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CLIMBER

Britain's leading climbing magazine

Bearing all...

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mountains a base map isn't that much use, so I would spend my money on the simpler Ebas Summit which you can pick up for about £140, or the slightly more advanced Summit HC for £225.

Magellan Explorer 600
 This most advanced model in the Explorer range has a digital compass and can store as many waypoints as you could ever want, though Magellan call them "Points of Interest". The unit has a base map, so make sure you buy the map for your area. The unit is easy to navigate around using a small joystick, and the screens all appear in a logical order. A card can be inserted with more detailed maps and the unit interfaces with all the standard mapping programs. A USB cable comes standard with the unit, as does a rechargeable battery that lasts between 7½ and 14hrs, depending on which features and lighting you have switched on. You can swap this for 3 AAA batteries that fit into a supplied case. The Explorer 600 has a really robust feel to it but felt quite a lot heavier than others I have used.

Communications

Communications in the mountains can mean anything from updated weather reports, calls for help or simply saving people worry if you're late back. In large parts of the world you can now get standard cell phone coverage. Most phones won't survive a soaking so it's worth getting some protection. **Ortlieb** have a great range of products and the **Wobtail** range from **Haglöfs** is also great. If travelling further a field you may want to

consider satellite communication. There are a number of different options: **Iridium** is still the only network that offers genuinely global coverage. I've phoned my Mum from the top of the Vinson Massif, and males have phoned theirs from the top of Everest, so it does work! The phones are not that cheap though. The **Motorola 9505A** is the smallest and most user-friendly model but costs about \$1,500 for a handset, though you can probably get a better deal on the web. Once you get a phone there is an activation fee of \$25 then a contract of about \$40 per month, though you can buy pre-paid minutes with no contract. Calls are about \$1.50 per minute, which is about the same as roaming with a cell phone.

An alternative system is **Thuraya**. This does not have the coverage of Iridium but it has a better call quality, and the phones are much smaller. The **SG 2520** (\$1400) is the smallest satellite phone available and has a Tri-Band GSM option. It also has high speed GPRS for Internet on the move. Similar contracts are available, including Europe, most of Africa, India and most countries to the north, until you reach Siberia. So if you're in the Himalaya it's a great option.

If you need high-speed internet in remote areas then the **Inmarsat BGAN** system is the best I have found. The unit is about the size of a laptop, which is then connected to your own laptop providing data and voice services. Costs for the units are between \$2500 and \$4800 depending on the upload and download speeds you're after.

Thanks to Danielle Edwards at **WSSL**, **satcom-solutions.com** for all the information on these sat systems.

One other system worth a look is **Globalstar**, who have coverage of Europe, North and South America, North Africa, Northern Asia and Australia. Phones cost from €900 and calls from €0.80 within Europe.

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