

Coaching Tip – Collecting Features

Last week we talked about Catching features that will stop you if you go beyond a control. But what about before you get to a control? Are there features to guide you into a control? Yes, there are and they are called Collecting features. Looking for collecting features is a bit of advanced map reading, but should be started at the Orange course level. Orange is a great level to start really getting into more complex map reading, and of course it's essential for the upper course levels.

The use of collecting features is a technique that requires not only precision map reading, but an understanding of combining features into travel avenues that can keep you from drifting off course. Some collecting features are fairly simple "stay between" situations such as "If I stay between the trail and the stream,.. " "If I stay between the 2 reentrants,.. " or "If I stay between the hilltop and the line of cliffs..." But they can also be a series of features that guide you in, not really your check-off features, but maybe a reentrant system or line of ditches that act as natural funnels to get you where you are going.

The difficult part about collecting features is realizing the difference between convergent and divergent feature systems. Convergent features will eventually come together and guide you to a specific small area. Divergent features spread out as you follow them and aren't very good as guides. You don't want to choose to follow a divergent system.

So, how do you tell convergent features from divergent features? Imagine you're at the base of a large reentrant system, or better still find such a reentrant group on one of your O maps. You're at the bottom, remember. Look at the map, does the reentrant start with a wide bottom sweep and come together to one contour line bend at the top? Or does the reentrant start low with a small outflow and fork into many small reentrant tops? The first is convergent. No matter where you are in the reentrant, if you go up, you wind up at one place. But the second example, the one with many reentrant tops, is divergent. It goes to many places. So if you're following a reentrant, or any feature system, to a control, be sure you get the convergent one. You want to go to a specific place.

Oh, and you might notice that if you are at the bottom of a reentrant and you see it becomes convergent at the top, notice that if you were at the top, it would be divergent going down. Hmm, that's interesting for route choice possibilities, huh?

So, when you are looking for collecting features to guide you into an attack point or a control, or even along a leg segment, look for "stay between" features or convergent feature systems and use them to get you where you want to go.

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