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Why Range Finders are Perfect for the BackCountry

By Chuck Fitzgerald

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by: **Chuck Fitzgerald**

Outdoor enthusiasts love to guess about all sorts of things. We guess how many stars are in the Milky Way, we guess how fast a deer runs or we might even guess about how long it will be until that big, dark cloud dumps rain us. But there are times when guessing in the backcountry just doesn't get the job done. Specialty gear is available to help us determine how far we've hiked – and in what direction – and other tools are available to help take the guesswork out of purifying water. But there is a another useful tool overlooked by many avid backcountry visitors – the rangefinder.

Rangefinders are used in a number of commercial applications – surveying, mapping, mining, etc. – however for our purposes we will be discussing the portable laser rangefinder used by outdoor sportsmen and sportswomen.

Laser rangefinders calculate the distance to an object by bouncing a laser beam off of the object and measuring the lapsed time until the beam returns. Since the calculation is based upon the return of the beam, it stands to reason that a more reflective object can be measured at a greater distance than a less reflective object. Readily available models are accurate to within one yard and have the ability to measure distances to reflective targets up to 1500 yards away - that's nearly a mile – and they're accurate under nearly any condition.

The past few years have seen a number of technology advances across all rangefinder price ranges. Many models are lightweight, are easily operated with one hand, can measure through rain or snow, can see through nearby clutter, function well in low light, contain integrated optical magnification and are 100% waterproof. Additionally there have been vast improvements lately to lens coatings, battery life and information display.

If distances are important to your activity, you need a rangefinder. BackCountry features - rocks, trees, lakes, mountains, ravines, cliffs - have a tendency to distort one's depth perception. It is easy to misjudge even short distances. The most widely used application of rangefinders is in measuring shot

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distances by hunters. Whether you are hunting waterfowl or elk, distance to your game is the most critical factor in placing an effective shot. Bow hunters would never hunt without their rangefinder, the difference between 45 yards and 50 yards for a bow hunter is the difference between success and failure. Rangefinders are also used by golfers for determining club selection, by hikers to determine the best route to travel and by campers, boaters and wildlife observers for a wide variety of distance measuring purposes.

The next time you plan to spend time in our wondrous backcountry consider taking a rangefinder along with you. If you've never looked through a rangefinder, you don't know what you're missing. With a quality rangefinder, guessing distances just became old news. Use this information and you'll Get It Right The First Time. Get Outdoors!

Chuck Fitzgerald is Owner and President of Arizona based BackCountry Toys, an online store providing backcountry specialty gear and educational information for outdoor enthusiasts. Visit

to receive the free newsletter "FreshAir" or call (800) 316-9055.

New Year's Resolutions for the BackCountry

By Chuck Fitzgerald

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The New Year has begun and you probably have a few New Year's Resolutions under way. You'll lose weight, lose a bad habit, add a good habit or even mend an old fence. But do you have any resolutions for the backcountry? Are you ready to make this year your best backcountry year? I'm ready. Here are a few of my backcountry New Year's Resolutions; please adopt a couple of these for yourself. If you do, 2005 will be your best outdoor year yet.

First off, I resolve to spend more time in the backcountry. No matter how much time I spend hiking or camping, it never seems to be enough. So this year I will try to get my fill of the outdoors. Of course, I said this last year too but failed to get enough.

Next I resolve to upgrade my critical gear. Some things are more comfortable the longer you own them, but this isn't good practice for critical backcountry gear. For example, it's been a few years since I upgraded my first-aid kit or my hiking boots or my sunglasses. These items become a liability if they are not properly maintained. I've let that slip. I'll also take a long look at my binoculars and my camping kitchen, especially my stove. Taking care of your gear will ensure its ability to take care of you when you need it most.

While we're discussing gear, let's keep going with another resolution. I resolve to learn how to use all of my gear. I've been carrying a magnesium stick for fire starting for about 5 years. I don't think I know how to use it. I'm going to learn. I need to understand more about my GPS receiver (Garmin eTrex Vista). I use about five percent of its capabilities and this is only because I haven't taken the time to

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learn. That changes this year.

I also resolve to learn a new backcountry skill. I haven't decide what skill to learn but it will be something I've never done before. I've never taken the time to learn how to rock climb. Perhaps that's the one, or maybe kayaking. I've never collected water using a solar still. That sounds interesting too. Maybe you need to learn CPR or how to read a map or tie a variety of knots. This is the year to fill in the knowledge gaps.

Finally, I resolve to bring someone new into the backcountry this year. When I see the perfect sunset or a herd of antelope, the next thought I have is "I wish so—and—so was here to see this!" So this year, I'm going to share the awe of our backcountry with someone brand new to the outdoors. By sticking to these New Year's Resolutions, I will have a great year in our backcountry. I hope to see you there!

Use this information and you'll Get It Right The First Time. Get Outdoors!

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