

NAVIGATION LESSONS LEARNED ON THE COLORADO TRAIL

If you think your lost, you're probably lost! This was the principal navigation lesson learned this past summer on my solo, Denver to Durango trek of our stupendous Colorado Trail. Parenthetically, I only got lost 5 times(the longest stretch was 2 hours) which I felt was pretty good. As important, backtrack if you think you're lost and don't try to "shortcut" to the place you think you should be unless you're very good with a GPS. "Shortcutting" cost me the 2 hours mentioned above; I eventually gave up and backtracked. Also, I would not rely much on the self appointed "trail experts" you encounter on the trail; your own self reliance is the best source of information(you'll be surprised at how few people there are on the CT in any event). On a more positive note, here are my suggestions, in order of importance, on navigating the CT.

First, study the guidebook and databook by segment and thoroughly plan and visualize your route, campsites and water stops. Plan the whole trail at a high level but plan the next few segments in detail. Water stops are particularly important since some stretches are without water for up to 20 miles(unless you find the puddle referred to in the guidebook).

Second, get a sense of where you are, where you're going directionally and the topography of where you'll be. Obviously, your shadow tells you direction at a minimum, however, a compass should be kept handy. Mine was in my pocket easily accessible. Try and navigate by feel and by seeking out the CT signs.

Third, refer to the guidebook and databook constantly during your journey. I kept mine in a pouch on the waistbelt of my pack; again easily accessible. While the CT is generally well marked, there are some confusing spots. One tip is to triangulate your assumed speed with time to estimate when you should be at a landmark highlighted in the guidebook. As an example, you get a definite sense of pace(flat, uphill, downhill, rugged/easy). So, let's say you are moving at 3 miles per hour and a landmark is 1 mile away, therefore, you should reach that landmark in 20 minutes. Note that the guidebook and databook should be read in conjunction with one another since each one alone does not tell the full story. Further, to save weight, I cut up my guidebook into the various segments and only carried those segments as needed. Of course, carelessness is your worst enemy.

Fourth-While I did have all the topos, I did not use them except to see what was around me(peaks, creeks, etc.). I would not dissuade you from using topos but the above worked better for me.

Fifth-Again, while I did have a GPS, I only used it twice to verify my position and not to find my position. I have a similar opinion on primarily using a GPS as I would on primarily using topos. Further, my sensibilities tell me to not primarily rely on a electronic gadget.

Most importantly, commit then plan then follow thru on your trek of the CT!!

Happy trails.

Steve and his partners-"Friends of Yoda" are original 1987 adopters of a 12 mile stretch of the CT. At that time, Steve vowed to do an end to end of the trail in commemoration of Ron "Yoda" Davies and in celebration of Colorado and the CT. Steve has subsequently joined the Colorado Trail Foundation Board of Directors as a give back.