

This difference in angles is called Declination (figure 6). In Alabama, the compass needle points to Magnetic North and, if the imaginary line is extended, on to (almost) True North. Unless you are surveying, there is little need to compensate for our local error. However, if you are in Arizona, your magnetic compass needle will point to the same magnetic location as if you were in Alabama, but True North is several degrees to the West of that line of sight. That angle of declina-

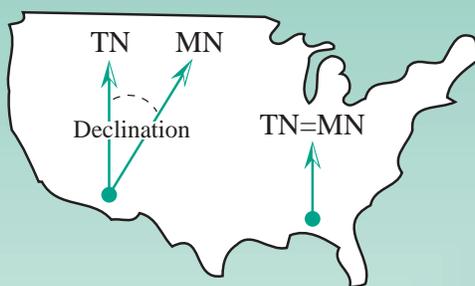


Figure 6

tion is significant and compensation should be made. Some automobiles have a built-in compass. The owner's manual explains how to compensate for the angle of declination depending on where you are in the U.S.

So what does this mean when you use your compass for directions in Alabama? Don't worry about understanding the geological and mapping details. Take your "off-the-shelf" compass, use it . . . and have fun. 🏠

How to Avoid Getting LOST in the Wilderness

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Each year the number of people using North America's wilderness areas is increasing.

Outdoor recreation, with its wide array of activities has grown into a huge industry. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm with which many people take to the woods is not always tempered with the skills and understanding necessary to handle situations that can arise while outdoors. Tragically, the growth in outdoor recreation has led to a steady increase in the number of accidents from carelessness and lack of knowledge.

One mishap that seems to occur often is people becoming lost or stranded in the wilderness, and not being properly prepared for such an event. Even in the Southeast, with its fairly mild winters, a person who is forced to spend the night in the woods without being properly prepared can succumb to hypothermia. This doesn't have to be the case. By learning some basic outdoor skills, and use of some simple equipment, you can lessen the chances of getting lost. Should you happen to get lost, you will be equipped to handle the situation.

One important step is to learn how to read and use a topographic (topo) map and a compass. It is even more helpful to acquire topo maps of the area to be visited, and study them thoroughly. For practice, try some orienteering using topo maps of some local areas. This will give you an idea of how good your skills are. **Take the maps and compass** anytime you venture into the woods.

Another step is to always carry some basic wilderness survival equipment in

what is known as a "survival pack." For this purpose, a small fanny-type pack is recommended. The survival pack should contain many of the items needed if stranded. It will also aid in finding a way out of the woods. It should contain the following items: waterproof matches, a compass, map, pocketknife, braided nylon fishing line, water purification tablets, small flashlight, small steel cup, fishhooks in a protective box, a whistle, strong cordage, prescription medications taken, spare eye glasses, if worn, and some first aid supplies. These items should be checked regularly for usability and replaced when necessary.

Learning some basic wilderness survival skills is also a good tip. Skills such as shelter-building and fire-making are of utmost importance. These skills can be attained by reading books on wilderness survival and/or attending one of the acclaimed survival schools in the country. It is essential to remember that there is an order of tasks to be followed when faced with a survival situation: 1) build a shelter, 2) find and treat water, 3) build a fire, and 4) find food.

The most important wilderness survival tool, however, is a healthy dose of mental self-control, common sense, and confidence in one's ability. Armed with this knowledge and these skills, one should be able to enter a wilderness situation knowing that he or she will be able to handle surviving in the wild.

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