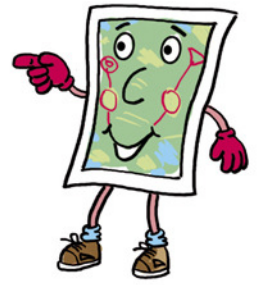


Orienteering is a challenging outdoor adventure sport enjoyed by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.



Orienteering

Beginners Guide



What is Orienteering?

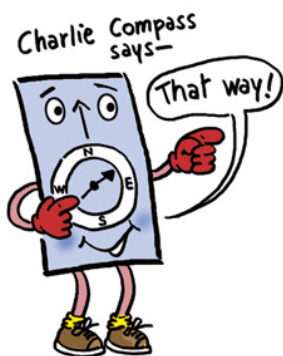
How to Get Started



Where to do it

What to expect





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What is Orienteering?

Orienteering is a "race with navigation".

Although it is a race it can be done at whatever speed you choose, there is no pressure to go faster than you want to. It's also a sport for all ages from 5 to 85. One feature of the sport is that it is so varied; it can take part in all sorts of locations from town parks to moorlands, forests to the streets of towns.

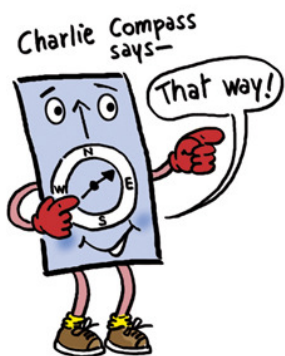
The course planner sets out a number of control points in the competition area. Each control point is marked by an orange and white "kite", and has some way of enabling competitors to prove that they have visited that particular control (explained towards the end).

In most races competitors must visit each of the control points on their course in the correct order, and the winner is the person who completes the course in the shortest time. It is often not the fastest runner who wins the race but the person who balances running speed with good navigation.

Unlike a road race, there is no mass start. Each competitor has their own start time, so each person has to do their own navigation between the control points.

Contrary to what some people believe, orienteering is definitely not about tramping along with a rucksack on your back, that's hiking. Competitive orienteering is a running race; top competitors are able to navigate accurately while running very hard through the forest. For adults, course winning times are typically in the range 50 - 80 minutes, depending on the level of the competition. Courses for children are generally shorter, from 1.5 up to 6





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km, with winning times between 10 and 50 minutes.

An orienteering event includes several different courses, so all levels of ability and experience are catered for. The range of courses on offer makes orienteering a very family-friendly sport. Children can do the shorter courses while their parents compete on the longer ones. Teenagers often enjoy beating their parents on the same way course. And it's certainly not compulsory to be ultra-competitive. Some people just jog or walk round a course.

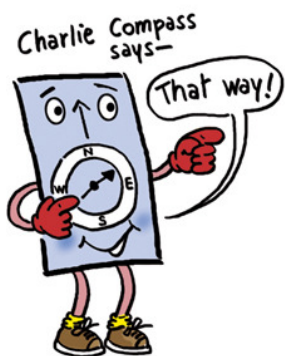
Why orienteering is different

Finding your way round a road race is fairly simple. You start at the same time as everyone else and follow the people ahead of you until you come to the finish. The course will probably be marked in some way, and there will be marshals at key points round the course to point you in the right direction and make sure that no-one is taking unauthorised short-cuts.

Orienteering isn't like that. You have your own start time, so you're making your own way round the course.

There are no marshals to check that you've kept to "the course". There is no fixed route that you must take, the choice is yours. There will be people on other courses visiting controls which may or may not be on your course. Following others is not a good strategy.





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Types of event

There are quite a lot of different types of orienteering event, including National events, multi-day events, night events, score events, bike orienteering events, etc.

The structure of events is being simplified to make the sport easier to understand for all participants. From the start of 2009 the structure will be;

Level 1; National Championships, Jan Kjellstrom festival and Regional championships. Competition in age classes will be a feature of these events, allowing British Champions in each age group to be found.

Level 2; Larger events that offer good quality of competition and a full range of courses, along with "services" that are expected and larger events such as results display/first aid/toilets. These attract people from a wide area

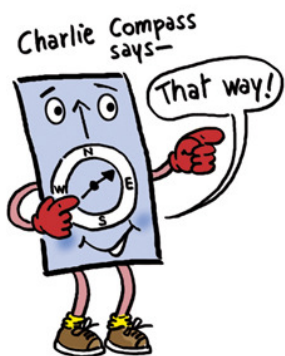
Level 3; Smaller events that attract people mainly from the area around the event itself. Some of the extra service may not be available.

Level 2 and 3 events are ideal for beginners in the sport.

The most common types of course are colour coded.

Each event offers a range of courses of different lengths and navigational difficulties, and you can choose whichever course suits your levels of fitness, orienteering experience and competitiveness.





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They are called Colour Coded courses because the courses are identified by colours. For example, the yellow course is very short and navigationally easy, so it's suitable for young children and absolute beginners. By contrast, the brown course is considerably longer and much more navigationally challenging. It's intended for the fittest and most competitive of the experienced orienteers. A darker colour indicates a longer and harder (physically and technically) course. Easier courses make more use of paths and the time lost making mistakes is generally less.

The colour of the course depends on the distance of the course and the technical difficulty of finding the control. A technically easy course will use paths and path junctions while a hard course will use more complicated features like contours and changes in the terrain.

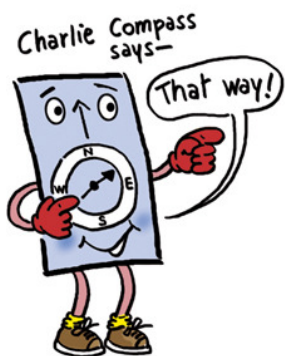
On easier courses a compass is not normally necessary as navigation can be done using the solid features visible on the ground like paths and walls. A compass can be useful to orientate the map, meaning lining it up with the features on the ground to ensure you are heading in the right direction. This technique is useful to check direction at path junctions.

Equipment, Map and compass

You have to navigate your way round an orienteering course using a specially-produced map and a compass. You're not allowed any other navigation aids such as global positioning systems (GPS).

Orienteering maps are special. They're produced at a larger scale than most Ordnance Survey maps, and include very detailed information about the terrain. For example, boulders more than about half a metre high are usually





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mapped individually. The cost of the map is included in your entry fee.

Orienteering maps are produced at a variety of scales of from 1:5000 to 1:15,000. The scale used will depend on the area being used. If you're used to Ordnance Survey maps -- which are generally at scales of 1:25,000 or 1:50,000 -- it will take you a little while to get used to the larger-scale orienteering maps. At first you'll find that you arrive at path junctions, etc. sooner than you were expecting to.

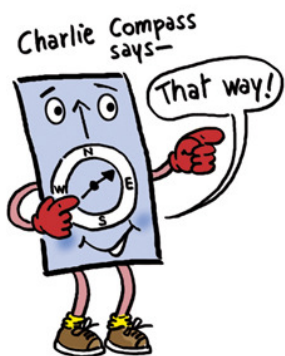
At most events it's now the normal practice to provide maps with courses pre-printed on to them. In this case you'll pick up your map -- normally sealed into a clear plastic bag or printed on waterproof paper-- immediately after you start.

In either case, you don't see your course until you start your run and the clock is already running.

On an orienteering map forest that is easy to run through is shown as white and open land is yellow. This takes a bit of getting used to as Ordnance Survey maps are the opposite way around! It's done this way because in Scandinavia, where orienteering started, most of the terrain is covered by forest and it made the maps clearer if this forest was shown as white.

Maps use a comprehensive set of symbols to show everything from paths and walls to individual boulders and small pits. It wouldn't be realistic to expect you to become an expert in all of those symbols before your first run.





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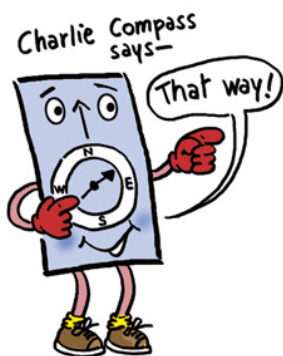
Fortunately, it's not necessary. If you start off on the less navigationally challenging courses there's a much smaller set of symbols that will be important to you. Before you set out on your course make sure that you are familiar with the symbols for:

- (1) Track. Path. Ride.
- (2) Wall. Fence. High fence.
- (3) Stream. Ditch.
- (4) Boulder. Crag.
- (5) Knoll. Hill.
- (6) Pit. Depression.

Also, be aware that different colours denote different types of forest. Open forest is shown as white. Forest that is a bit thicker - so that you can still run through it, but more slowly - is shown as light green. Beyond that, the thicker the forest the darker the green. As a general rule, avoid forest mapped as dark green - it's called "fight" and usually lives up to its name!

Wear clothes suitable for running, tracksuit bottoms are good to avoid scratches from undergrowth. Trainers are OK for beginners but as you try harder routes you will benefit from a pair of off road trainers or special fell running shoes as they give much better grip.





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Getting Round Your Course

This seven point plan applies at all levels of orienteering. It's just that as you gain experience and progress to more navigationally challenging courses your strategies become more sophisticated and you use a wider range of techniques. The basic routine remains the same.

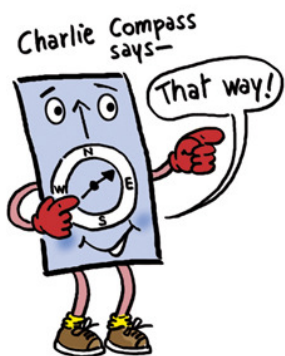
At a control

- 1) Check the **control code**, this is a number on the control and if you are in the right place will match the number on your map.
- 2) **Punch**, to record your visit, meaning put your timing chip in the electronic box
- 3) Decide your **strategy** for getting to the next control.
- 4) Check your direction as you leave the control.
- 5) Check the feature (and the control code) of the next control.
- 6) Are you seeing what you expect to see? Look at the features around you and match them to the map.
- 7) Are you expecting what you see? Looking at the map you will identify what you should see next, for example a path junction or a pond, if you don't see this you have probably made an error and need to relocate.

At the Start

At the start you should first take a moment to identify the location of the start - shown by a red triangle on the map - and relate the features around you to what is shown on the map. Then pick up the seven point plan at step 3;





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i.e. decide your strategy for getting to the first control.

Resist the temptation to dash off immediately before you've established where you are and decided on your strategy. And make sure that you set off in the right direction.

It generally pays to be a bit more cautious with your navigation at the start of the course, until you get the feel of the map and settle into your navigating routine. There will be plenty of time to run hard later on the course.

Getting lost and found again

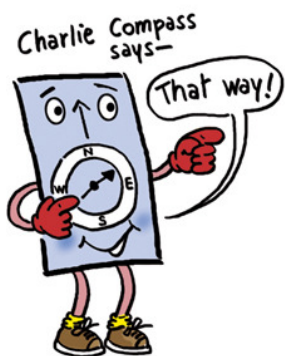
Getting temporarily lost is a normal part of orienteering. Sometimes you're only a little bit lost. You know where you are to within 100 meters, but you're not exactly sure where the control is. Sometimes you can lose track of your position to the extent that it takes quarter of an hour or more to diagnose where you are.

An elite orienteer regards losing a minute as a pretty bad error. As a beginner, if you can limit your lost time after an error to 3 or 4 minutes then that's a success!

The earlier that you can detect an error, the more chance you'll have of correcting it quickly. That's one reason for steps 6 and 7 of the seven point plan for navigating between controls.

As soon as you realise that what you're seeing around you doesn't match where you think you should be on the





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map, stop. Is there really a discrepancy or will a closer look at the map show that the ruined building is there on the map after all? Often when you are running you can not read the fine detail and stopping for a few seconds helps a lot.

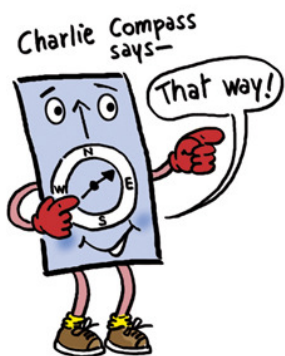
If there is a real discrepancy then you need to work out where you actually are. This process is called **relocation**. Successful relocation is usually the result of a combination of different techniques.

Once you are pretty sure that you know where you are, re-start the seven point navigation plan at step 3 -- decide your strategy for getting to the next control. Remember to form your strategy on the basis of where you actually are, rather than where you'd like to have been! The past is past, and you'll orienteer better if you can leave your mistakes in the past and concentrate on how you go forward from here.

If you're having trouble relocating then it's quite okay to ask a passing orienteer for help. Strictly speaking this is against the rules, but if you're still lost after you've spent a while trying to relocate then you're probably not going to be at the top of the results anyway. If you're going to ask for help then try to pick someone who's not running very hard and remember they are not obliged to help, although most will help, especially beginners. A less competitive orienteer will generally be less concerned about the loss of time involved in stopping to help you.

If you get really lost and decide to retire then take a compass bearing and head in the general direction of a really major feature such as a road or the fields at the edge of the map. Stay on paths and tracks, and keep trying to diagnose where you might be. Keep an eye on your compass bearing to make sure that you keep heading in the same general direction and don't walk in circles. Once you reach a place that you can recognise, walk back to the finish area.





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Remember that you must report to the finish - and, in the case of electronic punching, the download station - even if you are retiring from your course. If you don't report to the finish (or download) and the organisers can't confirm that you've got back safely then search parties will be sent out which is a waste of time if you have got back safely - you will not be popular!

Punching/Timing systems

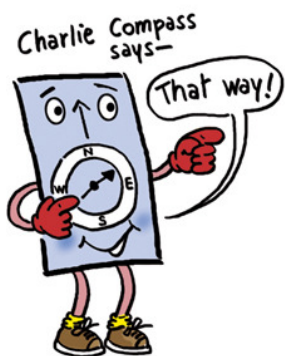
Each control point includes a way of enabling competitors to prove that they have visited that control. There are two different systems for doing this.

In one system each control has a pin punch, which competitors use to mark the appropriate box on their control card (a piece of paper marked with boxes where the pin punches are recorded. Each pin punch has its own particular pattern of pins, so the marks in the boxes on a competitor's control card show which controls he or she has visited.

Most clubs now use electronic punching. Each control has an electronic box and competitors carry electronic control cards, generally called "dibbers". When a dibber is inserted into a control a time is recorded. When this information is downloaded at the finish you get a complete record of which controls you visited at what times. This can be very helpful when learning where you made mistakes and when discussing your route with others.

Results of races are recorded on club websites and can be viewed in several ways. Simple results give a listing of positions and times.





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“Splits” give details of the time taken between each control point.

“Splits Browser” shows on a chart how you performed against others on the same course and is very useful to show where you did well or not so well. It is VERY rare for anyone to be fastest all the way around the course – everyone makes mistakes.

“Routegadget” shows your route on a map, against other runners. You can simulate a head to head race and see where you overtook people and which routes other people chose to take. Often you will realise that there were other options you did not spot on the day, a useful learning exercise.

Summary

Enjoy your run by using and developing your navigation techniques.

Enjoy being outside and getting exercise.

Talk to others after your run and compare routes, you'll learn a lot and meet all sorts of people.

Look at the results carefully and learn from them, always try to improve your orienteering speed by a combination of good accurate navigation as well as running.

