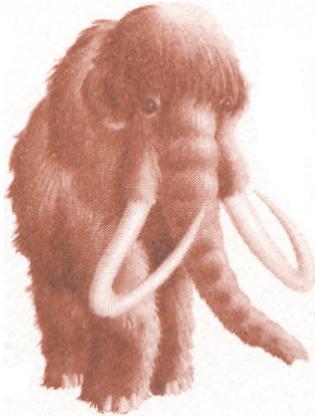




The Langlade Erratic

A newsletter on the Ice Age National Scenic Trail in
Langlade County, Wisconsin
August, 2016

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"40 YEARS AND COUNTING . . ."

HI...COME JOIN YOUR TRAIL BUDDIES AT A MEETING
OF THE LANGLADE COUNTY ICE AGE TRAIL CHAPTER.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 7 PM

WOLF RIVER ROOM,

LANGLADE COUNTY RESOURCE CENTER.

837 CLERMONT STREET, ANTIGO

SEE YOU THERE AND BRING A FRIEND OR TWO OR . . . !

Future Steps

This summer a few hikers we met praised the Mammoth Tracks GPS (Global Positioning System) Ice Age Trail app commercially available for certain cell phones. When unsure of a location, a quick check of the app displayed their position to the trail. For further insight on a technology with a bright future for hikers and other travelers, Dave Tlusty agreed to share some thoughts. Besides his article, the events posted above and below are offered for your future consideration. Also check iceagetrail.org for an array of future trail events in Wisconsin.

Saturday, September 10 – 9 AM

Late Summer Hike-Old Railroad Segment
Bring a lunch. Meet in front of the Forestry
Office at the Fairgrounds, Antigo.

Saturday, October 1 - 9 AM

Parrish Hills Segment-National Trails Day
Observance Hike - Dedicate Old Truck
Marker - Bring a lunch. Meet in front of the
Forestry Office at the Fairgrounds, Antigo.

Saturday, October 29 – 9 AM

Ice Age Trail Alliance Regional Rally
McGinley Room, Antigo Public Library

GPS Steps

As a professional surveyor, Dave Tlusty knows maps, land survey and GPS technology. We thank him for the following informative insight on the technology and a recent experience with a GPS app on his cell phone.

GPS: My, how things are changing! A few years ago I wrote a simple little article on GPS units and their use. At that time, I had a low cost Garmin handheld, their little yellow Etrex. Through my job as a land surveyor, I had access to other more complicated, more accurate GPS units but it was not uncommon for me to grab the Garmin and input a search point or use it to record a position I needed to get back to later.

When my little Garmin died, which I think can be accredited to a lot of rough use, I was "handheld GPSless" for about a year. I remember that I didn't want to buy another Etrex right away because it was beyond its lifecycle and I just knew Garmin had to be working on something else. I was correct. A short time later Garmin introduced the Dakota series and made another simple, yellow unit: the Dakota 10, which I purchased around 2011 and still use today. OK, so a little yellow Garmin to replace a little yellow Garmin, what's the big deal?

Simplicity and ease of use are two great improvements. With the original unit, one would have to spend a little time looking at the instruction manual with GPS unit in hand. With the new unit, the user interface (now all touch screen and color!) was very intuitive and easy adapt to.

Being acquainted with the old unit, a majority of the commands and functions were very familiar to me, so I was comfortable with it from hour 1. It seems like the accuracy in wooded areas was also better and it would take much less time to get a position value displayed. Battery life was also noticeably longer. The price was about the same for both units but there were significant improvements in the sheer number of functions available and the ease of access and use of those functions.

I've seen this same scenario (more features, simple and easier user interface, better accuracy, lower price) in the survey grade GPS units that I use. A great example is that in the late 1980's - early 1990's survey grade units were just becoming "affordable". A bit of tongue in cheek humor there because you had to be a multimillion dollar firm to be able to afford a set of GPS units. At a minimum, you could GPS survey back then with two units: one (a base unit) set over a point of known latitude/longitude, the other set over a point that you needed coordinates on. Three units (total cost \$250,000) were deemed more cost effective because you could get coordinates on two new points with only one base unit. But they didn't display coordinates, they only collected data. To get a coordinate, you'd have to collect hours of data, download the data to a personal computer, use a cryptic DOS program (yes, there was something before Windows) to crunch the data and produce coordinates. It was a very accurate but time consuming method. Today, you could work the same way with three units (total cost under \$18,000!) to again produce very accurate coordinates and yes, there would still be data processing involved. However, there is now another method using only 1 survey grade unit and a cell phone (total

investment of \$12,000) which allows you to get very accurate coordinate values instantly! My, how things are changing! What will the next 15 - 20 or so years bring? It's scary to think about.

Let's discuss cell phones. This will age me, but I remember when there was talk about using a phone that wasn't connected to a wall. Huh?! How can that work?? Well, I guess it does. Now my phone is with me all the time and is really an Internet computer with telephone capabilities.

As a GPS user, that brings up the question, how accurate is my Iphone GPS? After a little research, I couldn't find a definitive answer but can state that most of the time it's accurate to 20 - 35 feet.

In a recent boating event I was in, I downloaded a free app from Raceowl.com which allowed anyone to 'follow me' on their computer by watching my little boat icon work its way across the state of Missouri. Because my phone was in the bottom of the canoe in a waterproof case, it had a poor view of the sky and therefore some of my reported positions were 5 miles from the river I was on. Sometimes it was better, other times worse such as in the boat when the GPS unit had a very restricted view of the sky.

In doing my research, I did run across an article in GPS World magazine. I found that a company named u-blox, has created a GPS module that "delivers high performance down to centimeter-level accuracy". Oh my! Centimeter GPS accuracy on cell-phone! My, how things are changing! Will cell phone GPS be the death knell of handheld GPS units?

A 2012 article in Wired magazine titled "Apple, Google just killed portable GPS devices" is an indicator that they will. A search of "popular handheld GPS manufacturers" lists four: Garmin, DeLorme, Lowrance and Magellen.

On February 11, 2016, Garmin announced plans to acquire DeLorme. Now there are three... How will the improvements to GPS accuracy on cell phones help us on the Ice Age Trail? We don't know but one should think it'll only get better! Stay tuned!