



Greater Vancouver Orienteering Club

www.orienteingbc.ca/gvoc/

Navigation 101: Don't Get Lost!

by Ted St.Croix, Thomas Nipen and Richard Vurdela

Navigation is one of the key factors that separates adventure racing from other ultra endurance events. As the sport grows in popularity many Race Directors are 'raising the bar'. Courses are becoming more physically challenging and this is true of the navigational component of races. More races offer very challenging rogaine (score orienteering) sections, as well as an increasing number of races are run on unmarked courses.

The Greater Vancouver Orienteering Club is lucky to have several members that compete at national and international levels. I've tapped into their knowledge (specifically for this article; Ted de Croix and Thomas Nipen) for some helpful tips to make your race more enjoyable and make you more competitive.

1. **Basic Knowledge: The starting point**

Reading the map: Everything starts and ends with the map. If you are not familiar with various terrain features both on the map and in their natural beauty, this is the place to start. Reading terrain takes practice, there is no substitute for being out there.

Taking a compass bearing: This is another basic building block. Lots of information is available. grab your compass and practice.

Orient your body: Turn the entire body, not just your wrist, so you are facing in your intended direction of travel.

2. **Basic Route Finding: Easy concept, really hard skill!**

Route finding (as with a street map) is a matter of reading the signs and knowing when to change direction. Select your route such that you have a safe attack point and handrails to follow to get to the attack point. Practice, practice, practice!

Handrails: Features that run parallel to your direction of travel such as trails, rivers, cliffs, etc.

Attack point: Prominent feature near the control point. The place to begin the fine orienteering.

Catching features: Features that run across your direction of travel beyond the control point.

Oops, you've gone too far!

Aiming Off: If this means something to you, great! If not, I need to have something to talk about if we are ever asked to write another article!

3. **Move at the speed that you can read the map: Getting lost super quick does not help!**

This one is important. The only movement that counts is the one that is taking you to the checkpoint. Navigation errors occur when you lose contact with the map. In theory, if you always know where you are then you can't get lost. Here are some tips to keep you in touch with the map.

Short and frequent: Glance at your map repeatedly but with short duration in order to obtain an image of the map. Staring at the map requires you to stop and is inefficient. Redundancy checks

are important in order to confirm you are where you think you are. Maps are not always accurate so you need to check against multiple features.

Read Ahead: Map read ahead such that you know what is coming up rather than relocation when you “stumble” upon a feature. If you run until you stumble upon a feature, you then have to stop to figure out which feature is on the map. If you plan ahead and know what is coming up, then you can be much faster and smoother and “flow” with the terrain.

Always available: In order to stay in touch, your map and compass need to be readily available. It sounds obvious but if you have clipped it to the back of your pack, it's like leaving them behind.

4. **You have got to know when to hold'em and know when to fold'em.**

Everyone gets lost sometimes!

Thomas Nippen: “Often, during a leg I become a little bit unsure of where I am. Instead of correcting it right away, I delay it, hoping I will hit some large feature that will tell me where I am. Usually, this large feature never comes, and my slight unsureness turns into, I have no clue where I am! The key is to fix the error as soon as you become unsure.

All great navigators/orienteers go through an internal program that begins the moment they lose touch with the map.

Slow down: Slow your pace so you can take in more information about your surroundings. Look for significant features and match them to your map. The sooner you do this the easier it should be.

Back out: If this doesn't help it may be necessary to back out to the last know point. Accept the fact that you're human and not a walking GPS. A few minutes at this point can save you 20 or 30 minutes of team frustration.

As with every discipline in adventure racing, the key is practice. Most racers train 5 or 6 days a week paddling, biking, running and weights; yet rarely practice the element that is used throughout the entire race. To build and hone skills it is necessary to get out and train – often! For the three of us that means at least once a week and much more during the race season.

Incorporating some simple strategies can improve your performance, reduce team frustration levels and enhance your outdoor fun!

Ted is a really fast old guy. Thomas is a really fast young guy and Richard has a lot of gear