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“Maps on the move”

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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

Maps on the move

How would you like the entire OS mapping of Britain for two pounds? That's all Explorer, all Landranger, 1:10,000 street maps and 1:125,000 road atlas, all for £1.99; in your pocket, on the move, wherever and whenever you need them. Too good to be true? Well, yes and no. Maybe the reality doesn't *quite* live up to the promise, but it's not far off. Welcome to the world of 'apps' – low-cost applications running on the latest mobile phones and personal organisers. We tested two apps running on different devices to discover whether you really can leave home without a trusty paper map in your pocket.

The devices

Our tests used an Apple iPod Touch and HTC Wildfire mobile phone. Both are slim, handy (about 10cm by 6cm), light (about 100 grams) and stylish. Both cost anything from zero to over £200, depending on the package deals and special offers of the various suppliers. The iPod is not a phone and is free of all call costs; you need a wireless broadband connection (wi-fi) to load it but not to use it. The HTC is a phone which also has GPS and compass; it connects to the internet via wi-fi or the mobile network.

The apps

Apps are available through iTunes App Store (Apple) or Android Market (for HTC and other devices running Google's Android operating system). You can access these via your PC or direct from the device. On the HTC, we tested OS Atlas (£1.99); on the iPod, *UK Map* (£6.99). *OS Atlas* is indeed the full OS mapping as described above. *UK Map* offers small scale OS road atlases, plus hybrid 1:25,000 mapping and OS 1:10,000 street maps. The 1:25,000 is part derived from OS District mapping (less detailed than Explorer maps) with additional data from OpenStreetMap.org.¹

Apart from the source of the mapping, the big difference between them is how the maps are loaded – and this has a huge impact on usability in the field. *OS Atlas* (on the HTC) loads each map tile one at a time, only when needed. For this, it requires access to the internet 'on-the-go'. *UK Map* pre-loads the maps in advance, storing them on the iPod itself. So, as long as you remember to load the mapping you need before leaving home, it's all there, instantly.

How do they perform?

The 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 mapping is superior in *OS Atlas*, but because of reliance on a live internet connection over the phone network, there can be a frustratingly long wait for the display to appear (and in our tests quite often a failure to appear at all). Battery life on both is a problem, most especially on the HTC if the GPS is enabled. *UK Map* requires an iPod Touch with at least 32Gb memory because maps are stored internally. The place-name search on *OS Atlas* is bizarre – if it finds more than one result, it automatically displays only the nearest. This may be appropriate if searching for a nearby burger bar, but not for place-names.

Verdict: Both excellent value, great fun to play with, but take your paper map too.

John Davies

¹ See illustration on page 26 for example of *UK Map* screen display.