

## How MapCreate Works: the Basics

You'll be making maps faster if you understand the hoops MapCreate must jump through to cram a high-detail map into your GPS unit.

First of all, those CDs you just purchased contain a whole bunch of *raw* digital cartography data. There are several hundred files of digital mapping information containing lake shorelines, navigation aids, roads, rivers and all the other information that goes into our high-detail maps.

It takes some fancy formatting to fit the whole world onto a few compact discs. Your GPS unit can't read those raw files (called atlas files). Even if it could, no GPS unit or MultiMedia Card (MMC) has enough memory to hold *that* much information.

This is where MapCreate comes in. The program looks at all those raw atlas files, shuffles the different types of information together, and then places them onto your computer screen. That's what we call the **Master Map**, the main window in the MapCreate interface. By changing various options in MapCreate, you can control how much geographic detail is displayed on-screen in the Master Map.

It's a pretty cool electronic map, but your GPS can't read it in this form, either. This is where *you* come in. You move around the Master Map and locate the area or areas you want to make a detailed map of. Then, you grab the computer mouse and draw a **map border** around the region you want. (There are two or three fun ways to do this...we'll describe 'em in a few minutes.)

Now, this map border isn't really a map yet — it just defines or outlines the area you want to include in the final GPS-friendly map. If you wish, you can save the boundary you have drawn as a **Map Border File**. MapCreate uses a map border like an electronic shopping list. The program looks at your border, grabs the appropriate raw atlas information, and then glues it all together as a *custom map*. Now you can save *this* data as a **Custom Map File** on an MMC (or SD card) and load it into your GPS unit. (If you like, you can backup the Map File by copying it from the MMC card to your computer's hard drive.)

GPS information — such as waypoints, routes or trails — is handled differently. You can click the mouse to set a waypoint or plan a route, then save that information as a **GPS Data File**. Just save it directly on or copy it to the MMC and this file is ready to load into your GPS unit. When your unit makes trails or waypoints in the field, that information is also saved as a GPS Data File. Your GPS unit can save the file to the MMC, which allows you to copy the GPS Data File back into your computer. Then you can open, edit and save it in MapCreate.