPS to your PC to view your maps, plan routes, manage data, and send to GPS. This facility will be available across the Garmin range as it develops.

The established products in the Garmin range – Dakota 20, Oregon 450 & 450t, Oregon 500 & 550t , GPSTMap62s & 62st see no major changes although we hear there may be a camera version of the GPSTMap62 range before very long. All offer sunlight readable screens, HotFix GPS reception, 3 axis electronic compass and wireless sharing, on & off road routing and access to custom maps & paperless geocaching across the ranges.

New for July 2011 will be the Montana range which will include the Montana 600, 650 & 650t. Standard across the range will be 4" dual-orientation sunlight readable touchscreen, included rechargeable lithium battery (or 3 x AA batteries not included) automatic routing with optional mapping and voice prompts, 3 axis compass and access to custom maps & paperless geocaching across the range. The 650 & 650t will add camera & 100k European topo mapping respectively; initially only the Montana 600 will come with Whole GB 50k OS Discoverer mapping bundle - the GPST bundle price will be £480 saving £150 on the RRP

The long awaited upgrade of the eTrex range takes place in autumn 2011; the new products have been announced on Garmin.com but information is a bit sketchy for Europe at the moment but it seems that there will be 3 reasonably priced models

- eTrex 10 which will be the base model offering 2.2" display, worldwide basemap & paperless geocaching
- eTrex 20 which will add colour display & expandable memory
- eTrex 30 which will include colour display & expandable memory and add barometric altimeter, 3 axis compass and wireless sharing.



What seems unclear at the moment is the availability of OS Discoverer maps for the range and UK price structure; we'll update this review as soon as the product announcement is released

Garmin offer regular free updates for their GPS unit software & PC based software, FAQ's & email support online and personal contact on 0808 238 0000.

Magellan

Not seen in the UK for several years now the Magellan brand has been acquired by Taiwan based conglomerate MiTAC; they launch a new eXplorist range of four handheld GPS devices in July 2011.

GPST have had a brief play with the base model in the range and expect to have access to a demo model very soon; until then we can only pass on the information given by the UK distributor. Once we have had the opportunity to evaluate the product then we'll post a more detailed review on our website.

Access to your PC for data management & data transfer to/from GPS is by VantagePoint free to download Magellan software; however GPST are not sure at this stage whether the software can be used to view maps held on the GPS in the same way as BaseCamp (we think it can't). Once we have established how data, maps & GPS transfer works then once again we'll post the info on our website.

- eXplorist GC will be the base model offering 2.2" colour screen, a selection of pre-loaded geocaches and a 30 day premium membership on Geocaching.com - all models across the range use 2 x AA batteries and offer Magellan's World Edition map, which includes a complete road network for the U.S., Canada, Western Europe and Australia, as well as water features, urban and rural land use, and a realistic shaded relief background – RRP £179.99
- eXplorist 510 offers 3" colour touchscreen, camera, speaker & microphone allowing you to Geotag photos and add notes on the go – OS mapping available not included RRP £299.99
- eXplorist 610 – adds 3 axis electronic compass & barometric altimeter - OS mapping available not included - £399.99
- eXplorist 710 - combines the best of on-road and off-road navigation, including both Magellan's highly detailed Summit Series topographic map and its City Series turn-by-turn map which allows users to navigate their vehicles through busy city streets on their way to their outdoor adventures - OS mapping available not included RRP £499.99

From our discussions with the UK distributor; only the eXplorist 510,610,710 will offer access to OS maps. We understand that included with these models there will be a voucher in the box allowing you to purchase Whole GB 50k maps for £50.



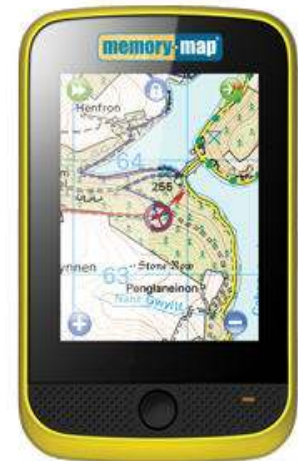
Having seen 3 previous failed attempts by Magellan to make headway in the UK & European markets we are a little cautious about this offering. We are unsure how the model for access to additional OS mapping through their website will work and note that there is no telephone contact number for product support it seems that Magellan intend to reply on FAQ's and email contact for product support.

Once we have fully tested a device and established how easy data transfer & map downloads are using VantagePoint then we'll decide if we will stock the product range. We did find it strange that we could purchase an eXplorist GC on eBay from the USA for less than we as retailers could buy it for in the UK.

Memory-Map & MM Adventurer Range

Both devices in the Adventurer range in our opinion are strictly speaking not handheld GPS; they are Personal Navigation Devices (PND) with integrated GPS and a mobile version of Memory-Map software. Similar to a Smartphone with integrated GPS running an app allowing GPS navigation on the move.

When navigating with the Adventurer 3500 (once you are locked onto satellites) you can lock the screen to present position > now the screen will scroll as you walk/ride/drive. You can create & follow routes & trails in the GPS and import/export user data to/from your PC & your MM PC based software quite easily (explained in our online resource)



Its worth pointing out that Adventurer 3500 works best as a moving map as described above, it does have a miniature keyboard for naming waypoints etc which is more than most PND devices offer and the transfer of user data once you've cracked the system is straightforward. However if you are not the PC friendly type of person then maybe this isn't the best GPS for you.

The big attraction of this device particularly to existing MM users is the perceived value of being able to copy maps from their portfolio of PC based maps to the device (only legitimate versions of MM V5 maps are compatible with this device). In addition any routes (user data) can be sent to the device and seen overlaid on any maps you have in the device.

Another advantage is that any maps purchased in the bundle come pre-loaded to a 4GB MicroSD card with space left for additional map downloads from your PC or the MM Digital Map Shop. MM offer a wide range of international maps all transferable to the 3500.

The device in its standard form does not offer turn by turn routing; however add on MM software & EU SatNav is available for about £100.

There are 2 devices in the Adventurer range the 2800 & 3500; whilst you can still purchase an Adventurer 2800 it has to some degree been overtaken by the latest offering the Adventurer 3500 which is waterproof and offers a larger 3.5" touchscreen.

By far and away the best value way to purchase the Adventurer 3500 is to buy the GB Edition which comes with Mains & 12v charger, subscription to Trailzilla and 4GB MicroSD card and PC version of MM V5 on CD/DVD allowing you to install to your PC/Laptop.

GPST have been the MM recommended training partner since 2003 and consider MM the most user friendly if not the cheapest PC based software and offer MM users both hands-on & online training. We offer the Adventurer 3500 with unlimited access to online training.

Memory-Map offer regular free updates for their PC based software, FAQ's & email support online and personal contact on 0844 811 0955.

Quo/Lowrance Endura GPS

The Endura range is manufactured by Lowrance who are huge in the marine market worldwide; however like Magellan they have had several unsuccessful attempts to launch handheld GPS to the UK market.

In all fairness this latest venture looked doomed to failure (as their OS maps were not up to the standard required) until they teamed up with the guys from Quo or Mapyx. Essentially the Quo/Endura package offers the Lowrance Endura GPS running a dedicated mobile version of Quo on the Endura platform.



Quo PC based software is a favourite with our customers as it's easy to download & use and offers all the features you would expect of PC based software at a reasonable price with flexible map downloads. There is a growing portfolio of international maps

The Quo/Endura GPS allows you to copy any PC based OS maps you own to the device overcoming the issue of Maps for GPS & PC. In addition any routes (user data) can be sent to the device and seen overlaid on any maps you have in the device.

GPST do not retail these devices but are happy to offer you information & advice on the full range. There are three devices on offer in the Quo/Endura range the Out& Back, Safari & Sierra; if you would like more information on these devices then visit the Quo website and check out the latest deals.

The Quo website is www.mapyx.com where you'll find FAQ & email support & training and personal contact on 0844 35 777 34

Satmap Active 10 Plus

This UK based GPS project has produced a serviceable handheld device that in all fairness is now looking a bit dated. They were the first to offer full OS maps and to some degree live on the back of that: whereas other GPS systems have moved on the Active 10 has only had a few unit software updates to add new features since its launch. Leaving that aside it is still a very popular device and is promoted heavily by many retailers.

The Active 10 features were conceived to allow navigation on the map page (which is its strongest point) and uses a selection of soft keys and menus to move around the interface. Data transfer is via a free piece of in-house software SatSYNC; essentially it takes GPX files and imports or exports them to/from the device.

There are several versions of the Active 10 all include electronic compass & pointer; we recommend the Active 10 plus GB Edition as the best value package included in the bundle you get the usual cables, rechargeable lithium battery, wall & car charger and access to Route share network and of course OS 50k Whole GB on SD card.



The route share network gives you unlimited access to whole GB Ordnance Survey Explorer & LandRanger over the internet. It allows you to create, manage & print user data like routes etc and then send to your Active 10 using SatSYNC. The downside is that the maps are not available when you are not online and of course you don't own them; many of our Satmap users go on to use MM or Quo which of course means buying maps twice once for the GPS and then again for your PC.

The Satmap website is www.satmap.co.uk where you'll find FAQ & email support and personal contact on 0845 873 0101

Summary

We are constantly asked for advice on which GPS is the best buy; of course it all boils down to the users personal needs & preferences. We believe that the more choices there are for the consumer the better but we do wish that more manufacturers would consider the needs of the market & consumer before launching new products.

Many would say that it's a good thing that there is competition in the market and welcome the return of companies like Magellan; however our first take is that they seem to be making the same old mistakes they made before and wonder how deep the commitment to the UK market is.

Yes there is a place in the market for the Adventurer, Endura & Active 10 ranges; but we see no innovation or new thinking. All of which leads to the understanding why Garmin have become the market leaders by a country mile.

Already they have the two most popular outdoor handheld GPS devices on the market; the Oregon 450 & GPSMap62s both bundled with whole GB 50k OS maps at a very competitive price. No doubt they will be joined by the new Montana 600 GB Edition; I'm sure the larger screen & voice prompts will be very popular with our customers.

This season sees yet another major overhaul of the very popular eTrex range adding worldwide appeal & geocaching features across the range at affordable prices (product announcements will follow as soon as they are released in August 2011) it will be interesting to see where they go in relation to access to OS maps for the eTrex20 & eTrex30

So interesting times ahead again
Peter Judd
June 2011

For GPS sales or more information on any of the products included in this article visit www.gpstraining.co.uk or call 01768 885855.