



# Summer Orienteering

## Thinking on the Run

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**O**rienteering summer series are in full swing right around the country. It's a glorious time of year, when daylight saving (in most states) allows us to enjoy a good run after work as the day cools.

For dedicated runners whose image of orienteering is of "nerdy" types fiddling with a compass, here's the good news: many of the summer series (especially in Sydney, Melbourne and large country towns) are simply a run around a suburb – no compass required.

The run takes in the best bits – the parks, reserves, bush tracks, fire trails, harbour foreshores, etc. – to ensure the workout is aesthetically pleasing too.

For example, take the Sydney Summer Series ([www.sydneysummerseries.com.au](http://www.sydneysummerseries.com.au)), held each Wednesday afternoon from 4:30-7:30pm. One week you might be running along the Luna Park boardwalks, taking sweeping views across to the CBD and Sydney Opera House from beneath the Harbour Bridge, and negotiating the up and down of Kirribilli and Lavender Bay – a workout for the eyes and body!

The next week might feature a speedster's course on the very flat surrounds of Sydney Olympic Park. Then you'll get Pennant Hills, which is almost all bush track with lots of

climb, meaning running (or walking – there is a separate category for walkers) will be slower than usual, something you'll need to account for in your planning.

After a week on the open playing fields of Meadowbank, you may then be in the inner west, taking in gentrified Pyrmont or Glebe's mix of federation homes, foreshore and light

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rail. The pre-Christmas run is usually on one of the Mosman maps – again, there's plenty of climb, but there's also the chance for a refreshing swim afterwards.

The task is usually to get to as many controls (the orienteering term for checkpoints) as you can in any order in the time allowed, which ranges from 45-60min depending on the series.

The controls are worth 10, 20 or 30 points.

They are clearly marked on the map, and you're also provided with a clue sheet, so spending time planning your route before setting off is important to maximise your score. Some series allow unlimited planning time, some allow just two minutes, and others none at all.

You get to keep the map (see the sample the opposite page) as part of your entry fee, which, at less than \$20, compares favourably with running-only series or corporate runs.

The fastest runners will cover up to 10km on flat courses and perhaps no more than 8.5km on very steep courses, the latter commonplace in the northern suburbs of Sydney.

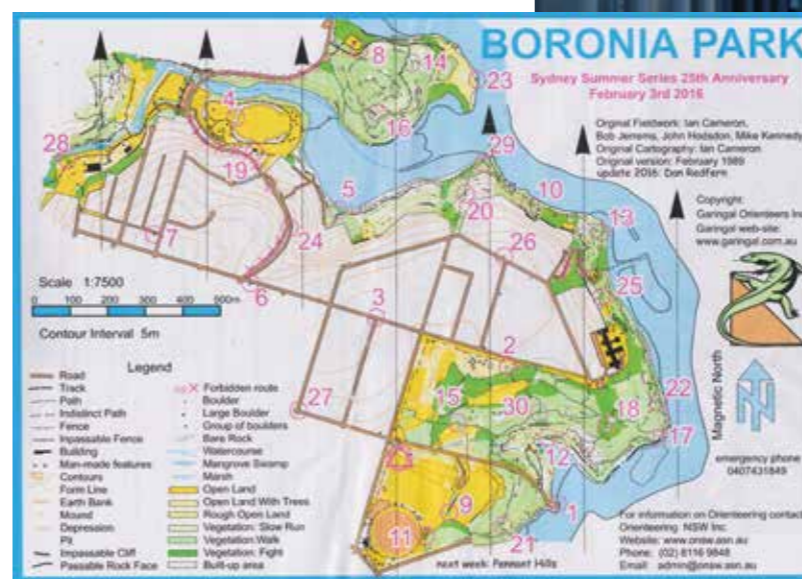
The best thing about summer orienteering is discovering new areas to run. Yes, the reality is you're likely to run close to work or home; but in discovering these other places, you have expanded

your options by a hefty percentage.

All orienteering events are open to the public, and someone from the organising club will be happy to take you through the basics.

Orienteering NSW gets around 200 entries each week, the vast majority being regulars who love the mental logistics as much as the physical workout. Orienteering has often been called cunning running for

The Sydney Summer Series 25th anniversary map, showing a course featuring a great mix of street, park and bush.



just this reason.

For serious runners, you needn't worry that reading the map will consume too much time and leave you way off your PB. Beginners (and, for that matter, experienced orienteers) always make the odd mistake on course; it's how you react to adversity that determines the outcome.

Think of it as a cross-training activity and a form of interval training: run hard to the control, quickly study the route to the next control, and then set off again.

As you become familiar with street orienteering, you'll weave reading the map with running and improve your score and your kilometre rate.

For those formerly inactive people who got into running via parkrun or Couch to 5k, summer series orienteering also takes your mind off the fact you have to run for 45min.

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Curiously, the 45min in an orienteering event seems to tick down so quickly. I have since found this to be a fascinating reverse psychology motivator; because you're engaged in reading the map and trying to maximise your score each week, the 45min really does come around much faster than you realise.

Likewise, if you've done some adventure racing, learning to read even a



Australian Junior World Championships representative Nicola Blatchford in action at Sydney University



Elite New South Wales orienteer Andrew Brown in action at the UWS Bankstown Campus

straightforward street orienteering map is fantastic navigation practice.

For those who wish to try “proper” orienteering, the jump from street to bush can be daunting, as this is where you need to know how to use a compass to go cross

country in an area where they may be no “handrails” (i.e. tracks, fences, fire trails, streams, etc.) to guide you.

The bush also offers a whole new world of adventure and wonder, as you'll often see kangaroos, native birds and lizards and might not see another competitor for 5-10min. You are fully immersed in the forest.

Now, from what you have read so far, orienteering may sound more like a recreational pursuit than a serious sport. Let's put that to the test.

Hands up if you can run 1km in five minutes? Okay, that's most of you.

What about maintaining that pace and doing 12km in an hour? Okay, some of you.

Now add in about 500-600m of climb. I see your numbers are dwindling.

Now make it through a European forest

with limited visibility, the odd marsh, plenty of rockfaces to negotiate and maybe the odd single track. Those of you still with your hands up might be a national cross country, trail or fell running representative.

Now – and here's the clincher – you have only a map and a compass to find your way (no trails, no little red flags, no bunting, no spectator barriers), and you have to find the controls in order! So you can't go to number two until you have found number one.

Can you do that? If yes, you are an orienteering world champion – averaging 5min/km for all of the above.

As you can imagine, a slip-up here or there can make a big difference to your placing, regardless of your fitness or ability. A professional golfer who has 17 pars and a triple bogey will spend the night cursing the one bad hole rather than reflecting on the 17 good ones.

Orienteers are the same. Post-race discussions are around route choice and “splits” (the time for each leg of the course).

In both golf and orienteering, you never have the perfect round or run. As a runner, you don't constantly set new PBs; but the pursuit of it (along with the scenery) is what always brings you back – so come along and embrace a run like no other. 🏃

### For more information...

...check out these websites:

- [www.onsw.asn.au](http://www.onsw.asn.au)
- [www.sydneysummerseries.com.au](http://www.sydneysummerseries.com.au)
- [www.orienteering.asn.au](http://www.orienteering.asn.au)