

FALL INTO PLACE

Navigate nature with GPS-enabled app

The nights are cool, the leaves are turning, and fall is in full swing. But just because summer is over, it doesn't mean you have to go into hibernation and cease all outside activity.

In fact, autumn in our neck of the woods is a good time to get out and explore the great outdoors.



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InSites

The temperatures during the day typically are not too hot or too cold. And the changing of the leaves paints the landscape in vibrant colors.

If you're looking to take advantage of the many

hiking and biking trails in our area, or even if you want to plan a more distant hike, Gaia GPS is a website (gaiagps.com) and app that can help you find your way.

Gaia GPS helps you find, plan, navigate and record hikes in locations around the world. You can search its database for maps of trails at famous locations such as Yosemite, Yellowstone and the Appalachian Trail. The hikes



Trail Mix: Check out Chad Sebring's hiking blog on thetimes-tribune.com

include maps — topographic and satellite — distances, elevations, estimated completion times, photos and reports from other hikers.

Or, you can study maps of the location you're interested in and plot your own hike on any trails in the area. The app lets you mark points along the trail and save your route. It generates distance, elevation and time information for any hike you create.

You can plan your trip on the website using your desktop computer, then sync and download the maps to your mobile device to refer to in the field. You can even print the maps for backups in case your device fails.

Once you're actually out hiking, you can use the app to record data and images from your excursion. Your location, elevations and pace all can be tracked. And of course you can take photos to save with your hike. You also can add waypoints with notes to your route.

The app and website are free, but you can upgrade to two different paid levels that offer more features. The paid levels have more types of map layers as well as more specialized maps. You need a paid version to download maps for offline use.

The map interface on the app will be familiar to anyone who has used Google, Bing or Apple maps online. But there is a learning curve to creating, saving and using custom hike maps. The Help menu has information and videos that will guide you through the app's various capabilities.

I only tested the free version of Gaia GPS. I found it useful but with some limitations, such as the level of detail on the maps. The paid version, with the extra maps, probably resolves that issue.

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