Landholders guide to orienteering

What is orienteering?

Orienteering is a sport that combines running/walking with map reading and navigational skills. It involves navigating through the bush, parks or streets with the aid of a specially produced map and sometimes a compass. The aim is to locate checkpoints (controls) on various natural or man-made features along the way, such as a boulder or track junction.

The sport attracts people of all ages, from under 10 to over 80, with varying levels of skills and fitness. Courses are set to take account of the ranges in ages and abilities. The shortest courses may take as little as 10-20 minutes to complete, while the longest courses may take 1-2 hours.

Areas used for orienteering range from urban parks to bushland, schools, campuses, state forests and farms. The first step in holding an orienteering event is to consult and agree with landowners and then make a detailed orienteering map. The orienteering club that commissions the map will consult with the land owners to establish whether there are any areas on the map that should be out of bounds to orienteers.

Bush orienteering generally has a variety of terrain detail i.e. not be too steep or completely flat. Open forest provides for the best running conditions, although forest with some areas of thicker undergrowth may also be used.

Dense vegetation such as rainforest, heath or swampland is generally not suitable for orienteering. Neither are areas dominated by thick, scratchy bushes such as lantana.

Orienteering clubs seek out areas that provide navigation challenges. These include bush with rock features, areas of complex contours such as sand dunes, and campuses with a range of different buildings or complex streets and urban landscapes.

Orienteering is a navigation sport

Orienteers make choices about the best way between control points. In many cases this is along a path, and in some cases (in a park, forest or field) a direct cross-country route is taken which will be unique, i.e. usually not more than one person follows the same route exactly off path. Each event offers different courses and mostly at a different location, so competitors do not follow where they went at previous events. Areas are rarely used more than once per year.

An orienteering course is a short event. Competitors do not eat on the course, do not leave behind litter and don't stop to boil a billy or alter the environment.

Orienteering NSW and its clubs

Events in NSW are conducted by ONSW's affiliated clubs. The number of competitors ranges from 20 at local club events to 200+ at state level, while the annual NSW Championships generally attract more than 300 participants. At major national events (conducted in NSW roughly every 3 years) numbers can grow to more than 800.

Infrastructure

Orienteering events are conducted from a central location, the assembly area, where cars are parked and registration of competitors is conducted. This area has to be accessible to conventional cars and is a factor in determining whether an area is suitable for orienteering.

The event *Finish* is generally located in the assembly area for spectator viewing while the event *Start* may be some distance away. Some tents are generally erected in the assembly area to provide shade and shelter for officials.

Orienteering events are never exclusive use – the public is free to wander around the areas where orienteering is held, including the assembly area and start. Possible exceptions to this could include competing events that present safety risks such as car rallies, equestrian events or mountain biking events.

Most assembly areas are located near public toilets. If not, portaloos, or for some smaller bush events, basic pit toilets are used.

Orienteers start at intervals to prevent competitors following each other. They will visit a selection of controls – usually between 10-30. It is unusual for two orienteers to run or walk together. It is very rare for any two orienteers to follow exactly the same route from start to finish at an event. Thus, orienteering events do not generally create paths.

For the event, nylon orienteering markers (control flags) are hung from bushes or suspended from aluminium stands. These are placed in position the day before the event. Electronic timing devices are attached to the stands. Water is supplied to competitors in containers at control sites or accessible sites such as along tracks. This equipment is collected at the conclusion of the event.

What access is required?

If a property is assessed as being suitable for orienteering and agreement between the landowner and Orienteering NSW is reached, the mapper will require access over several days or longer. The organisers will then need to visit the property prior to an event to determine a suitable assembly area and to assess and mark control sites. They will also return just before the event to position control flags.

On the day of the event, competitors will come, compete and depart. All orienteering events on private land stipulate on the map that access is only given for authorised orienteering events and that right of entry outside this time is not allowed.

Generally, once a map is produced, ONSW would like to continue to have access to the land for at least 5 years. Wherever possible, an

orienteering area is not used more than once a year to avoid competitors becoming too familiar and to ensure any impacts are minimised.

At each event, new courses are set and different control sites used to provide different challenges for competitors. If the land has multiple access points, then different assembly areas are used for each event.

Property protection

Orienteers depend on the goodwill of landowners in gaining access to properties. Orienteers are instructed to be mindful of infrastructure such as fences and to always ensure that gates on farms are left as they are found. We also try to ensure that animals do not get frightened or unduly disturbed. Events are organised to avoid critical times such as lambing and calving to also ensure that animals are not disturbed.

Smoking and fires are not allowed at orienteering events. Dogs are also not allowed at events in case they cause a disturbance to stock and native wildlife. All rubbish is collected and removed at the end each event.

Orienteering maps show areas that are out of bounds. These include residential property, areas that are off limits to the public, garden beds, environmentally sensitive areas, sites of cultural significants etc. Crossing out of bounds areas leads to disqualification. The symbols for out of bounds are specified by the International Orienteering Federation and are known to all orienteers, either from past experience or by beginner instruction.

The Orienteering Code of Practice sets out clear parameters for organisers and participants to ensure all property is respected and left as found (or in a better condition).

Environmental protection

Orienteering NSW has an environmental code of practice that covers area selection, course setting, access and parking, infrastructure and competition rules (e.g. out of bounds areas) to ensure that environmental factors are integrated into event planning and management for all events in the state. An environmental impact assessment conducted by independent consultants in 2012 (co-funded by the ACT government) found that for control sites "any observed changes in the environmental condition resulting from Orienteering are temporary only and that the sites recovered to their original condition in a short time." The areas of most impact for bush events are around the finish and parking areas. This is not an issue for urban events.
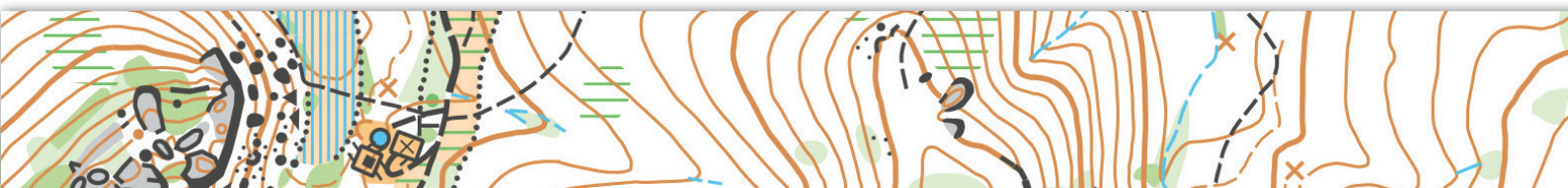
Production of an orienteering map

The map development is the most expensive and time-consuming aspect of orienteering. Standard topographic maps at a scale of 1:25,000 do not provide enough accurate detail for orienteering. Orienteering maps are made from LIDAR data (which locates hills, valleys, cliffs, roads), aerial photos and publicly available maps.

Additional features such as vegetation, watercourses, boulders and termite mounds will then be added via extensive and detailed fieldwork by an experienced orienteering mapper. Once this fieldwork is completed, the map is then drawn on a computer, using special orienteering drawing software.

We aim to have maps as accurate and up-to-date as possible so that competitors can feel confident that the map truly reflects what they see on the ground. Man-made features and some natural features change over time. To keep the navigation fair, orienteering maps are updated before most events.

Public liability insurance

Authorised orienteering events conducted by Orienteering NSW and its affiliated clubs are covered by the national $20 million public liability policy of Orienteering Australia. This policy covers all aspects of the sport, from map making to event organisation. The counter parties to this policy include any land owner or lease holder of property on which orienteering is conducted, including private individuals and government organisations.

State and national associations have also taken steps to inform and educate event organisers about the need to assess potential risks and to eliminate or minimise these wherever possible. Orienteering has not had a claim made against it in the 25 years since taking out this policy.

Safety

Event organisers are required, under Orienteering NSW's Organiser Rules, to take into account any hazardous features of the area and ensure that competitors avoid such areas. In adverse weather conditions (e.g. extreme heat or cold), competitions may be canceled or shortened.

All orienteering event organisers must manage risks in accordance with ONSW Rules. At a minimum, they must provide a first aid kit, ensure all starters return to the finish, and have their mobile number on the map.

Complaints

If you believe the conduct of an orienteering event or the behaviour of orienteers is not as described in this brochure, please contact the Organiser of the event (as shown on the ONSW website's Event Calendar) or Orienteering NSW's Administration Officer (see contact us on ONSW website).

Further information

Additional information about orienteering and event organisation may be obtained from Orienteering NSW, PO Box 3379, North Strathfield 2137.

Ph 02 8736 1252 or email admin@onsw.asn.au or visit our website: www.onsw.asn.au

Local Contact: