

FINDING NORTH WITHOUT A COMPASS

Where's north and south and how much more daylight do I have?

Sometimes while driving on windy roads I get a bit turned around, especially if I don't have my GPS going and I'm not used to the area. I come to an intersection and I'm supposed to head in a certain direction. How do I know which direction is which?

What about if you are hiking on a trail that twists you all around and you are told to take the trail off to the south? The trail has taken you all over and you don't know where south is. Are you sure that trail doesn't head more toward the west?

It's easy to figure out which direction you are going if you know where the sun is. Sure, it rises in the east and sets in the west. This trick is easier with a dial watch than a digital but it will work if you know what a dial watch looks like, and you have a clock of some sort on you. You take the hour hand of your watch and point it directly to the sun. Half way between that and the 12:00 will be south. You want to head north? Look at the opposite side of the face. That will be north. For example, if you point the hour hand to the sun and it's 4:00, then south would be 2:00. Half way between the sun and 12:00. North would then be facing 8:00. Pretty simple. If you don't have a watch with a face but you still know what time it is you can make your own clock by drawing on a piece of paper or scratching a circle into the ground.

What about if you are out and you have to head back to your vehicle? Do you know when it's time to turn around? How long until it starts to get dark? This time let's pretend that you are just visiting the area and don't know when the sun sets in this part of the country.

Face the sun. Extend your arm out and bend your wrist so your fingers are parallel to the ground. Measure the distance between the bottom of the sun and the horizon with your hand. If the distance is greater than your four fingers put your other hand underneath or above that hand. Each finger between the bottom of the sun and the horizon is 15 minutes. If you have four fingers between the bottom of the sun and the horizon the sun will set in one hour. If you have 6 fingers you have an hour and a half. Two fingers? Well, get a move on!