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Quo closes the gap

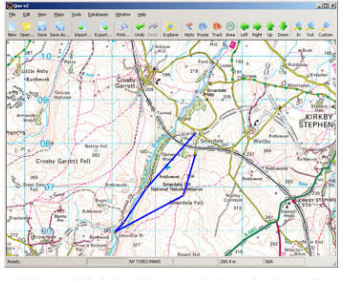
The original Quo digital mapping application launched in late 2006. Its chief attraction was very competitive pricing, with the whole of Great Britain at 1:50,000 Landranger scale costing just less than £100, nearly half the price of Memory-Map. However in the [review](#) we wrote at the time we pointed out that the financial saving came at a fairly heavy price in terms of usability. The software just wasn't that easy to use, particularly for the very standard tasks of plotting a route, printing out a route card and map and transferring the data to a GPS.



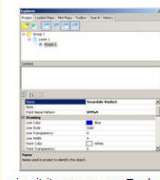
Immediately after our review Quo's makers came back with a promise to streamline these key tasks, initially by Spring 2007. Spring, summer and most of autumn went by and we began to wonder whether anything was going to be done. Then towards the end of 2007 a whole new version, Quo v.2, was launched.

On starting up the software the difference is immediately obvious. The previously rather retrograde set of panels for different tasks has been dropped altogether, so the whole thing looks clean and straightforward. The interface has been completely revamped, with a set of cute buttons for the main tasks along the top menu bar. Suddenly Quo looks like a real contender. And the fact that it took a year to do begins to look quite reasonable.

So does this change the way you use the program? Indeed it does. Creating a route is now beautifully simple. You just click on the Route button at the top and click to place your waypoints. At the last waypoint you right click to end the route. Having done this most of the functions you need are available by hovering over the route and right-clicking. From the sub-menu that pops up you can print out the map, create a route card and export the route to a file, GPS or mobile device. The map printing and route card functions are clearly laid out and work well, while transfer to GPS is a doddle.



Quo retains a principle found in v.1 of gathering overlay items such as routes and waypoints into Projects. This allows you to create a set of waypoints, for instance, to go with a route or a set of routes and save them off easily as a group, a useful feature if you are in the habit of creating additional waypoints for escape routes, points of interest (the pub perhaps?) or peaks you might want to add in on the day if time allows. All these items can be managed by clicking the Explore button in the menu bar. This opens up a box in which all your saved overlays can be viewed and manipulated.

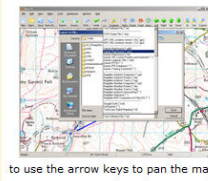
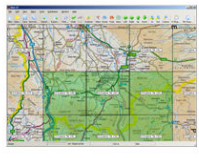


The software encourages you to think in terms of waypoint sets rather than individual waypoints, a significant departure if you are used to applications like Memory-Map and Anquet. This has advantages and disadvantages, probably in equal measure. When creating a route, for instance, the waypoints are automatically numbered. In the Explore panel it's then possible to add a prefix to all the waypoints in one go, a very useful function if you want to have a tidy set of uniquely named waypoints to transfer to your GPS. In other applications you would have to do this one by one. The downside is that the waypoints have to be numbered sequentially, so you cannot pick one out (the summit, a significant path junction or an escape route perhaps) and give it its own name. To do this you need to add a separate individual waypoint within the same project and name it as you wish.

Given this it is perhaps a little odd that you cannot place a single mark very easily. The only option is to create a waypoint set and place only one waypoint in it. It's then a rather cumbersome process to go into the Explore panel to change the name of the set to the name you want for that mark. In fact in Quo waypoint sets are not so very different from the waypoints in a route, in that they too are numbered sequentially by default. If you like having numbered waypoints in your GPS but don't generally use the GPS in its route following function you might quite like this. It is also very simple to make a waypoint set onto it in the Explore panel. You simply create an empty route and drag the waypoint set onto it in the Explore panel (the RXF files we provide for Walkingworld routes currently import as a waypoint set rather than a route so you may find this a useful function). Overall, however, it would be nice to see a simple "mark" function for those times when you just want to record a location and name it quickly.

Other features come as a pleasant surprise. When you zoom in and out from a location the mapping changes automatically to an appropriate scale. This saves you the bother of changing the map when looking at a wider area and changing it back as you zoom in to work in detail on a route.

Import and export functions are massively improved from v.1. Single buttons bring up clear options to import or export to file, GPS or a mobile device. The list of file formats supported is as long as your arm. Importing new maps is also impressively simple, as is the online purchase of new mapping. This is done by clicking the Tile Shop button on the menu bar and then selecting the scale of mapping you want to purchase. The tiles you can buy are overlaid over the map you are looking at in the application and you can click to select them. If you have a route plotted this makes it very easy to see that you have bought the right tiles to cover that route. Once your choices are made (the price of your purchase is displayed as you click), a single button press takes you straight into the online shop to make payment and download the map tiles. You can buy 1:50,000 Landranger tiles but you are more likely to use the shop to buy 1:25,000 Explorer tiles for specific areas. These cost £1.95 for a 10km x 10km area (minimum order is 6 tiles).



The software is not without its quirks. Currently the automatic changing of mapping assumes that you have 1:25,000 Explorer mapping loaded, so when you zoom close in and don't have that scale of mapping the screen goes blank - a fix for this is apparently on its way.

Existing digital mapping users may also find it strange that you have to hold down the right mouse button rather than the left to pan the map around the screen. But there is method in their madness; it means you can pan while you are plotting a route. In Memory-Map you have to use the arrow keys to pan the map while plotting.

Price-wise nothing much has changed from v.1. You can download a free version of the application but routes are limited to 10 waypoints, so you will outgrow this fairly swiftly. The full 'Pro' version with Britain's national parks at Landranger scale is just under £40, making it £10 more than Memory-Map's equivalent. This probably means most people will jump straight to buying the full application with Landranger mapping for the whole of Great Britain at £99.95, or at least to the countries of England, Scotland or Wales at £74.95, £54.95 and £39.95 respectively. Compared with other digital mapping applications these bundles are great value. You can buy them on DVD in the [Walkingworld shop](#).

In its new form Quo has certainly closed the gap in terms of ease of use and functionality. It's not perfect but it does what it says on the tin and if you have not already plumped for a digital mapping tool it deserves your consideration. If nothing else its developers should be applauded for listening to criticism and working hard to deliver what users really want; the fact that they have done so, and in such a complete and well considered way, bodes well for the future.

[Find out more on the Quo website.](#) You can download a free trial version of the application from there.

David Stewart

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