

Orienteering – A Guide for Land Managers

This guide has been compiled to provide land managers with an insight into the sport of orienteering to assist them in making decisions on access and the provision of facilities within the principles of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Orienteering is managed in Scotland by the Scottish Orienteering Association. This body is a non-profit, voluntary national governing body of sport affiliated to sportscotland.

Orienteering is a competitive, running sport which generally takes competitors off paths and tracks and into unfamiliar terrain. The sport does not involve vehicles of any description, although permission may be sought from the land owner by event officials to take on or two of their own vehicles into an area to allow equipment to be placed at starts, finishes etc.

The preferred terrain types for orienteering are: mature forest and woodland which competitors can run through, dune areas and open moorland. The more undulating and broken the ground the better.

The sport is a running sport at its competitive level with the top competitors undertaking a significant amount of training to enable them to race competitively.

The Scottish Orienteering Association does not manage the 'mountain marathon' type of running sport such as the Karrimor International Mountain Marathon and similar 'adventure' type events.

Special orienteering maps are produced of suitable areas for competitions. Ordnance Survey maps are unsuitable as they do not show the required level of detail for accurate navigation.

As these maps are expensive to produce and update, permission is always requested from land managers for orienteering competitions to take place, and then for each individual event or organised activity such as training.

Should there be any areas deemed out of bounds due to nature conservation or land management operations such as lambing or ground nesting birds then these can be marked on competitors' maps and the courses planned to avoid them. These areas can also be marked off on the ground with tape and competitors advised before the competition. Similarly if there are any boundaries which should only be crossed at gates or stiles then existing ones can be used or temporary structures built. This can also be marked on the competitors' maps if requested.

Natural hazards such as dangerous crags are also marked on the competitors' maps, and if necessary, taped off on site with warning tape.

A variety of courses are planned to provide a technical (map reading) as well as physical challenge. The courses and competitors spread out over the area during the competition thus avoiding excessive impact on any particular part of the area. The courses can be from 12km for senior men to 1.5km for younger junior women.

The course involves navigating from the start, round a series of checkpoints which are marked on the map, to the finish, in the fastest possible time. The checkpoints are marked on the ground with a red and white flag on a metal post and are located on mapped features such as

boulders and knolls. Competitors may take whichever route they chose to get between the checkpoints as long as they avoid any out of bounds or other restricted areas marked on their map.

Courses are planned to comply with the appropriate technical standards and also to follow environmental good practice. In environmentally sensitive areas, Scottish Natural Heritage and other environmental organisations such as the RSPB are consulted, and their advice acted upon, to ensure the sport has minimal impact on the environment.

In order to stop competitors becoming familiar with areas, areas tend to be used at varying intervals and / or have different start and finish locations used at each event so that different courses can be planned for each event.

A variety of courses are planned of different length and technical standard which as well as providing an appropriate challenge for the competitor, can if necessary, spread the competitors out and reduce the impact on any specific compartments.

Numbers attending orienteering competitions can vary from 20 for a local evening training event, to around 600 for a Championship event and as many as 3,500 for the bi-annual Scottish International 6-Day Orienteering Event.

The sport is not very spectator friendly as the presence of spectators in the competition area could give away control locations to competitors. With very few exceptions, spectators are not allowed into the competition areas but are kept in the finish arena.

Unlike cross-country or hill races, competitors do not start together. Each competitor is allocated a start time over a period of time, usually 2 hours, when they start. This prevents following during the competition and also reduces the volume of traffic trying to get to the car park for a specific start time.

All competitions organised in Scotland by the SOA and its member clubs are registered with the British Orienteering Federation in order that their public liability insurance covers the competition.

Most organised competitions are scheduled well in advance to allow time for the map to be produced, the courses planned and the event publicised.

For all events there has to be some thought given to facilities. For a small evening training event a small area for parking will suffice. For larger events a field or similar area for parking, toilets and a finish arena are usually provided. The provision of these and other facilities can be agreed between the land manager and event organiser.

Orienteers have an excellent record in clearing up after events.

Ensure the event organiser fully understands any restrictions or concerns on other factors such as where dogs may go and under what conditions, what happens if damage is inadvertently caused to a parking field, etc.

Major orienteering competitions, especially those over 2 or more days can bring visitors, often outwith the summer period, into an area with the resultant economic benefit.

The SOA encourages its member clubs to enter access agreements with land managers on access to areas for orienteering. Organisers and course planners are always happy to meet and discuss event infrastructure, course design, location of checkpoints and any other matters concerning the use of the area.

For further information or guidance contact:

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