



All roads do not lead to Rome

I am one of those people who doesn't own or use a GPS device. Being that I drive a vehicle which was built just after the fall of the Berlin wall, there is no onboard GPS system to guide me during my travels. However, the ubiquity of these electronic maps amongst my group of friends has often made me feel like the odd-man out. This is particularly true when I am asked why I never bothered to pick up a GPS after moving to a new country. Surely my lack of familiarity with Boston would warrant such an electronic aide looking over my shoulder at every step of even the simplest journey to the corner store?

Perhaps stubbornly, I have resisted the idea that with the advent of commercial GPS technology mankind has become incapable of driving anywhere without getting completely lost. After all, I did manage to make it from one coast to the other with nothing other than paper maps. I didn't even have a cell phone with me, which was viewed by some in my circle as irresponsible. When I mentioned these facts to my grandfather one evening, he related to me the tale of how my great-grandparents had piled into a Model T pickup truck with a friend of theirs one summer and driven from Quebec to California with no issues. This made me feel better about being disconnected from the global electronic network.

Part of my refusal to embrace GPS technology is the fact that I want to get to know the streets of Boston and develop some sort of internal guidance system that will help prevent me from getting turned round during my driving excursions. Unfortunately, the city of Boston seems to go out of its way to make this as difficult as possible. Take, for example, the almost complete lack of street signage. It is not uncommon to drive for blocks without any indication of what street you are travel-

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Some Boston intersections don't translate accurately on a GPS system. Then again, some Boston intersections don't make much sense in person either.

ing on or what cross-streets you are passing. In terms of its road system, Boston's philosophy seems to be almost akin to that of the secret societies its institutions of higher learning are notorious for – if only I knew the right handshake or code word, then the mysteries of its geography would be revealed to me in all of their splendor.

Alas, I remain on the outside looking in, and as a result I frequently find myself squinting at my paper atlas and wondering if the abbreviated word painted across the only actual street sign I have been able to find within a 2 mile radius actually matches its official name. Abbreviations are one of the fun "bonus prizes" of Boston driving that motorists unfamiliar with the city have continually thrown their way in an effort to keep things lively. In a similar vein: streets that seem to end in a cul-de-

sac only to start again on the other side of a physical obstacle, numbering system intact and mocking my feeble attempts to get where I am going. Combined with the preponderance of one-way streets and the fact that traveling in a straight line for more than a few hundred feet in this city is a genuine rarity, Boston is an incredibly challenging metropolis to memorize and master.

There is one pleasant side effect to the total lack of urban planning that marks Boston's status as one of America's oldest cities. The rural roads that lead through the suburbs east of the downtown area gradually grow more and more interesting to drive upon, especially once the I95 belt has been passed. Twists and turns, so reviled when hunting down an inner city address now become a feature to be cherished as they challenge driving skills and provide a very pleasant way to spend an afternoon. There are enough roads crisscrossing each other throughout this diaspora of pastoral driving that it is virtually impossible to stray too far from a familiar

landmark and not be able to work your way back again towards your point of origin.

Of course, the delight of getting lost in such a superb driving environment is precluded entirely if one sticks to the rigid regimen imposed by a GPS device. Concerned only with getting from point A to point B with the least amount of fuss possible, the directions beamed down from the heavens are the antithesis of adventure, the type of "planned fun" that fails so spectacularly at office holiday parties and class trips to the zoo. Taking off the GPS blinders can be a great way to get reacquainted with the roads less taken – roads that can add a whole lot of fun back into your commuting experience. ♦



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