

## Coaching Tip – Attack Points

Quite often one of our GAOC juniors will come to me frustrated because he couldn't find one of the controls on his course, or found it after spending 20 minutes searching the area. He'll tell me everything he did, but almost always leaves one of the most important things out. Something so important, that all I have to do is ask, "What did you use for an attack point?" and he instantly knows why he couldn't find the control.

When we teach orienteering above the beginner level, we teach that you must go by C-A-R. That is, Control – Attack point - Route. Each of the 3 steps is equally important. But many times, the orienteer forgets to use an attack point to navigate to the control site and it's common to pay for that skip with a time-consuming error.

So, what is an attack point anyway? Attack points are features that are near your control feature but easier to find. In fact, it's almost like stepping back one level of difficulty because an attack point for an Orange course control will be the same difficulty as a Yellow course control point. An attack point for Green or Red course control will be the same difficulty as an Orange course control point. If you're on the right course, navigating to an attack point should be a snap.

So, how does it work? Remember a couple of weeks ago, I said that no feature is sitting out there all by itself, that there is always something nearby? Well, some of those nearby features can be easier to navigate to than going directly to your control point. Those easier to find feature can help you find your control. Maybe the control point on your course is a boulder on the side of a hill. The hilltop is easier to find, right? Navigate to the hilltop (attack point) first, then finding the boulder is just a short compass march away. Or maybe your control is a small spur near a trail bend, so the trail bend will make a good attack point. And the next one is close to a fence corner. In fact, if you look for them, it's not uncommon to find 2 or 3 good attack points for any control point above the beginner level.

So, going by C-A-R, let's do this step by step:

1. Control - the first step is to identify your control point - You just punched #5, so you're going to #6 and, checking the clue sheet and map, you see #6 is a rockface on the other side of the ridge. The clue sheet says it's 1 meter high and the code is 109. Now you know where you are going.
2. Attack point - the 2nd step is to find an easier to find feature nearby - You study your map for bigger or linear features in the vicinity of #6. You see the reentrant the rockface is in (control enlargement), you see a reentrant junction about 50 meters above it, and you see that the top of one of those reentrants forming the reentrant junction is just past a trail junction on the ridge. You decide to use the trail junction as the end of one of your leg segments (learned about those last week!), and decide to use the reentrant junction as the attack point for your control #6.

3. Route - 3rd step is to decide on the best route to your attack point. It's important to remember that, when planning your route, you must have the attack point as the end of the 2nd to last leg segment. The last leg segment goes from the attack point to the control point. So, you study your map and see a couple of routes to the attack point, and chose the one that takes advantage of the trail junction above the reentrant for the end of your 3rd to last leg segment, so you can go right from there to the attack point at the reentrant junction.

Okay, I agree that sounds a little complicated. Here's a little "homework" that should help you get used to using attack points. Pull out your maps for the last couple of courses you ran. Sit down and mentally re-run each course, but go by C-A-R and for each control, put an "A" by each attack point you find, then pick the attack point that you think is the best for you, and circle that "A". Then plan a route to the attack point you circled. Do that for every control on the course. Then take a map from another course and do it again. By the end of the 2nd course, you should be clicking off those attack points pretty fast. Then, ask yourself - would I have been faster if I'd navigated this way? I bet the answer is a confident, "Yes!"

It's always a good idea to have a training goal for every course you run, even if it's just for fun. Next time you orienteer, make your goal to pick an attack point for every control. Remember, just go by C-A-R. And see if your navigation doesn't get a lot more efficient and fun.

Let me know how you do!

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