

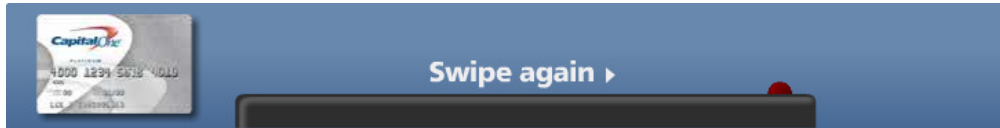
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## Venturing Beyond a Compass and Map

By IAN AUSTEN  
 Published: December 1, 2008

AT one time, about the only battery-powered device for use in the great outdoors was the flashlight. But few outdoor activities today are without accessories that have greater capabilities than providing illumination. Many of these products help make hiking, camping and other recreation safer or at least add a new dimension. Here are a few that could grace anyone's gift list.

### Multimedia



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### Outdoor Gizmos

#### BRT STRAP Planet Bike

(planetbike.com) makes a number of well-priced, efficient headlights and taillights for nighttime cycling. The BRT Strap (\$16) provides a way to keep pant legs away from greasy chains. It also increases visibility; an LED in the strap lights up a transparent filament that runs around its exterior. The two coin-size batteries that power the eight-inch strip last for about 200 hours, according to the company, which says that the device is also used by many pedestrians and dogs.

**AQUAPAC SLR CAMERA CASE WITH HARD LENS** While digital single-lens reflex cameras have become relatively affordable, the consumer models generally scrimp in one area: they lack the extra sealing that protects professional cameras from water and dust. The Aquapac SLR Camera Case with Hard Lens (\$130, aquapac.net) is not elegant, but it allows photographers to shoot in difficult conditions without fear of equipment damage. That includes underwater photography to a depth of 15 feet. The case has five pouches of desiccant to prevent humidity from forming inside the bag and has its own carrying strap.

**TIMEX EXPEDITION E-TIDE TEMP** Compass outdoor watches can provide a dizzying array of data. Timex's Expedition E-Tide Temp Compass (\$120 to \$175, depending on strap and finish; returntotheoutdoors.com) adds a novel measurement: tide tracking.

**SPOT SATELLITE MESSENGER** Unlike conventional GPS devices, the Spot Satellite Messenger (also known as Personal Tracker; \$170, findmespot.com) does not give directions. Instead, it tracks its user's location and sends family and friends automated text or e-mail updates. If necessary, the device can alert up to 10 people that a user needs nonemergency assistance; another feature acts as a global 911 service for true emergencies. The Spot requires an annual subscription of \$100 to \$158, depending on services.

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**C-TECH WIRELESS WEATHER STATION** Coghlan's (coghlan.com), an established Canadian company that makes camping accessories, offers a sophisticated method for tracking the weather. The company's C-Tech Wireless Weather Station (\$30) has two pieces: a remote sensor and a receiver that can be placed up to 100 feet away, presumably somewhere warm and dry like a tent. In addition to displaying the usual weather data, the receiver also offers a forecast of general weather trends.

**WINGSCAPES BIRDCAM** The BirdCam (\$250, wingscapes.com) may be just the thing for bird watchers who want to stay indoors. It's a simple digital camera inside a weatherproof container. When placed near, say, a bird feeder, it has two automated options. An infrared heat and motion sensor can set off the shutter, or the camera can be programmed to take photos at scheduled intervals. There is one potential catch to the sensor mode: the camera cannot distinguish between birds and other wildlife, leaving open the prospect of many squirrel portraits.

**SPEED ZONE COMP COMPUTER** Now that racing bicycles generally have 10 sprockets at the rear wheel as well as sophisticated spring-loaded gear-changing systems, chains are something of a weak link. If chains are not replaced, or at least inspected, with a special wear gauge every 1,500 miles or so, they can damage other parts of a bicycle's drive train. Cyclists who are not mechanically inclined can set the Specialized Speed Zone Comp Computer (\$65, specialized.com) to keep track of a bicycle chain's age and alert the rider when it's time for a service call. The Comp makes wireless connections from its handlebar mount to sensors on the bicycle.

**BUSHNELL BACKTRACK** The BackTrack (\$74, bushnell.com) is a minimal GPS unit intended to perform one task. When users mark their starting point by pushing a button, the BackTrack will guide them back to it later. Although it is available in a camouflage version, Bushnell suggests that it may be commonly used in a decidedly urban situation: finding a car in a vast parking lot.

A version of this article appeared in print on December 2, 2008, on page F5 of the New York edition.

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