

## Coaching Tip - Scoping the Map

Everyone loves pre-printed courses on maps. No hunkering down in front of master maps, no copying circles and numbers, just pick up the map and go - a real time saver! Or is it?

At the GAOC meet at Joe Kurz, and several previous ones, when you signed up, you were given a "clean" map of the area. "Clean" meaning a map without a course printed on it. Other than ask for a map case and noticing there were a lot of pretty colors on the map, what else did you do? You should have spent some time looking the map over before you went over to the Start table and master map area to clock out to copy and run your course. Scoping-the-map time isn't always available, sometimes the maps have pre-printed courses. But when you are given a "clean" map to look at before you run, don't waste the opportunity to scope it.

So, what is scoping the map and why is it so important? Well, first, you might want to know whether the terrain was hilly or flat to decide what shoes to wear, or if it's rocky so you can tape that weak ankle. Or what scale the maps is, to see if you can squint your way thru the course or if you're going to have to dig out those reading glasses. But also there's a competitive advantage to scoping the map.

Whenever the serious orienteer is given a map, either a "clean" one or one with a course on it from a previous use, he'll be much better prepared to do well competitively if he looks the map over and learns what's on the map.

1. Scale & Contour interval - Most orienteering maps are either 1:10,000 or 1:15,000 scale and there's a definite difference in the detail of the map for each scale, as well as the size of the map symbols. Look also for the bar scale on the map and transfer it to a piece of masking tape on the edge of your compass' baseplate so you can measure distances quickly under competitive pressure. Also, notice the map's contour interval. If it is 3 meters, you know right off the terrain is flatter than if the contour interval is 5 meters, because the mapper is going to choose the one that allows him to best represent the shapes of the terrain. Your choices of around-or-over could change depending on the steepness of the terrain and it's a good idea to evaluate terrain steepness vs. your physical shape and make some parameters for yourself before you start.

2. Magnetic North lines - Orienteering maps are drawn to magnetic north rather than geographic north. That means the north lines drawn thru the map can easily be used with an orienteering compass without extra plotting. Also, those north lines are a set distance apart and can help a lot with your distance estimation and if you know your pace, you can remind yourself of the distance estimation lengths for your pace for that scale. Orient the map, look around you, get a feel for where you are on the map and the direction and orientation of the map to the terrain before you start.

3. Look for the legend - One pet peeve I have is a map without a legend. Sometimes a

mapper will leave it out or make it so tiny as to be unreadable under competitive conditions so he can put more map on the map sheet. If there's no legend on the map, get someone to go over the map symbols with you before you start. Even if there's a legend, it's better not to have to worry about searching it for an unknown symbol while you're running thru the forest trying to concentrate on your navigation. And be sure you know what each symbol looks like in the terrain.

4. Boundaries and main linear features - Look for areas that are off-limits (usually overprinted red or purple stripes) so you don't violate those private or dangerous areas and also look along the edge of the map for indistinct areas where you might drift off the map without realizing it. Give yourself an overview of where the main roads and water bodies are, so that you have mentally split the map into quadrants that have distinct edges to wake you up whenever you see them and let you know if you're moving out of one area into another. Remind yourself that all those linear features are terrific catching features and/or relocation helps.

5. Water features - Look at the water levels of lakes and streams in regard to surrounding contour features, and think about how those features and seasonal streams, dry ditches and gullies might change from the way they are mapped for "normal" water levels. Judge how they will be different that day based on how wet or dry the weather has been lately. Also, note which way the water in streams should be flowing, especially in relatively flat areas where the flow of water will help you determine uphill from downhill.

6. Intricate trail & contour networks - Identify complex areas to be navigated carefully, places where a flow of features might give you good collecting features, areas where there are few distinct features where you will need to rely more heavily on your compass, and areas where trail systems are so complex they might slow you down more than speed you up.

7. Map Colors - Map colors not only give you the type of feature but also sometimes the size or hazards involved.

*Blue* - water features - look for variations such as dashed areas for marshes and dotted or dashed seasonal streams.

*Black* - rock features and man-made features - the thicker the black symbol, the larger or more distinct it is, note the difference in the various sizes of trails and the extent of the rock features. Will these be navigational helps? Impediments to footing?

*White* - normal, open woods - remember, it's not just the color of the paper, it's information.

*Green* - thick vegetation - light/dark shades & patterns denote level of density, lighter colors mean easier transverses and darker green is fight. Note how to get around dark green areas and where green lines show vegetation obstacles such as felled areas or low dense vegetation.

*Yellow* - open land - shades & patterns denote how open, whether it's mowed or dotted with trees or rough ankle-twisting fields.

*Brown* - natural non-rock features and contour lines – as with black, thicker brown lines mean distinct or deeper gullies or dirt banks. Contour lines let you know the steepness, elevation differences, shapes and type of terrain.

Scoping the map doesn't have to be done at the meet site itself, if you have a copy of the map from a previous event held there, you can study it before you go. Or when you arrive, if you discover the maps are pre-printed with courses, ask the meet director to post a "clean" copy of the map so that you can look at it. However, you need to do it, you'll be much faster if the terrain isn't a big surprise to you when the start whistle blows.

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