

Orienteering Permanent Course at North SeaTac Park

WHAT IS ORIENTEERING?

Orienteering involves the mind and the body. Checkpoints (called “controls”) are marked on a highly detailed map, and your goal is to identify and execute the best route between controls, using only map and compass.

Orienteering courses are usually set in a pleasant forest environment and you set your own pace. You can treat orienteering as a highly competitive race of navigational skills and physical speed or as a hike through the woods with the added fun of finding controls. Orienteering is usually an individual effort, but it is common to see groups or families hiking around an orienteering course together. Fitness and experiencing the outdoors come naturally with this sport.

HOW DO I NAVIGATE?

First, orient the map. Maps aren’t meant to be held like books, with north always at the top. Instead, orient the map to match the terrain. You can do this by simply observing what you see. If you see a lake in front of you, then turn the map so that lake is in front of you on the map as well.

As your orienteering improves, you can orient your map with a compass as well. To do this, turn your map so that the blue magnetic north lines are parallel and run the same direction as the floating needle in your compass.

Second, thumb the map. Find your location on the map and put your thumb there. It seems simple, but it’s very important. As you move through the park, move your thumb as you go. See an intersection? Move your thumb. See a big bend in the trail? Move your thumb. You should fold your map smaller so that your thumb is always on your location.

Finally, choose a route. While advanced orienteers do use a compass to orient their map and occasionally to shoot bearings, a lot of orienteering relies reading the map and choosing a route. Look at the checkpoint that you are going to find. What looks like the most efficient route? Or, what route do you think you can confidently execute? What features will you see along the way? A big grassy field, or bend in the trail? Keep an eye out for these features as you go, keep your map oriented, and keep moving your thumb... then you’ll be orienteering!

WHAT IS A PERMANENT COURSE?

A permanent course is an orienteering course that can be done anytime, and is typically beginner-level in difficulty. A regular orienteering meet uses orange and white flags that are present just for a day. A permanent course has red and white controls painted on 4x4 wooden posts set in the ground.

HOW DO I DO A PERMANENT COURSE?

1. Find the magenta triangle on the map and begin there; this is the start. The two concentric circles on top of it mark the finish.
2. Choose a course from the Control Descriptions sheet. These control descriptions will tell you in which order to find the controls. You may also create your own course if you like, and find controls in a different order. Course lengths are measured as the crow flies, from control to control. Your route will be longer.
3. Navigate to the first control and each successive control until you arrive back at the finish.
4. When you arrive at a control, there will be a number AND a letter. The number is printed on your control description sheet, and will confirm that you’ve found the correct control. The letter is NOT printed on the control description, but you may write down this letter on any piece of paper to prove that you visited the control.
5. Have fun!

These permanent orienteering courses were designed and installed as a Boy Scout Eagle Award Service Project by Ryan Breseman,, Boy Scout Troop 579, Kirkland, WA.