BaseCamp basics

technology beats my memory every time during the turn-to-turn decisions of a ride. If you have your route on a handlebar-mounted GPS, it only takes a quick glance as you approach an intersection to determine which way to proceed. It's quicker, more accurate and safer than trying to see a paper map in a tankbag pocket.

Take control

The downside of planning rides with a GPS is that you have to learn how to do it.

As with every new skill, you need to understand the terms and how to manipulate the tools to become efficient. More than one rider has given up on using GPS because it was just too hard.

GPS terms are a little confusing at first. 'Routes' and 'tracks' confuse beginners. Routes are usually generated by a GPS, similar to using Google Maps on your smart phone. Give it a starting point and a destination and the machine gives you a turn-by-turn route to get to that destination. This is fine if you're happy following a road, but not if you want to choose your specific tracks, especially minor roads and single track. Using 'tracks' on a GPS allows you to draw in exactly where you want to go.

Routes

To get this function to work on your GPS you need to have a unit that will do it – not all hand-helds can – and load a routable map onto the GPS. Each GPS does routing

in a slightly different manner, so it's a case of 'read your user manual'.

Most GPS-routable units give you the option to bend the route to visit places you want to see by shifting waypoints.

Tracks

Using the 'tracks' function to mark your intended journey on the map is more labour-intensive, but allows you to choose your exact path, including along any minor road or single track you can find on the map. I'll describe my method and hopefully you can get started and later modify it to your needs.

My current GPS is a handheld (Garmin Map62s) with a small screen that makes planning on the GPS tedious. Instead, I plan tracks on my home PC, laptop, or, if I'm travelling, my Asus 25cm Transformer tablet. I use Garmin's mapping program called BaseCamp. It's a free download from www.garmin.com.
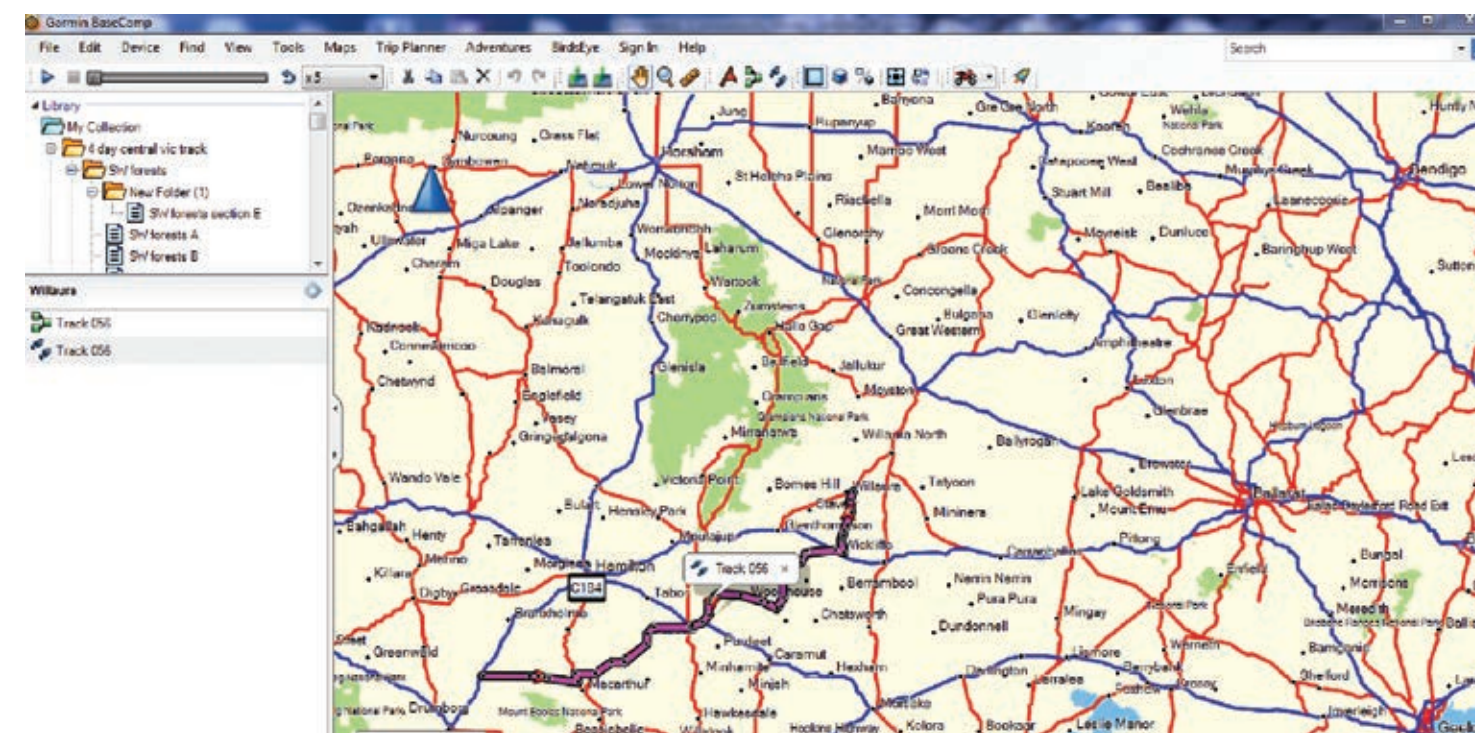
The standard map on BaseCamp is poor, so you need to load Shonky maps (free at shonkylogic.net) or T4A (free from www.gpsoz.com.au), or OzTopo, also available from GPSOZ.

BaseCamp has online tutorials and advrider.com has a lot of help in the 'Layin' Down Tracks' section.

These examples are using PC. The software is Mac compatible, but will look slightly different and have a few alternate commands. If you use this guide, but think a little, you'll find your way around a Mac as well.

To start out, using a mouse is easier, but you can get by with a touch pad.

Getting started

After you've installed some decent maps, open BaseCamp and you'll see this page or something very like it. (*below*)

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Using the GPS once it's mounted on your bike is only one step to making use of a fabulous resource. It's especially good if someone else does the planning. But planning a route or track yourself is not that difficult if you have a little time and the right software. Kym Stock offers a step-by-step introduction to how simple it can be.

Why use a GPS to plan an adventure ride when a paper map and highlighter is so much quicker?

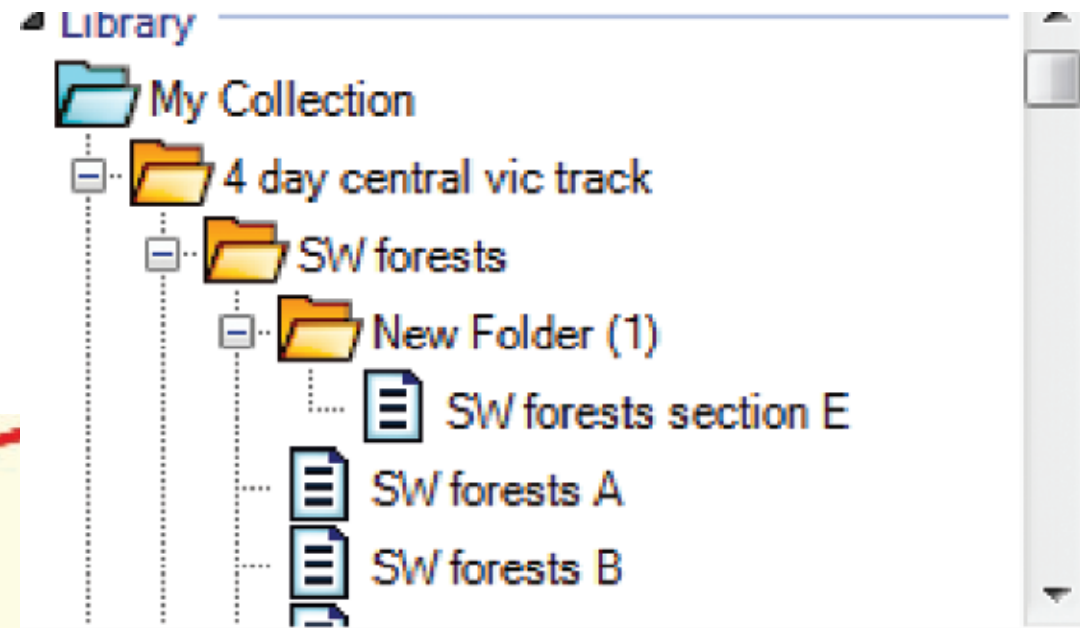I was, and still am, a fan of paper maps. Nothing beats them for an overview of where you want to go. But modern

I have Oztopo loaded to BaseCamp as my base map.
❖ Left click the icon on the toolbar that looks like two boots (New Track)
❖ Then, left click on your starting point with the pencil graphic and drag your mouse so the grey line follows the road you want to ride
❖ At the first intersection, left-click again and a waypoint will mark the point
❖ Continue to drag so the grey line follows the road. Add extra waypoints by left-clicking for bends in the road, or if you're happy with an 'as the crow flies' result, use fewer waypoints.
For your first go just do a small rectangular track. Right click to deactivate the pencil when you've finished the route.

Step two
Look at the lower-left screen area and you'll see your track has been assigned a number and is there as 'unlisted data'. If you look at the upper-left screen area, the library section has an icon called 'My Collection'.
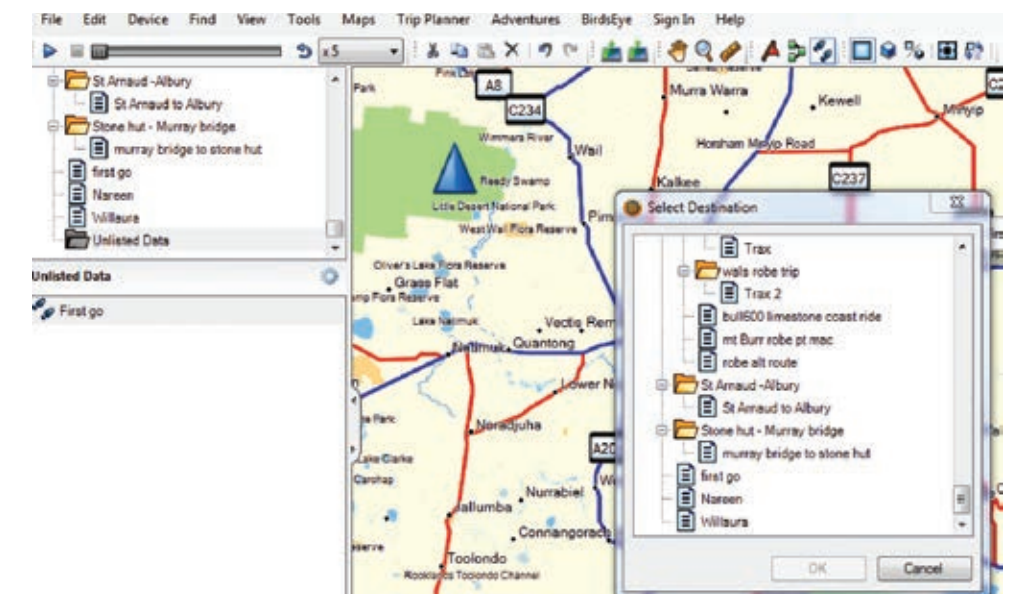Basecamp allows you to organize your tracks in folders in the library. Right click on the 'My Collection' icon and a dropdown list will appear. Select 'New List' and right click on it to rename it 'First go'. (*Below*)

Then scroll down to where you see unlisted data and left click on that. Your track will reappear. Right click on that and select send to the 'First go' folder. (*Top right*)
Now it's filed in the library.
I like to convert my track to a route so I can use my GPS route manager function while travelling. This conversion is easy to do by right-clicking on the track name in unlisted data or in the library and selecting 'convert track to route', then clicking 'OK' in the conversion options box.
You can change the colour of your track from boring grey to hi-vis pink by double-left-clicking on the file name and changing the colour in the top right corner to magenta.
The same outcome can be obtained by right clicking on the file and choosing open.

Moving on
Now plug in your GPS to your PC and wait for the PC to recognize the new hardware. Once the GPS has appeared in the tool bar, click 'Device'. In this case you want to 'send to device'. Select the file you want to send to either the SD card or base memory of the GPS.
Now look in your route manager menu on the GPS and 'First go' should be there. Open it up and check 'View map' or similar command to verify your pink route is visible. If so, well done!

So now you open the file in route manager, select 'view map' and the pink line should be visible to follow when you reach your starting point.
That's it. Go riding!

General Hints
❖ When you run out of map while plotting your track, slide the cursor up to the tool bar 'hand' icon. That'll allow you to pan the map across the screen. You then go back to the two-boots icon and resume your track where you left off. Don't be concerned if the track follows you up to the pan icon. It self-corrects when you select pan.
❖ The zoom function is hidden just to the left of the big, blue triangle 'north' indicator at the top-left of the map. Hover the mouse there and it appears.
❖ Once you return from the 'First go' route, plug your GPS into BaseCamp again, then select 'device' and select 'Receive from device'. Your track file – the actual exact path you took – will download onto BaseCamp. File it in your library. Delete the route file you planned previously to avoid confusion.
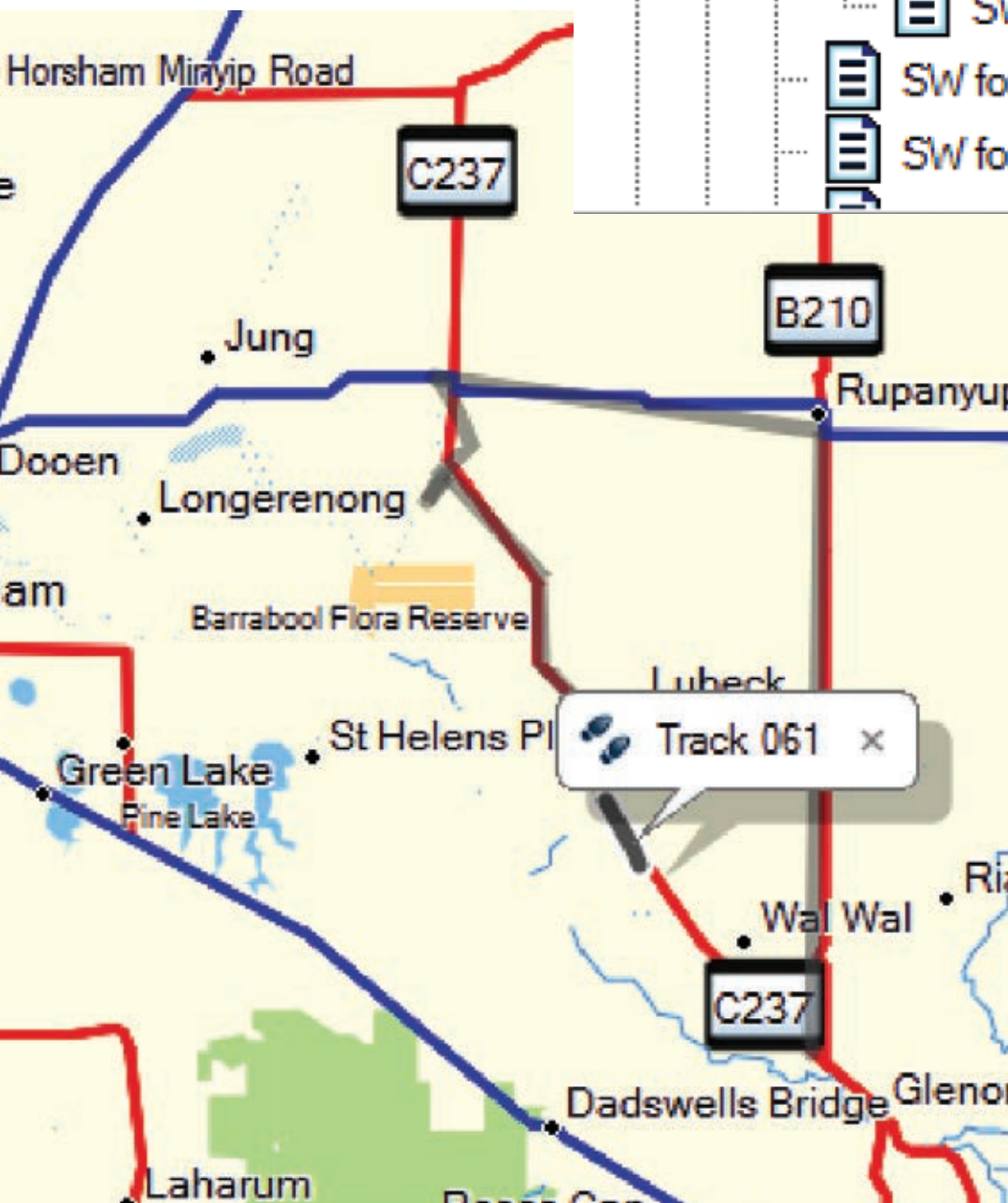❖ Click on the file and then select from the toolbar 'File'. Select 'Export' in the dropdown list and export a copy to your desktop. Then you can upload this file to www.transaustraliatrail.com.au to share with others. It is an adventure-rider's lending library and a great touring resource.
This GPS stuff seems difficult at first, but practice makes perfect. Enjoy! **ADV**

MORE NEXT ISSUE!

Issue #12 will have a rundown on converting your Google Maps files to run on your GPS.