

A new approach to navigating the PCT

By Caroline Benner, High Country News

At exactly 583.28 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, along the Pacific Crest Trail, you will come upon Golden Oak Spring. Just shy of a mile later, the trail crosses a power line near a wind farm. A half-mile farther, a man named Lon Cooper, a retired information-technology professional with an enormous amount of energy, stood thinking that the spot would make a nice place to camp.

He turned the data he'd collected into a GPS application for navigating the trail, and offered it as a free download for a smartphone. Hikers who use the so-called Halfmile app can now know exactly where they are on the Pacific Crest Trail, or how far away from the trail they are if they have wandered off it.

This sort of hyper-detailed, micro-documenting of the trails of the West – the Arizona Trail and the Colorado Trail have similar apps, for example – is a new trend in backcountry exploration. But before downloading these guides, consider whether you really want or need to know all the precise details that these wilderness apps offer.

Read the whole story