



ABOUT: Wilderness river trip communication options

Options

Each device has its strengths and weaknesses and, in our experience, none of them has proven to be more reliable than another (and none of them is as reliable as we would want). While "eventually", all of the devices are probably 95% effective, "immediately" they are unpredictably effective.

Satellite Phones – Basically a (dumb) cell phone that uses satellites instead of cell towers. Our 'immediate' connection rate has probably been between 75% and 85% (non-scientific and improving) and calls get dropped consistently but there is comfort in talking to someone. Iridium seems to have the best satellite network right now and you can rent Iridium phones for less than \$50 per week. Even though we will ask you to pack it in your drybag to make it less conspicuous and to help protect it, we recommend renting a case, too.

satphonestore.com

Satellite Texting Devices – Texting devices have the advantages of more reliable connectivity, a written record of the conversation, and more affordability, but they don't have the immediacy or convenience of a live conversation. For non-life-threatening situations, they are very effective. The Garmin inReach Mini paired with your smart phone looks like a great option. Units cost between \$350 and \$500 and service plans cost about \$20 per month, so this is an option for people who expect to use their device often. [REL has a great description of the options](#)

Cell Phones – Right now, the only river where we can get reliable cell service is the South Fork of the American. On all of the other rivers where we run trips, cell phones don't work for making calls - but they take really good pictures and videos!

[Bring a case!](#)



One of the best parts of river trips is the chance they provide to escape our everyday lives and to take a break from all of our beloved and 'indispensible' devices. We want you to come on our trip, immerse yourself in the wilderness, embrace every moment, and enjoy the freedom that comes from being unconnected. However we understand that circumstances may make communication with the rest of the world desirable. Here is some information that may help you plan for your trip.

What we do

We have thorough emergency procedures and protocols in place for each of our trips that include bringing an emergency communication device. Depending on the river, we use satellite phones, satellite texting devices, or cellular phones (or combinations thereof). Our devices are for emergencies only; we don't have scheduled check-ins and we don't call out for news or to send birthday wishes. Battery life is limited and it would be irresponsible to not have power in an emergency on day four because we checked our investments on day two. On the vast majority of our trips we do not communicate at all with the outside world (and to be honest, we like it that way).

What you can do

If you feel that your trip will be enhanced if you have the ability to contact the outside world, you are welcome to bring and manage your own communication device. Our only requests are that you coordinate any emergency communications with our guides and that you be respectful to your fellow guests who may not want to be connected (or to even know that you are connected). It is a sensitive issue and we ask that you treat your decision carefully and manage your usage conscientiously. To the left are some options for you to consider.

What to tell those who stay behind

In a true outside emergency with real time-sensitive issues (they are hard to imagine and harder to think about, but they exist), your friends or relatives who aren't with you on the river can contact our office and we will explore extreme measures (and serendipitous circumstances) to see if we can relay a message to one of our trips on the river. This is an unpredictable but feasible option. It is also the best answer to your loved ones who ask what they should do if something happens while you're gone. Give them our number: 209-962-7873.

And something else to think about...

*As we all know: ignorance is bliss. Just because we **know** something doesn't mean we'll be able to **do** something. For the majority of our trips we are in remote and marginally accessible wilderness river canyons; evacuation options are always limited, often dangerous, and usually expensive. [Our rule of thumb is that even in an emergency we are 24 hours and thousands of dollars from the front country; if your situation makes that reality untenable, you should reconsider your trip]. In a non-emergency, evacuation options are more limited and decisions become much more subjective. As harsh as it sounds, does learning that your mom fell and broke her hip make your trip better or worse?*