

May Mountain School Tech Tips: A Quick Guide to Using BC Basemap: Part 1

Many people are aware that 1:20,000 scale maps are now available free of charge from the BC Government for viewing and/or printing on your home computer system. Occasionally, I even find myself on a trip with someone who's managed to navigate the somewhat cumbersome user interface to produce such a map, but their use doesn't seem to be widespread. This is unfortunate because the coverage of logging roads is probably as good as you can get (without the hassle of trying to get maps from the relevant logging companies) and the 20 metre contour interval is very useful for planning and executing trips. But, cumbersome is the operative word and many people find the interface difficult to use and give up in frustration. Below are some (I hope) simple directions to get you started using BC Basemap.

First off, I use the term BC Basemap as a generic term to describe all the various maps provided by the BC Government. It's a hold-over term from when the maps first came out, but other terms you'll see include iMapBC. Secondly, there are two main sites for accessing the maps that I routinely use. Each has slightly different interfaces and some people prefer one over the other. In this column, I'm going to present the easiest version to use. Look for the more complicated version in part two of this article in the next newsletter. Finally, I'm providing some very simple instructions to access basic maps with terrain features, contours and roads shown. However, the mapping sites themselves offer many more alternatives so it's up to you to play around and customize your maps as you prefer.

British Columbia Base Map:

The URL below will take you directly to the simplest version of BC Basemap, copy and paste it into your browser:

http://webmaps.gov.bc.ca/imf5/imf.jsp?site=bc_basemap

1. At the top of the screen you'll find a toolbar. Click <Find Location>. At the right hand side of the screen a list in blue text will appear with various options for things you can search for including ski hills, fire zones, tree farm licenses, latitude/longitude, etc. Personally, I find searching for a place name the easiest, so that is what I'll describe.
2. Click on <Place Name>. A text box will appear below the words "Where do you want to zoom to:"
3. In the text box type the mountain, creek, town or other feature you are interested in. I usually use mountain names (being a peak-bagger), but I'll often search for creeks/rivers if I'm looking for logging road access. For this exercise, I used "elise" as in Mount Elise (see trip report in this newsletter).
4. You can also choose the extent of the map on this page using the drop-down box which allows you to choose 1 kilometre, 10 kilometres or 25 kilometres. I find the default 10 kilometres generally the most useful.
5. Once you've filled in the text box with your search term and chosen the extent of the map, click <OK>.

6. All the placenames with Elise in will appear in a list in blue text. Choose the one you are interested in. I chose Mount Elise.
7. Once you've clicked on Mount Elise, a map will appear, but there will be no contour lines so you'll likely find it's not that useful.
8. To get contour lines on your map, go back to the toolbar at the top of the page and click <layers>.
9. On the right side of the screen another menu will appear with two file folders, one labeled <Base Map Layers> and one labeled <Grids and Images>. Click <Base Map Layers> and a drop down menu should open.
10. Under the drop down menu, turn <elevation> on by clicking the little box beside it. A tick mark should appear in the small box.
11. To get the contours to appear, you will now have to click on the <refresh map> button which is underneath the file folders on the right hand side of the screen. Once you click <refresh map> your map will reload with contour intervals (20 metres).
12. You'll note that there are lots of other options you can select here such as <land cover features> and <cultural features>. Play around and see what you find useful.

Now that you have Mount Elise up on your screen, there are a couple of other things you might want to do before you print your map. Let's say you want to see a bit more of the terrain to the north of that shown on your current map. To move the map around and "pan" over different terrain, go back up to the toolbar at the top of your screen and find the little icons that run left to right across the top of the screen. You should see such icons as a magnifying glass, a hand, a printer, etc. If you hold the cursor over each icon, some text will appear telling you what each icon does. For this exercise, click on the hand icon which is the <pan> tool. Now, grab your map with the hand and move it down. A <loading map> icon will appear on your screen and the map will reload with more area to the north. You can use the <pan> function to move the map around to get exactly the area you are interested in.

The other thing I commonly do is enlarge a section of the map to make it easier to read. To do this click on the magnifying glass icon with the plus sign inside that you'll find on the toolbar just left of the pan tool. With this tool, you can draw a square on your map and enlarge that area. Once you've selected an area to enlarge, you'll see the <loading map> icon and the enlarged map will appear. Note that the map scale is given at the bottom of the screen. Astute readers will have worked out that I could also type the scale I want (i.e. 1:20,000 or 1:30,000, etc.) into this box and the map will appear at that scale (remember to click the <go> button beside the scale box).

Now that you've got the section of map you are interested in, you'll want to print it. There are two ways to print a map. The first (and easiest way) is to click the <printer> icon on the toolbar which prints to a PDF file. Once you click this, a menu will appear on the right side of the screen where you can choose the size of paper and the layout, the scale of the map (I use "current extent"), and you can give your map a title. Once you've made your selections and named your map,

click <OK>. A dialogue box will open telling you the map has been created and presenting you with a blue link <open map> to view your map. You will need Adobe Acrobat for this. Now you can go ahead and print your PDF file.

The second way to print maps, and the one I use is to do a screen capture (use the <print screen> button on your keyboard) and then copy the map into a photo editor. Then I use the photo editing program to sharpen up the image and select the exact area I want to print.

Below you'll see a section of map I printed out for Mount Elise. After skiing up Mount Elise in April with Jen Kyler, and having a thoroughly inadequate map that didn't show the roads accurately, I came back and looked the area up on BC Basemap, and found that the roads marked on the map were as they were on the ground. Having a (relatively) accurate depiction of the logging roads is one of the most useful attributes of BC Basemap. You could save yourself a lot of driving (or walking/skiing) and the planet a lot of carbon. Additionally, the detail found in the 1:20,000 map with 20 metre contour interval that shows all the small watercourses, marshes, tarns and puddles, etc. is also extremely useful for finding your way around the mountains. If you are like me and don't use a GPS but rely on terrain features to navigate, you'll find navigating with BC Basemap much easier than using the standard NTS 1:50,000 maps because you'll have so many more handrails and backstops to use.

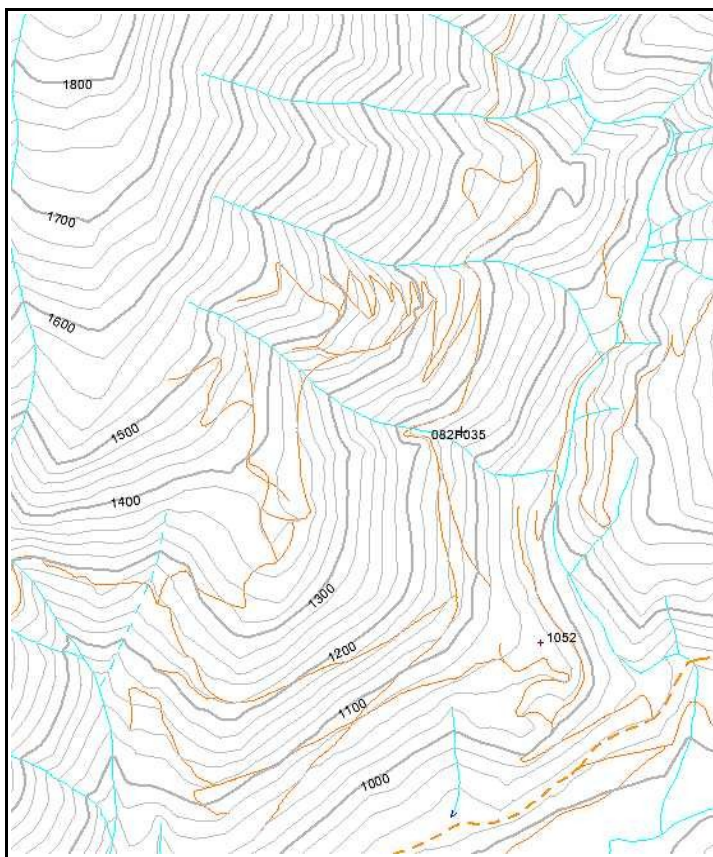


Figure 1: Section from BC Basemap showing old mining roads on the south side of Mount Elise