



Found: A rescue team locates our wayward writer.

EXTREME  
TEST

# LOST

The wilderness is a lot less wild when you carry a satellite tracker. —Joe Brown

**HOW DO YOU TRULY TEST** a device that beams your coordinates into space and dispatches a rescue squad to your exact location? You get lost. And that's exactly what I did—in Tahoe National Forest, an 800,000-acre home to bears, coyotes, mountain lions, avalanches, subzero temperatures, gale-force winds, and, for a weekend in December, a WIRED satellite office.

The Spot GPS Messenger, which is about the size of an '80s-era pager, relays your exact latitude and longitude to one of 48 orbiting satellites every 10 minutes. You can set the device to automatically upload this data to a Web site so your buds can follow your crazy adventures; you can push a button to send canned messages from the middle of nowhere, assuring your parents that you're OK; you can even call for roadside assistance (for an extra \$30 a year).





**EXTREME TEST**

But the gizmo really shines in an emergency: Flip open the SOS safety cap to hit the 911 button and Spot will fire off an urgent message to the GEOS International Emergency Response Center in Houston. GEOS will then figure out the best purveyors of rescue—cops, Coast Guard, US embassy, or, in this case, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue, a volunteer group of snow-happy badasses located in Placer County, California.

A word of caution: Please don't try this. Ever. I spent months working with Spot, GEOS, and TNSAR to coordinate this exercise. At no point was anyone under the impression that I was in real danger.

Still, planned or not: If I had to be the rabbit, I'd be no easy meat.

I set off into the woods in the pitch-dark part of the morning that's not really morning at all, doing my best to cover my tracks by scrambling over rocks and packed snow. When I couldn't avoid the waist-deep powder, I donned snowshoes and obscured my

footprints by dragging branches. After 30 minutes of walking, with "up" as my only directive, I was completely lost in the moonless, freezing night.

After eight hours, about 10 miles, and several thousand feet of ascent, I was not only disoriented but also dog-tired and hungry. If it weren't for the knowledge that help was a button-press away, I never would have ventured this deep into a strange forest. More than once I emerged from a stand of trees to face sheer drops and avalanche chutes. The bear tracks didn't do much for my already altitude-elevated heart rate, either. With food, water, and toes frozen, I pulled the pin on the rescue grenade and plonked down to await salvation.

It arrived about 30 minutes later: four snowmobilers, a gaggle of cross-country skiers, and a snowcat. They strapped me into a backboard and soon had me warming in the back of the diesel-powered cat. In the satellite age, *lost* is a relative term.

## Spot Satellite GPS Messenger

**WIRED** Water- and shock-resistant. Comes with handy arm strap. Flip-cap covering 911 button should minimize false alarms. Saved our butt when we were freezing and lost in the woods. 30 percent smaller than previous generation. **TIRED** Decoding blinking lights takes a lot of work—especially when you're freaking out. Did that message go through? Is help on the move? There's no way to know. Hidden fee alert: \$100 a year to "register" the unit (but includes rescue service). Uses only disposable lithium AAA cells, which can be tough to find in the city, let alone the wilderness. **\$169**



SPOT: TODD TANKERSLEY