

# Couple stranded 3 days after GPS leads them astray

December 28 2009, By JEFF BARNARD , Associated Press Writer

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(AP) -- A Nevada couple letting their SUV's navigation system guide them through the high desert of Eastern Oregon got stuck in snow for three days when the GPS unit sent them down a remote forest road.

On Sunday, atmospheric conditions apparently changed enough for their GPS-enabled cell phone to get a weak signal and relay coordinates to a dispatcher, Klamath County Sheriff Tim Evinger said.

"GPS almost did 'em in and GPS saved 'em," Evinger said. "It will give you options to pick the shortest route. You certainly get the shortest route. But it may not be a safe route."

Evinger said a Lake County deputy found the couple in the Winema-Fremont National Forest outside the small town of Silver Lake on Sunday afternoon and pulled their four-wheel-drive Toyota Sequoia out of the snow with a winch.

John Rhoads, 65, and his wife, Starry Bush-Rhoads, 67, made it home safely to Reno, Nev., Evinger said.

The couple was well-equipped for winter travel, carrying food, water and warm clothes, the sheriff said.

"Their statement was, being prepared saved their life," he said.

The couple had been in Portland and followed their GPS as it directed

them south on U.S. Highway 97 to Oregon Highway 31, which goes through Silver Lake and Lakeview before connecting with U.S. Highway 395 to Reno, Evinger said.

In the town of Silver Lake, the unit told them to turn right on Forest Service Road 28, and they followed that and some spur roads nearly 35 miles before getting stuck in about 1 1/2 feet of snow near Thompson Reservoir, the sheriff said.

"For some reason they finally got a weak signal after 2 1/2 days," Evinger said. "They called in. They alternated between two different cell phone numbers."

A GPS-enabled phone is able to send its coordinates to 911, and eventually one of the couple's phones sent its location to the dispatcher's console, the sheriff said.

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