

Backcountry

The Gear Closet »

Altimeters

Some pieces of gear, like winter cycling boots, are perfect for just one activity or one season. Others are useful year-round and for all sorts of outdoor pursuits. Altimeters come in handy any time you want to know where you are.

Beyond their usefulness in basic navigation, these devices often come with a host of other functions. Track your speed. Predict the weather. Count your laps. If you're not keen on winter hiking, now is the perfect time to punch buttons and familiarize yourself with all that altimeters can do.

We've surveyed four new models that highlight the range of options available to you.

Highgear Terrapod, \$70

Highgear is marketing their new **Terrapod** as an entry-level altimeter, but it's more than that. Despite being about as large as a hand-held stopwatch, it weighs just grams more than my personal altimeter watch.

It has a large hanging loop, as well as the usual features: time, alarm, altimeter, compass, barometric pressure, temperature. It's easy to use and calibrate, and it has a nice backlight feature on it, as well as a keylock feature. There's also a flashlight, a welcome feature, though it lacks enough output to be even a backup flashlight.

The Terrapod lacks a couple of key features for the advanced user, but these are minor for such a well-priced device. The first is a graphical display of barometric pressure trend, an invaluable tool for those of us less gifted at reading clouds. Personally, I'd be lost without this feature. The second is that it lacks an alarm system for every feature, so that one could, say, set an alarm when reaching a certain temperature or elevation. In spite of these shortcomings, the Terrapod is a great little device. *Allison Woods*

Silva Tech40 TraiLeader 1, \$140

In order to test this piece under real-life conditions, I promptly lost the instructions. Luckily, the operating manual could be found online easily, so this watch passed its first test. Next real-life test: could it be programmed on a forty-minute drive to the trailhead? Just the basics, but, yes, again. Please note that compass calibration will have to wait until you step out of the moving car.

The **Tech40 TraiLeader 1** is quite handy. In addition to your current altitude, you can track your twenty-four-hour minimum/maximum altitude and your total ascent/descent. You can set reference altitudes as well as alarms. Orienteers should appreciate both the bearing lock and the reverse compass bearing feature. One unique feature is its accelerometer, which gives you an accurate measurement of your speed, the distance you've covered and even the calories you have burned. When backlit, the face is easily read in the dark, and I could make adjustments while wearing liner gloves. It's not particularly stylish, but it is a comfortable fit and will certainly help to get you where you need to go. *Lace Thornberg*



Highgear Terrapod



Allison Woods

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Check out Allison's new blog at www.allisonsadventures.wordpress.com.

Test Your Altimeter

Altimeters must be calibrated in order to be accurate. The more often you calibrate the more accurate your altimeter will be. Often you will see signs on hiking trails, or on mountain roads that indicate the elevation and those are be good spots to calibrate.

Here are 22 more spots to calibrate. (All numbers below are in feet of elevation). Have fun!

Mount Spokane, lookout 5,858'

Mount Walker 2,755'

Deception Pass Bridge 192'

Potholes Reservoir 1,047'

"Stonehenge" at Maryhill 569'

Mount Constitution, lookout 2,368'

WTA Office 139'

Upper Lena Lake 4,551'

Columbia Crest 14,410'

Grand Coulee Dam, top 1,310'

Winthrop, main street 1,768'

Pike Place Market 117'

Rainy Lake 4,790'

Sunrise Ranger Station 6,409'

Johnston Ridge parking lot, Mount St. Helens 4,314'

Rainbow Falls State Park 272'

Lake Sammamish State Park boat ramp 33'

Space Needle Observation Deck 520'



Silva Tech40 Trailleader One



Timex Expedition WS4



Kestrel 2500

Timex Expedition WS4 Watch, \$199

"Hey, can you talk to Mars with that thing?"

That's the kind of helpful comment you could get while sporting the **Timex Expedition WS4**, at least if you've got the bright orange version. It also comes in white, black and yellow. It's ruggedly handsome, kind of like Conrad Anker, the climbing legend who helped to design it.

This is one useful watch. The display window makes good use of the piece's wide face, allowing you to see many readings at a glance. Temperature, weather, time (in two formats) and barometric pressure all appear on the default display. The target altitude alarm was easy to set and went off the moment I stepped over my predetermined elevation. As it is used here, the Indiglo illuminates all the numbers, in addition to the display's background, making it quite easy to read in the dark. Bells and whistles include a graphic barometer that gives you a look at pressure trends, water resistance up to 50 meters, and an activity review mode showing lows, highs and averages. One complaint: when you shuffle through to altitude, you get your peak altitude reached and accumulated elevation gain before you get to your current elevation; I would have preferred to see my current elevation first and to wait for the other two numbers as needed.

The easy-to-follow user manual is compact enough to carry until you know the watch inside and out. The manual also includes a list of the declination for major cities across the world, so you can easily recalibrate your compass while traveling. It's also peppered with helpful advice from Mr. Anker. *Lace Thornberg*

Kestrel 2500, \$199

The **Kestrel** is so much more than an altimeter. It's a weather station. With features like wind speed, wind chill, barometric pressure and maximum wind gust, you'll be transformed into an on-trail Cliff Mass in nothing flat. The Kestrel also tells time and elevation. I had trouble with the calibration function; it works by having you recalibrate the barometric pressure. This seems counterintuitive. This model lacks the alarm and chronograph functions of altimeter watches, and the Kestrel line doesn't include those features, so this is a tool that I'd use in tandem with a watch of some type, rather than all by itself. Viewed as a pure weather station, I think this is a must-have item for people who consider mountain weather one of the more interesting reasons to get out. There's an optional tripod available for positioning the device into the wind, and the Kestrel floats! How cool is that? The high-visibility orange color's going to assure you don't leave it behind in camp. *Allison Woods*