

Epic Trails in the Glacier Peak Wilderness

Washington TRAILS

A Publication of Washington Trails Association

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Jul+Aug 2014

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Protect Your Trail Tech

Love it or hate it, we live in a tech-dependent time. Tech surrounds us at home and at work and has found its way out on the trail with us.

And while the point of hitting the trail and venturing into the natural world is most often to leave the buzz and distraction of electronic devices behind, many have proven their worth in wilderness settings—from allowing us to capture and share the untamed beauty of wilderness in digital photographs, to helping us negotiate wild backcountry environments with the aid of satellite navigation, to giving us a lifeline for assistance in case of emergency, to (we admit) keeping us entertained when rain and snow confine us to our tents. However, high-tech gear and sensitive electronics often don't pair well with the rugged and harsh elements of the outdoors: rain, snow, dirt, mud, water and the cold. That is why, if you're going to take your tech out on trail with you, you need to protect it.



For protecting your smartphone from the damp and dirt, the MSR E-Case (left) and BioLogic Dry Bag (right) are two economical, trail-ready soft case options. \$20–\$40



Protect your smartphone from drops, bumps, scratches and water with an impact-resistant hard case, like the BioLogic Hard Case (left) or Pelican Voyager (right). \$50–\$100



Keep your tech gear safe and accessible, or stashed in your pack with a Mountainsmith Cyber Case (left), Fishpond Westwater Pouch (center) or Kelty Cache Box (right). \$20–\$30

Just in Case

Smartphones are a part of our lives these days, for better or worse. They're contacts and cameras, books and budgets, games and gadgets. Most smartphones are built to withstand being shoved in pockets, tossed in bags and occasionally dropped on the floor. But add sharp rocks, stray branches, running creeks and plenty of dirt and debris to the equation, and your precious personal device becomes much more vulnerable.

For protecting your smartphone, there's no shortage of cases on the market, in countless colors and configurations. But for those of you packing your smartphone along on the trail with you, you want a case that is more protective than decorative. Your case of choice should seal out dirt and moisture and be sturdy enough to withstand being dropped—both on the trail and in the water. (If you're prone to dropping your smartphone, you should consider a hard case.) You should also employ—and many of the better cases now include—extra protection for sensitive touchscreens.

THE SOFT SIDE If you like keeping your smartphone light, with minimal coverage for trail use, a simple soft case can keep it safe from dirt and moisture. Many options feature waterproof closures and have touch-sensitive windows that allow device operation even when enclosed. The **MSR E-Case** comes in several sizes to accommodate smartphones and tablets. The watertight closure means you can drop it in a creek (up to 1 meter) and your device will stay safe and dry. We took some of these on some rainy spring hikes and they performed admirably. Another worthy mention is the **BioLogic Dry Bag**. This ultralight soft phone case employs a unique crimping closure to seal out moisture, while utilizing a weather-sealed headphone plug to let you enjoy your music while keeping your device sealed away and safe. It also features an adjustable lanyard for wearing around your neck or over your shoulder. The only downside to soft cases is that photos taken from an enclosed device don't turn out as clear or sharp.

THE HARD WAY For the ultimate protection for your iPhone or Android device, you'll want a hard-sided case. There are lots of options available, but for the best protection in an outdoors environment, the models offered by OtterBox, Pelican and BioLogic lead the pack. Several of the sturdier options even offer full watertight protection if dropped in a creek or taken out in the rain. The lightweight **OtterBox Commuter Series** can withstand daily bumps, while the bombproof **Preserver Series** can go anywhere. The new **Pelican Voyager Cases** for iPhone 5 and Galaxy S devices are low-profile, impact-absorbent and can withstand a bombardment of drops and scratches, from the bus stop to the summit. And whether your trail outing is by boot or bike, your iPhone (sorry, Android users) is covered with the **BioLogic Hard Case**—a new favorite of *WT's* editor. This sleek, fully-enclosed aircraft aluminum case protects from moisture and impacts and can be shoved in a pocket or pack or mounted to bike handlebars.

Trail Cargo

For larger electronics, such as compact cameras, GPS units and device chargers (see next page for a few choice selections of trail chargers), you'll want protection not only from the elements, but also from jostling or being smashed in your pack. There are a variety of options available, from padded sacks to rigid cases. The key is finding one that suits your tech-carrying needs without adding too much weight or bulk to your pack.

When choosing a case for your tech, you'll want to factor in accessibility. For a camera or GPS unit, a belt or pack loop or other attachment is nice to keep it easily accessible, so you're not stopping to dig in your pack every time you want to take a photo or check your location. If you're packing a tablet device, solar charger, extra camera batteries or noise-canceling headphones (no judgment), you'll want a container rigid enough to keep your tech safely protected in your pack—so it's not getting crushed under your tent, stove and food bag, or damaged if you drop your pack.

IN THE BAG For toting along compact cameras, GPS devices or even binoculars to catch a closer glimpse of that mountain goat high on the ridge above you, pick up a soft case that you can attach to your waistbelt or pack. Many small bags and pouches are specially made for electronic items and feature padded interiors, water-repellent materials and leak-proof zippers or closures. The handy little **Fishpond Westwater Pouch** is seam-sealed and fully waterproof: its contents are protected with a roll-top and buckle closure. Attached to a waistbelt, it's easy to retrieve items for use. It also features a removable padded interior sleeve if you'd rather fill it with trail snacks or personal essentials. Available in two sizes, the **Mountainsmith Cyber Case** can carry and protect a compact camera or smartphone device. You can fasten it to your pack with the Velcro loop attachment, or wear it around your neck or on your shoulder with the included strap. Made of water-resistant materials, it repels moisture to keep its contents safe and dry in the padded interior.

HARD CASE When you don't need immediate access to your tech but want to keep it protected in your pack, a sturdy case will do the job. Most hard cases built for outdoor use are constructed to withstand bumps and repel moisture while keeping their contents secure. The new **Kelty Cache Boxes** come in three sizes, from small for smartphones and cameras to large for full-size tablet devices. The sturdy, water-repellent construction maintains its shape under moderate pressure (but don't put it at the bottom of your pack), while the padded interior offers dividers and pockets to let you keep your tech organized. If you need of lightweight armor-plating for your expensive or sensitive tech, carry it in a **Pelican Micro Case**. Available in several sizes, the 1040 model will accommodate a smartphone, compact camera or GPS unit. The rubber interior liner protects contents from jostling while the polycarbonate casing safeguards against impacts. It even features a pressure-relief valve for use at higher elevations. It's a little heavier, but you'll appreciate the security.

TRAIL MIX

Gear Closet



Stay charged on trail with a Powerrocks Magicstick (front) or Brunton Resync (left) charging packs; or carry unlimited charging potential with a Secur Power Pad 3000 solar panel (right). \$40–\$130

Trail Power

In addition to keeping your tech protected on trail, you also want to keep it charged—otherwise what's the point in lugging it out there with you? There's nothing worse than your camera or GPS—or your SteriPen!—running out of juice halfway through an epic trip. And while extra batteries should always be a trail-packing essential, many newer, smaller devices—including those handy SteriPens, as well as many newer head lamps—rely on internal lithium batteries that require charging via a USB plug.

Thankfully, options for recharging on the go are becoming commonplace, and many of them are trail-friendly. These can range from micro charging packs—good for one or two recharges—to larger units that can recharge five or more times. The alternative to battery packs is solar chargers. New high-efficiency solar panels can charge faster with less exposure. And the nice thing about employing reusable battery packs and solar panels is that you're reducing disposable battery waste.

JUICE UP Depending on your power usage, a small charging device will get you through most long weekends in the wilderness. The **Powerrocks Magicstick** packs two full charges for power around town or on the trail. It's about the size of a roll of Life Savers: you can toss it in any pocket, purse or pack. When it comes to big power needs—enough to get you through a week or longer on the PCT—the **Brunton Resync** can supply up to eight device charges, and its size and weight are comparable to most smartphones, meaning that all this extra juice won't weigh you down or take up too much space in your pack. For an unlimited power supply (as long as you have sunny skies) the new, water-repellent **Secur Power Pad 3000** (testing well with *WT's* editor) is a compact solar panel that can easily be attached to the lid of your pack for charging on trail. Just let it charge up as you hike, then plug in your devices in camp. It can fully charge an iPhone 5 in less than two hours; shorter times for lower-capacity devices. Repeat as needed. ♦

Tech-cessories

Even if you're taking precautions to keep your tech safe on trail, there are a few other small items you can use to ensure their ability to withstand the harsh conditions of the outdoors, improve your charger's performance, and perhaps even rescue it from a near-disasterous water incident.

CLEAN UP It's unavoidable—when you're out on the trail, your fingers turn into dirt magnets. Keep your touchscreen smartphone and tablet devices clean and working at their best with **Dust-Off Screen Wipes**. Just toss the small packet in your pack when you head out and clean your device screen on the go when needed. This is especially beneficial if you're out for several days and are operating your tech with grubby fingers.



DRY OUT You're rock-hopping over a creek and—*plop!* Your smartphone or camera jumps out of your pocket and into the water. \$@#&! Well, you just might save it with a **Bheestie Bag**. The special Bheestie bead pack in this bag draws moisture out of electronic devices in a similar way to those little oxygen absorbers in your dehydrated lasagna. Drop your item in the bag, let it work for a bit and it just might save you from heading out to purchase a costly replacement.



SPEED CHARGE When taking a charging pack or solar battery out with you, it's always nice to know how much juice you have left. Find out with **Power Practical's Practical Meter**. Plug the tiny meter into your device and get an instant reading on how much charge you have left. It's also ideal for helping you position your solar panels just right in order to get the optimum charge. Then use the Fast-Charge cables to recharge your tech devices in a fraction of the regular time.

