



# IN-DEPTH The Watch To Wear If You're Going Off The Grid For Good

What do you want on your wrist when you're going to be wiping yourself with poison ivy for the rest of your life?



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The watch world is full of interesting hypothetical cases that will, if there is anything like luck or justice, never transpire, but which are fun to consider as thought experiments. Not infrequently, these revolve around various apocalyptic scenarios. One of my all-time favorites, for



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turns out to the joy of G-Shock fans worldwide, that this is not, in fact, the case).

Another related but different scenario involves what I like to call (as of five minutes ago when I made it up) the Mad Max Watch Hypothesis. This posits that a mechanical watch is inherently superior to a quartz watch because in the event of a collapse of technological society (which is beginning to seem more like a blessing in disguise than an apocalypse lately, depending on how grouchy you feel about the day's headlines) a mechanical watch can be serviced. A quartz watch on the other hand, will, in the fullness of time, run its battery down and die – not with a bang, but with a whimper.





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The Great Outdoors. Image, [Hendrik Cornelissen](#).

In honor of Great Outdoors Week, I would like to consider a closely related – and indeed, very likely identical, at least from a consequences perspective – question, which is: What is the best watch to have with you if you finally get fed up with mankind and its mendacity, and decide to go off the grid?

The critical point here is that you are not just disgruntled – you are, in fact, terminally, permanently disgusted, and find the thought of never again seeing another human not only preferable, but a consummation devoutly to be wished. You have decided that we are not *Homo sapiens*, but rather, *Homo stultus*. You are essentially Robinson Crusoe, but you hope with all your heart to never see the immaculate blue sky over the wine-dark sea stained with a smudge of a sail.



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Grid watch past some colleagues here at HODINKEE, including our commercial director, Russell Kelly, who replied rather drily that probably the last thing you need if you are vanishing into the trackless wilderness, is a wristwatch. This is unassailable logic.



However, this merely raises the obvious point that nobody needs a wristwatch, period, and so we are free to continue to entertain ourselves by considering the best solution for bringing a watch with you when you bug out for good.





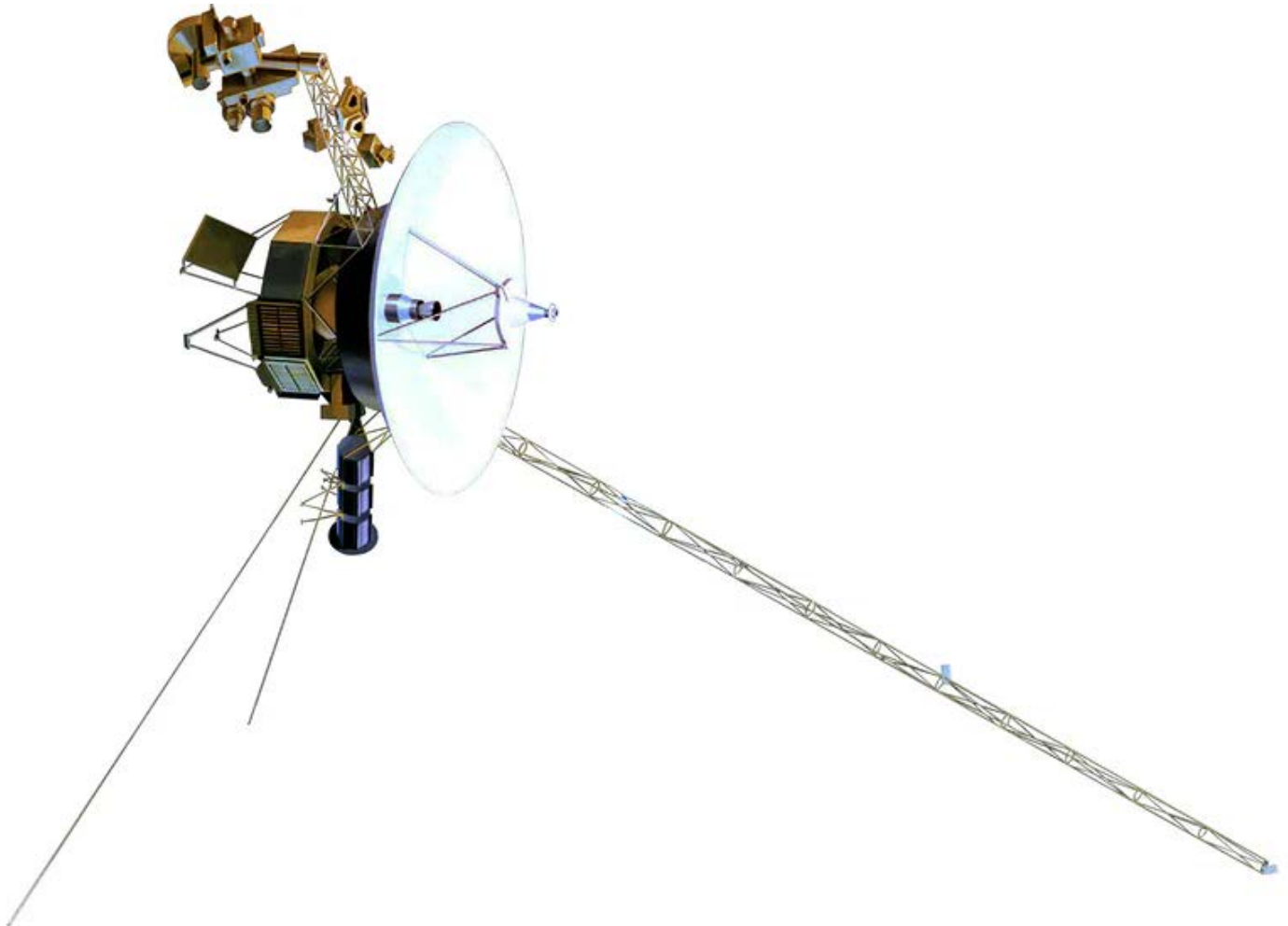
The Citizen Eco-Drive Tough

**T**he first obvious possibility is a quartz watch, powered by a solar-cell-recharged battery. You could, for instance, go with a Cartier Tank SolarBeat if you wanted something a little more elegant by which to see when it's time to climb out of your pile of dead leaves and breakfast on squirrel and berry pemmican. However, the problem with rechargeable batteries is that they can only go through so many recharge cycles before they fail. Unless your plan for a watch breaking down involves sneaking into the nearest rural hamlet in a Bigfoot costume under cover of darkness to steal a battery, you will then be, as they say in this man's army, SOL.

Integrated circuits also tend to accumulate gradual damage, although this can to a great extent be ameliorated for considerable lengths of time by properly sealing the IC from the atmosphere, and preventing moisture or



extreme temperatures, as well as very powerful radiation and magnetic fields (including that of Jupiter), and its chips are still chipper.



Voyager 1, image from NASA

The spacecraft is powered by thermoelectric generators that turn the heat from plutonium-238 into electric current, and the three on-board *Voyager 1* are expected to provide enough power for some operations through 2025. You might be able to power a wristwatch with a small thermoelectric generator, depending on how comfortable you are with having plutonium on your wrist (perhaps a reader with the relevant engineering background



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However, if you are a relatively young misanthrope, you might want more than forty-plus years of operating life and this is where the mechanical watch comes in.



Girard-Perregaux observatory pocket tourbillon – not what you usually think of for going off the grid, but it's been around since 1889.

**T**he mechanical watch relies on the mechanical energy provided by the mainspring, and leaving aside accidents, the main failure modes are most likely to be wear on the pivots of the gear train where they run in jewels in the movement plates and bridges, and degradation of power from the mainspring. If we assume that you are bringing tools with you (and



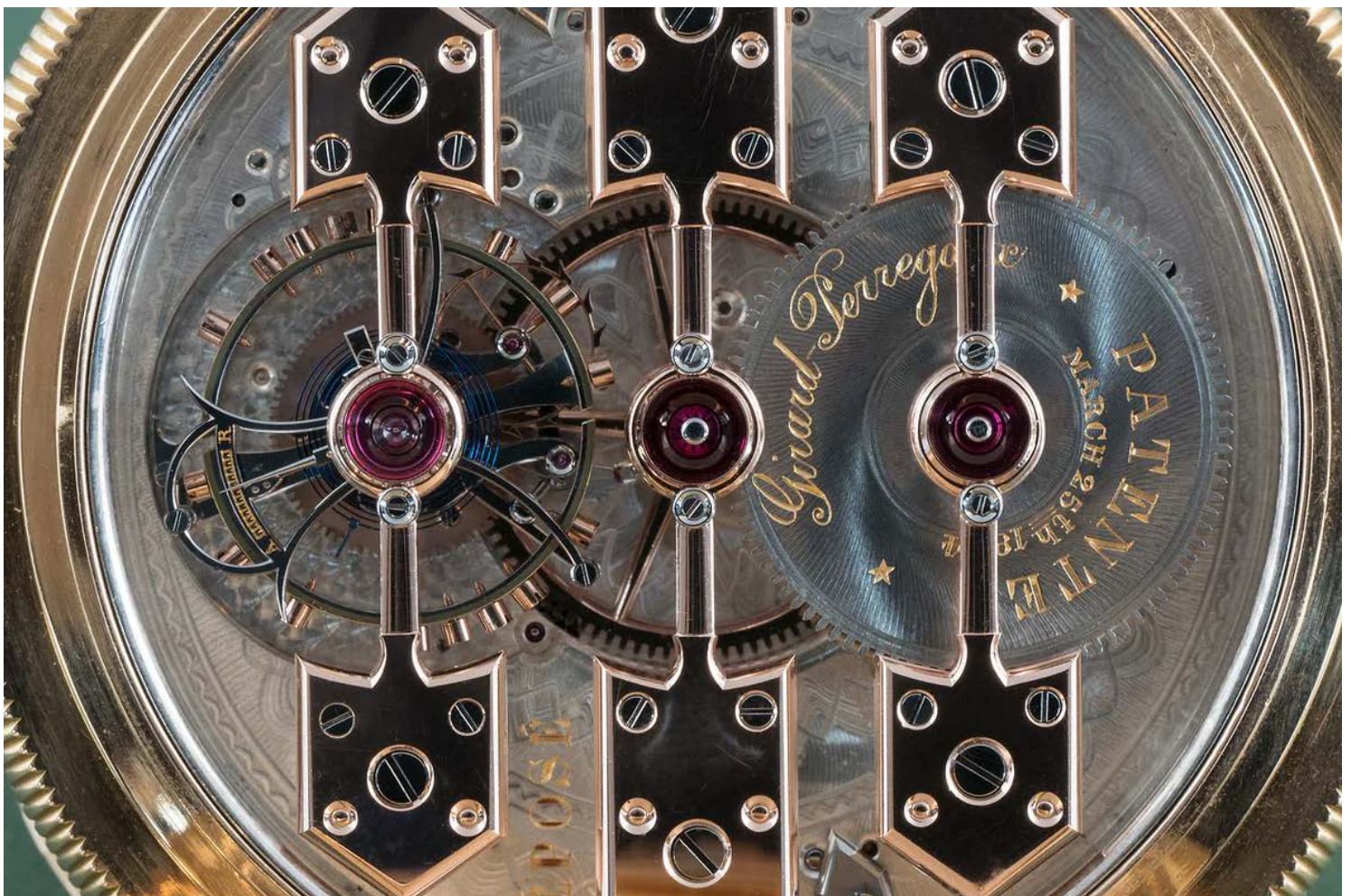


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town before modern synthetic lubricants and they can work well (whale oil used to be ubiquitous in clockmaking, for instance).

Cleaning is a little tricky as you will probably not have access to the usual chemicals used to clean and degrease a watch movement, but soaps will do nicely as long as you remember to dry your components immediately after (watchmakers used to use boxes of dry sawdust to dry movements, which brushes off easily).



That leaves the mainspring. A plain blued-steel mainspring won't last nearly long enough, as they have a tendency to fatigue, "set" (that is,





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out, with I think pardonable pride, that one of his watches would be ideal, assuming you can afford one and don't mind a few years on his waiting list – you are probably selling all your worldly possessions anyway so springing, hahahaha, for an RS is as good a way as any to spend the last money you'll ever spend. The advantage to an RS watch is that the escapement does not require oil, so you will not see wear at the impulse surfaces, or rate variation due to lubricant deterioration. (Roger also pointed out that the same advantage would apply to any pocket watch with a chronometer detent escapement.)



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Roger Smith Series 2, [as seen in 2016](#).



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Over the last couple of decades there have been somewhat experimental watches which don't use conventional oils at all but these usually rely on exotic materials like silicon or even synthetic diamond, and in the event you do need to work on them, you'll need to invent – oh, I don't know, the electric generator to start with, and then God knows what else. In fact, anything made using MEMS technology, LIGA, or processes derived from the semiconductor industry, need not apply. Give me good old steel and whale grease every time.

The question of getting a clock to run for a very long period of time gives us more options, of course, and the Long Now Foundation has been working on a clock called, reasonably enough, The Clock Of The Long Now. It is designed to run, without stopping, for ten thousand years although as it is enormous, buried in a vault of solid rock, and really,





Me personally, I'll take a Roger Smith. It's completely irrational to bring a watch with you if you're vanishing for good, but it is also something of a symbol. The steady ticking and the motion of its gears and balance are an homage to what us humans used to call The Clockwork Universe – a place where Reason with a capital R was what made the merry old world (and the worlds around it) go 'round. For someone fed up with the unreason of human civilization, I can't think of a better talisman by whose ticking to fall asleep – the peaceful, solitary sleep of one convinced of the truth of Jean-Paul Sartre's observation, that hell is other people.

- CLOCKS
- GIRARD-PERREGAUX
- POCKET-WATCH
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