

Organic Maps for Preparedness and Privacy

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In light of recent disasters in the Southeast caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, this month I take a look at one aspect of preparedness overlooked by me. In reading about the destruction caused in Western North Carolina, I found one recommendation that I had not thought of before: having access to maps that do not rely on internet or mobile data connectivity. This seems like a very good tool to have in your prepping toolbox. It also has applications to outdoorsman, off-roaders, search and rescue, etc.

One way to do this besides paper maps is [Organic Maps](#). As a side benefit, Organic Maps does not collect any personal data and does not track your location. I have recently been on a mission to improve the privacy and security of our family's digital life. Organic Maps seems to be a good fit for this mission.

Organic Maps is a free app available for both the iOS and Android operating systems based on [OpenStreetMaps](#). There is a high-level base map supplemented by downloadable regional maps for points of interest, fine detail and contour lines, etc.

The OpenStreetMaps website describes it as being built by a community of mappers contributing roads, trail, café, railways and many other points of interest and navigational data. It is used as the basis of maps by many websites and mobile apps. It is important to note, that this mapping system does not provide satellite imagery or street views as are available in Google Maps.

So far, I have downloaded six maps to cover central and East Texas (Austin, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Tyler and Waco). These use 620MB of storage, which is not a huge amount of memory on a typical cell phone today. The app itself uses about 600MB more memory than Google Maps due to the need to download the high-level base map as part of the app.

A screenshot from the Organic Maps website is shown below on the left with walking directions shown as a dashed blue line. The layout will be familiar to anyone who has used other mapping apps. Features include zoom controls, compass indicator, layer selection, search and favorite button (star). Directions can be provided for walking, driving, public transport, bicycle and re-routing by clicking a point on the map. You can see the contour lines and shading for vegetation types. On the right below is a view

showing a developed area with building shapes. So, while there is no satellite imagery, you can still get a good feel for the infrastructure in the area.



I tested navigation capabilities on a recent trip from my home to lake Whitney State Park. The app worked very well, handling a route change while driving. It seemed to more rapidly manage the route change than Google Maps. I have found that Google Maps seems to suggest a U-turn for a long time before giving up and re-routing. The app kept the screen on the entire time and used relatively little battery capacity compared to Google Maps which I find to be a resource hog. The difference is probably due to the fact that Organic Maps is not continuously using wi-fi or mobile data. The tradeoff is using memory to store the downloaded maps.

In my opinion, a significant benefit of Organic Maps are the data privacy features. Organic Maps claims to be free of trackers, does not collect any data, does not "phone home". It also does not require any registration and does not contain ads. App

development is completely funded by volunteers and donations. Likewise, the app has no mandatory tutorials upon installation and no push notifications. You don't need to provide an email, but if you do, they don't spam you or sell it to others companies.

KM4ACK has a very recent YouTube video out on this very topic ([KM4ACK Map Video](#)). He discusses Organic Maps starting at the 8:35 mark, followed by OsmAnd Maps. The latter is not totally free, but looks pretty good as well. At the beginning of the video, he discusses paper maps and an application for Linux users.

For me, Organic Maps is a good replacement for Google Maps. If you rely on satellite images or street view, however, Organic Maps is still a good option to use when you may not have connectivity.