

Freedom of speech



Satellite communicator

Thankfully the dark days of incommunicado are behind us, and the world of the mountain hunter is infinitely safer. Not only safer in regards to your physical being, but your emotional self as well. How so you may ask, well my younger self made the mistake of getting married, ummm err huh, what I meant to say is, my younger self made the mistake of getting married, during the prime time of summer sheep hunting, and I have paid the emotional penalty ever since. I used to disappear for two weeks, and arrive back home to a disappointed and angry wife, because I hadn't been able to say "I love you" on our wedding anniversary, yet again. I, and more importantly my wife, feel much more secure now, in the knowledge that a helicopter is only a few button pushes away. Do I feel more secure that my house won't be cleaned out when I return, with a note from her divorce lawyer tacked to the door? May.....be, because nothing says I love and cherish you more, than a 100 character text, sent from the top of some nameless mountain.

In my experience, hunters are mainly utilizing three methods of communication. Satellite phone, Spot Connect, and the Roadpost inReach by Garmin, formally known as the DeLorme inReach. The name and ownership was changed in early 2016. I'm not going to talk about the various walkie talkies you can buy at sporting goods stores, as broadcast regulations limit their power, and their ability to communicate in the mountains, is extremely limited.



Spot Connect Satellite Communicator

My weapon of choice is the Garmin inReach SE. This model has now been eclipsed by the Garmin Explorer, which has been upgraded to include, limited GPS mapping capabilities. It has never failed me, and it rarely has issues acquiring the requisite satellites for operation. I will contrast the inReach and the Spot Connect (I've had both) as they are targeting the same customers with a similar method of communication. The most important feature that the inReach possesses, that the Spot does not, is it's capability of two way messaging. With the inReach you can send and receive texts, while the Spot will only send. Even better, if you and your sheep hunting partner possess an inReach. No more guessing if he is on sheep or sleeping. Last year I made the decision to put to bed a large ram, and decided to

spend the night on the mountain, rather than hiking back to the tent (2 hours away), where my partner happened to be. If either one of us didn't have our inReach to pass along and receive my intentions, I would have been forced to hike back that night or my partner would have been sick with worry. Another great feature of the inReach, is the new ability to download weather forecasts, they seem to be reasonably accurate in my experience. The weight of the inReach is 7oz, the weight of the Spot is 4.9oz, but in order to take full advantage of it's messaging abilities, you need to pair it with a smart phone. An iPhone 7 weighs approximately 7.5 oz, so the total weight of the Spot, plus a phone, would be around 12.4 oz. Both devices have the ability to send out bread crumbs to Google Earth, in order for others to track your progress. They both also have instant SOS capabilities. Both devices have various rate plans, as you add messaging features, the prices rise substantially. I like the ability to suspend my inReach service during the winter; however, I still am obligated to pay \$3.10/month during the time of suspension. You MUST be cognizant of the fact, that no SOS features are available while your service is suspended. With the inReach you must subscribe for a minimum of 12 months of service. Unlike the inReach, Spot's SOS features are still available even without a subscription. Disclaimer, plans do change frequently, so self verify your Spot will still provide you with the SOS coverage you expect, even in the absence of a plan. In my opinion, the main benefit of the Spot is it's price. You could outfit a family of three with them, for the cost of one inReach.

Lastly are the satellite phones. Admittedly, I haven't packed one with me for around a decade. They were heavy (old school batteries), expensive to rent, and the batteries drained rapidly in the cold. Oh my! How things have changed. The Iridium Extreme (pictured below) weighs only 8.7 oz and has a talk time of over 4 hours, with a standby of 30 hours. This horsepower doesn't come cheap though, costing roughly \$1660 on amazon.ca. There are less expensive models starting at roughly \$800.00. A few plans I researched online, started at 69.00/month for basic services up to 110/month for more advanced features. The renting option may be in my future, because you can rent a phone for as low as 12.50/day or 280.00/month, plus 89.00 for a one-time plan that includes 50 minutes of talk time.

One real hazard of bringing along a satellite phone is its ability to transport you to a different time and place. I imagine all of us mountain hunters don't suffer through all the pain, in order to just put some back-straps on the grill. The

mountains are my "happy place" where the thoughts of bills, mortgages, work etc. are far removed. After a few days on the mountains, my thoughts have been distilled down to the basics, like managing my body health, staying warm, dry, the next days sheep hunting tactics, and so forth. When you do call home, all those issues are brought into your sphere of consciousness again. Personally for the majority of the year, I feel I am constantly under a constant low level of stress, just dealing with life's daily demands. I don't feel I am being selfish taking a two-week hiatus to replenish my reserves. Pleaaaase! No one show this to my wife, LOL. All kidding aside, she supports me in my hunting endeavors, as she recognizes it is part of my DNA and necessary for my overall feeling of contentment.



Iridium Extreme Satellite Phone

Happy Trails,
Mike Kirk