

Staying inReach

DeLorme's SE satellite messenger, along with the new Explorer model and OCENS SpotCast Weather

Two way" doesn't just refer to the fact that the DeLorme inReach satellite messenger/tracker lets you text back and forth with people pretty much like a cellphone. I also tested the system shoreside by lending a sample inReach SE model to friends Doug and Dale Bruce when they went on a cruise to some remote islands south of New Zealand.

Yes, Doug had a little trouble with SE's little cursor keyboard; but heck, he was in rough seas on the other side of the planet! I was pleased with how well I could follow the Bruces' trip on the DeLorme MapShare site associated with the device. It took a while for Doug to find a place near his stateroom window where the inReach could see both the GPS and Iridium satellites it uses, but from then on fixes with speed and altitude were posted almost every 10 minutes.

As a result, I was already researching the amazing geology and wildlife populations of Macquarie Island as

their ship approached the place, and I "watched" as my friends went ashore at the science station and spent a night reaching back and forth in the island's lee. It wasn't like actually seeing and hearing half a million penguins on a cobble beach, but it definitely brought some excitement to the cold winter in Maine where I was testing.

I've been testing the inReach system since late 2011, when the first model came out, and I became even more of a fan as the software improved and the company added an iPad version of the Earthmate app. The release of inReachSE (Screen Edition) about a year ago got me pretty excited, and I'm still enthusiastic after using it a lot myself. When the inReachSE is running, my iPad mini automatically connects to it and Earthmate tracks me on freely downloadable NOAA charts and worldwide topo maps while also handling messages.

Nav apps can also use the inReach GPS, and the SE is much easier to leave on for tracking purposes because of its

100-hour lithium battery and easy USB charging. I don't use the color screen and keypad much on the boat, but it certainly extends the device's stand-alone abilities, though it is not a stand-alone navigation tool.

The brand new inReach Explorer, on the other hand, is a stand-alone navigation tool. In addition to doing all the satellite messaging of the earlier inReaches, it has a Bluetooth app connection and a digital compass, altimeter and accelerometer sensors for better handheld navigation. I suspect it probably also has more processing power.

I'm not sure the Explorer is great for marine navigation—the Map icon, for instance, only gets you to a sketch of your track and waypoints—but it would definitely be useful on shore hikes, thanks in part to its track-back function. I'm also intrigued by the description of how a user will be able to create routes on their DeLorme Explore "portal" (web-site), which will presumably sync to their Explorer handheld.

The inReachSE and Explorer models also now have a worldwide weather option, thanks to OCENS SpotCast (also works with Iridium Xtreme and Inmarsat IsatPhone Pro texting). Of course, forecasts have to be quite succinct to fit the inReach's 160-character maximum, but it looks like OCENS has designed the service cleverly. Each message covers 24 hours in four six-hour forecasts, and if you've purchased the 72-hour option—unlimited forecasts for \$8 a month or \$80 a year—you can ask for one, two or three days at once.

The latter detail is nice because the messages will come out of your service plan, although DeLorme started offering a very flexible Freedom Plan earlier this year.

Editor's note: For more of Ben Ellison's insights and reviews of marine electronics, go to www.panbo.com or visit the blogs section at www.passagemaker.com.

