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<http://YardageRangefinder.com>

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## About This Guide

This guide and my site ( [YardageRangeFinder.com](http://YardageRangeFinder.com) ) came from my own hunt for a yardage device to improve my golf game.

Since my work is building websites, I realized that it would be smart to compile all my notes and share them all online to help others save time when researching a rangefinder purchase.

When I started my search, I had no idea that there were GPS units for golf (I had only known about laser rangefinders), so much of this document is about GPS vs. Rangefinders and which is better and why.

I hope it will help you save some time and make your buying process easier.

## Benefits of Using a Yardage Device

It's fairly obvious that knowing detailed yardage information for every green, hazard or bunker on a golf course will improve your game. Professional golfers don't pay caddies 10% just to carry the bag; the real value is all about the hours that the caddie spends mapping yardages on the course.

Golf GPS and rangefinders are designed to bring "caddie" knowledge to the average golfer. From the user reports I read online, almost everyone who has tried either type of yardage device has experienced at least a couple strokes improvement per round.

## *Knowing the course*

The primary benefit of GPS and rangefinders is to get insider knowledge of the course. Without these devices distance judgment is mostly guessing, “feel” and based on experience.

Knowing the exact yardage to the front, center and back of the green, not only helps you judge what club to hit and how hard to hit it, but also can help you make better decisions.

A lot of good players, not only decide where to aim their shot, but also the preferred spot to miss. **A yardage tool can help make these choices and make you a smarter player.**

## *Knowing how far you hit your clubs*

The less appreciated benefit of a yardage device is for the golfer to know exactly how far they hit each of their clubs.

For me, without a GPS or rangefinder, when I’m shooting over water, not only do I have to guess the carry distance, but also what the best club is for me to carry that yardage.

With a GPS or rangefinder, I can “map” all my clubs and know that I hit my 8 iron anywhere from 130 – 143 yards. This improves accuracy and more importantly **improves confidence when making tough shots.**

## What's Better, GPS or Rangefinder?

The short answer is neither a GPS nor rangefinder is better, they are similar, but different; so they have different strengths and weaknesses.

The best way to solve that problem is to have one of each ☺ but that isn't always realistic, so this section will provide the facts you need to decide which one is better for your needs.

### *How a Golf GPS Unit Works*

To keep it simple, a golf GPS is a **satellite based** mapping device. It communicates with overhead satellites to pinpoint your exact location on the Earth and then uses previously recorded locations on the golf course, to tell you the distance to any important locations near you (front of the green for the hole you are playing for example).

Important factors with [Golf GPS](#) units:

1. **The course must be mapped:** you won't get any useful information on a course the first time you use your GPS if the course hasn't been previously mapped (by either you, another user or the GPS company) and stored on your GPS device.
2. **You must have satellite reception.** More and more this is not an issue, but if your connection to the satellite is weak or not present; your device will be useless.
3. **Won't work under a canopy of trees.**

4. **Many GPS companies require an annual subscription to their mapping service.** To be able to continue to download new courses (units will often only store 10 to 20 courses) you will need to pay an annual access fee to the course “maps” that contain all the fairway, green and hazard yardages.

### ***How a Rangefinder Works***

A rangefinder is much different than a GPS. It is an **optical device** that is a cross between a pair of binoculars and a laser gun that is used to catch speeding drivers by a highway patrol officer.

The optical system (like a rifle scope) allows you to select and lock onto the target that you want to determine the distance for (a flag stick on a green for example).

Then the rangefinder shoots an “eye safe” laser at the target, and measures the time it takes for the laser to bounce off of the target and return to the rangefinder. From this time delay, the rangefinder can determine how far away the target is.

Important factors for a [golf laser rangefinder](#):

1. **The object must be in view:** a rangefinder can only target object that it can lock onto. High magnification optics can make it easier to spot flags, but can make it harder to hold the device steady enough to get a good reading. (The latest models have technologies, like Bushnell’s PinSeeker, which make locking on to distant pins much easier.)

- 2. If you are shooting over a hill or over a bunch of trees, you won't get any yardage information.**

### ***Advantages of GPS***

You don't have to aim it at a target to get a yardage reading. This can be an advantage if your target is not in your line of site; an elevated green or you are behind a bush for example.

Also, you don't have to have a steady hand or accurate eye to line up a GPS unit like you would with a range finder.

### ***Advantages of Rangefinders***

The latest model Range finders have a powerful 7x magnification monocular. This can be very useful, not only for guiding the laser to get accurate yardage measurements to your target, but also for locating landing areas.

For example, it is impossible to locate a ridge on a green that could that should be avoided from 175 yards with the naked eye. With a range finder, you could spot it easily and play safely to the other side of the green, resulting in an easier birdie putt.

Another advantage is that a laser rangefinder can be used on the practice range to see how far you are hitting each club.

## **Golfer Feedback: Golf GPS or Rangefinder?**

Some actual user comments on whether they felt a GPS or rangefinder helped their game more.

*"I have no idea why somebody would get a GPS over a laser range finder. Laser range finders are easier to use, more accurate, last about 40 rounds on a battery. What is the advantage in a GPS?"*

~

*"I started with a Sonocaddie last year and really hated having to pick that thing up and focus every time. Plus sometimes hitting the flag was a pain. So I switched to gps."*

~

*"I just keep the laser range finder in the pocket when i play. I have a small one, so it fits in the back pocket. Not a big deal to pull it out."*

~

*"GPS you walk up and take a glance to get yardages. With a laser, you have to have a pretty steady hand, and sometimes (at least the few times I've used them) you can pick up a tree or whatever instead of the pin. That's not even counting the blind shots that happen frequently on the courses I play."*

~

*"Anyone considering whether or not a GPS unit is even worth it; don't think on it any longer. My round today was so smooth, I couldn't believe it. I can't say I'm hitting the ball so well I can really judge the accuracy, but to get to your ball - ok, 144 front, 160 center, pick club, go! It's fantastic."*

~

*"A Rangefinder does not replace a pin sheet and/or GPS. If you're an 18 handicapper it is all you need. But if you're a low handicapper the pin is not always what you want to know, and it isn't necessarily that good for telling you the front and back of the green/ridges on greens, etc. For that reason I use it in conjunction with a GPS which tells me front/rear of green yardages. The GPS is not as good for pin yardages because I am telling it where the pin is, and I might be wrong."*

~

*"One Yard Accuracy? Absolutely! No way with a GPS!  
Tree "canopy"? No Problem - With a GPS-Forget it!  
Flag moved? A GPS could be off by 10-15 yards and you will not even know it! You'll know it immediately with our Laser Rangefinders!  
What's the distance is to a hazard that is not on your GPS? No Way! With Laser Rangefinders you know the distance to any spot!"*

As you can see, there are good arguments for and against both types of devices so there is no obvious choice.

I think that this comment probably contains the most wisdom...

*"If I had to have only one device, I would go with GPS. Smart golf is about playing to the right parts of the greens, and a basic knowledge of where the pin is enough to know where that is. GPS is better at telling me the yardage to that "smart" location."*

## Golf GPS Features & Factors

The main factors to consider in golf GPS units are:

- **Screen size and display information.** Some units have full color screens that show detailed pictures of greens, hazards and tee boxes with the yardages marked to each location.

Others will only have simple text only grayscale screens and simply display yardages to various points on the hole.

The [most advanced Golf GPS unit on the market](#) actually has full color aerial flyovers of the holes for all of its premium mapped courses.

- **Number of courses that the unit can store.** If you travel a lot or play many different courses, get a unit that holds a lot of courses so you don't have to constantly log in and add and delete courses.
- Some units will **keep your score.**
- Some units will allow you to **store club distance information.**
- **Cost of course subscriptions.** These vary from free, to a single lifetime fee, to an annual ongoing subscription.

## Laser Rangefinder Features & Factors

The main factors to consider in laser rangefinders units are:

- The **quality of the optical device** makes a big difference: make sure you get a brand name.

- The magnification makes a difference in your ability to target pins. Top units will have **7x magnification** and low end units only 4x.
- **The size of the lens** (in millimeters, usually up to 27mm) determines how much light comes through the lens and makes the unit easier to use, especially in low light situations.
- **PinSeeker or PinHunter or similar technologies make it easier to lock onto targets** and are available on advanced models.
- **Size of the unit is important**, some golfers said that some rangefinders are too large for them to keep handy and use on every shot.

## Use in Tournaments & For Handicap Rounds

Yes, most GPS and rangefinders can now be used legally in tournaments and for handicap rounds, however read the rule carefully, from the official golf rules:

### Appendix I - Part B - Item 9

#### 9. Distance-Measuring Devices

If the Committee wishes to act in accordance with the Note under Rule 14-3, the following wording is recommended:

*"Distance-Measuring Devices:*

*[Specify as appropriate, e.g., In this competition, or For all play at this course, etc.], a player may obtain distance information by using a device that measures distance only. If,*

*during a stipulated round, a player uses a distance-measuring device that is designed to gauge or measure other conditions that might affect his play (e.g., gradient, wind speed, temperature, etc.), the player is in breach of Rule 14-3, for which the penalty is disqualification, regardless of whether any such additional function is actually used."*

**Using any device that measures slope is illegal in any competition or for handicap. Even if you turn off the slope feature it isn't allowed.**

While all slope measurement devices are illegal, the basic rule that allows GPS and rangefinders is considered a "local rule" which means that it **can vary from course to course and tournament organizers can modify it**. So check before using any device in a tournament or any other important round.

## **A Couple Last Considerations**

- Many courses now, aware of the popularity of rangefinders have begun to install **mirrors or prisms on top of their flag sticks**. It makes picking up the yardage a lot faster.
- With the exception of "slope" measuring rangefinders (which are not tournament or handicap legal, but are great for practice) neither a GPS nor laser rangefinder will compensate for uphill or downhill distances or wind or other weather factors (only the [Leupold GX-II](#) has temperature and altitude compensation).
- Lots of courses are beginning to include GPS units on their carts. This may make it smarter to purchase a rangefinder so that you can take advantage of both.

## The 18<sup>th</sup> Hole

I sincerely hope that this guide has helped along your understanding of golf GPS units and laser rangefinders and how they can provide benefit to your golf game.

Shrugging off the hosel rockets,

**Jon Symons**

PS. If you received this report from a friend and you aren't on my mailing list, you can [sign-up here](#) and receive golfing tips, deals and coupons and information valuable to any golfer.

## References

- Bushnell Golf GPS Owner's Manual - Lit # 98-1182 / 5-08
- The Sand Trap Golf Forum
- USGA.org (official golf rules site)