

# Orienteering for Scouts and Scouters

Wikipedia defines the sport of Orienteering as follows:

**Orienteering** is a group of [sports](#) that requires [navigational skills using a map and compass](#) to navigate from point to point in diverse and usually unfamiliar terrain **whilst moving at speed**. Participants are given a topographical map, usually a specially prepared [orienteering map](#), which they use to find [control points](#). Originally a training exercise in [land navigation for military officers](#), orienteering has developed many variations. Among these, the oldest and the most popular is [foot orienteering](#). For the purposes of this article, foot orienteering serves as a point of departure for discussion of all other variations, but almost any sport that involves racing against a clock and requires navigation with a map is a type of orienteering.

So why should we be promoting Orienteering with our Troops? Because it is a **fun, challenging and very useful sport** that gets our scouts and scouters out in the woods. I think that there are three critical skills needed by anyone who spends any significant time in the outdoors: Wilderness Survival, Wilderness First Aid and map reading and I believe that being good at map reading significantly reduces the chances that you will need to use the first two skills!

Living in the Atlanta area makes it incredibly easy to participate in organized Orienteering. The Georgia Orienteering Club ([gaorienteering.org](http://gaorienteering.org)) puts on over **20** orienteering meets from September to May of each year. A significant number of these meets are in or near the metro Atlanta area: Red Top State Park, Sope Creek CRNA, Gold Branch CRNA, Sweetwater State Park, Palisades East and Palisades West CRNA, Don Carter State Park, Chattahoochee Bend State Park and **Bert Adams Scout Reservation (February 18, 2018)**. The cost to participate is about \$10 to \$13 per person. The only equipment you need to bring is a basic baseplate compass and a whistle. The club members gladly give beginner instruction before each meet.

Orienteering is a great combination of physical conditioning and mental skills. Just being fast running through the woods won't do you much good if you are **LOST!** It is a sport that can be enjoyed by just about all ages. Generally there are multiple courses offered at every meet that range in difficulty from beginner to expert and also vary in length.

**If your scouts got the Merit Badge at summer camp and think they are experts in orienteering, they should come to a meet and find out how challenging it is to complete a real course!**

If you want additional info beyond the Merit Badge book, I would highly recommend 'Discovering Orienteering' by Charles Ferguson and Robert Turbyfill. It covers all aspects of orienteering and includes a section of skills and activities for teaching orienteering. It is an all around excellent book and well worth the investment. It is available on Amazon.

Here is a reproduction of the Q and A section from the Georgia Orienteering Club's web site:

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## Beginner Questions

### 1) What is orienteering?

Orienteering is a cross-country running sport, demanding physical and mental fitness. The sport emphasizes map reading and the ability to make quick decisions under physically challenging conditions.

Skill and experience can take the most ardent competitor into international competition, meeting orienteers from around the world. Although Orienteering is a highly organized sport, families and individuals may participate on a non-competitive basis as well. Map Hiking is non-competitive, requiring the same skills, but you can enjoy the forest scenery at a more leisurely pace. Whether you are Orienteering or map hiking the challenge is the same and the courses are organized similarly.

## **2) What do I do at a meet?**

You use a map and a compass to complete an Orienteering course. It usually takes an hour or two, and takes place in a natural setting like a park.

## **3) Do I need any experience?**

No. We have courses for all skill levels, and we have beginner instruction at every meet.

## **4) Do I have to run? or Do I have to walk?**

You may run or walk. We attract all levels of Orienteers, from casual walkers to competitive elite experts.

## **5) How much does it cost?**

Cheap Thrills. The entry fee is \$7 for club members and \$10 for non-members. And if your going out in a group and just need another map, that's just \$3/map. Also, most parks also have a parking fee or usage fee that you have to pay. (State Parks charge \$5 to park).

## **6) Is there training available?**

We have training available at every local meet, just ask. It is free, and is given by our volunteers. Show up at 10am for training.

## **7) What should I wear?**

For beginners, wear long pants. Long sleeve shirts are also popular. Hikers usually wear sturdy walking shoes. Runners usually wear running shoes. Otherwise just dress for the weather.

## **8) What kind of compass do I need?**

Beginners don't need a compass. It does sort of get in the way when you are trying to learn to read a map. But if you "just gotta have one," bring a baseplate compass. The compasses that you "sight" through are not widely used for Orienteering.



## **Group Questions**

### **1) Can you come teach my Scouts/Club/Friends to orienteer?**

It is much easier for us if you bring your group to one of our meets. We get this request all the time, and there is no way that our small group of volunteers can satisfy everyone. We have instruction available at every meet.

### **2) Can we Orienteer as a group?**

Yes, within reason. Groups larger than 2 quickly become a leader and followers. If the followers want to learn to navigate it's not much fun. Very young groups (Cub Scouts, Brownies) are much better off if an adult accompanies them, and in that case the group can be larger.

### **3) How much does it cost for a group to Orienteer?**

If the group uses one map, then it is the same as for an individual. If they want extra maps, then each additional map within a group costs \$3.

#### **4) Why do we need to call (or email) you before we bring a large group to Orienteer?**

So that we can have enough maps and volunteers to support you. It's very upsetting when we run out of maps :-)

#### **5) How can I help GAOC with my group?**

Tell us that you are coming, and how many you are bringing. When you get to the meet, have one person in charge of handing out the registration forms, making sure they are filled out correctly, and collecting the money.

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### **Club Questions**

#### **1) You guys are volunteers? You must be crazy.**

You too, can be a crazy GAOC volunteer. Spend your weekends away from home. Get leathery wind-burned skin in the winter and heatstroke in the summer. Always have a poison plant rash and insect bites. Carry water jugs into the woods for people to drink. Put out the controls before everyone else arrives and pick them up after everyone else goes home. Get lost trying to find obscure control sites.

Spend a lot of time in the woods. See parts of Georgia (and the world) that others never see. Make a lot of friends. Gain self-confidence. Learn something new. Learn to think while exercising. Have fun. Become a very good navigator.

#### **2) Who makes the maps?**

We make the maps. You too, can make maps for the GAOC. See the question above, except that making maps is expensive, and it's not easy, and it takes a lot of time.

#### **3) Will you make a map of my favorite Park/School/Backyard?**

The quick answer is No. The real answer is that we have several years worth of projects that we would like to do, and your project, even if it is the greatest place on Earth, would have to wait. Also not every park or school or Boy Scout reservation is suitable. And it costs money. We do have GAOC members who contract their services to make maps. If you're interested, contact the VP of Maps, Kevin Haywood.

#### **4) How do I volunteer?**

We always need volunteers. Start coming to meets, introduce yourself to the regulars, and we'll put you to work. You don't have to be an expert Orienteer to volunteer. Just let us know.

#### **5) Where does the money go?**

GAOC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Our income goes into more maps, meet equipment and supplies. The overwhelming cost of running an Orienteering club is in the maps and they are very valuable. The GAOC maps are copyrighted and may not be copied. When you do copy them, you are stealing from our club.

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### **Intermediate Questions**

#### **1) What are the color-coded courses?**

This is how we cater to people of different skill levels and ages. Each course is a step up in difficulty and/or

length. The following table gives the details for our local meets, NOT FOR AN A MEET. Typically, we offer White, Yellow, Orange, Green and (sometimes) Red courses at our local meets. Distances are "straight-line." Actual course distances depend on the individual's route choice.

Course	Difficulty	Distance *	Comments
White	beginner	~ 3K	controls on trails or marked routes
Yellow	advanced beginner	~ 3K	controls just off trails or marked routes
Orange	Intermediate	4-5K	contour features are introduced, trails no longer primary route choice
Brown	expert	~ 4K	short short expert, rarely seen at a local meet
Green	expert	5-7K	short expert
Red	expert	6-8K	medium expert
Blue	expert	8-10K	long expert, rarely seen at a local meet.

## 2) When do I move up from one course to another?

A difficult question to answer. If you can average 15/20 minutes/km you can probably move up, but remember the 3 hour time limit, and ask yourself how long you can realistically concentrate on your navigation. The biggest mistake we see is trying to do too much too soon.

## 3) What should "MY" colored course be?

See the above question. For the local meets, it is whatever you are comfortable with. For an A meet, it is your age-group class, see the A meet questions below. We do not do age-groups at the local meets, just courses by color.



## Competitive Questions

### 1) How do I compete?

Practice, practice, practice. Get in shape. Come to a bunch of meets. Volunteer. Set some courses. Do bag pickup. Travel to away meets. etc. etc.

### 2) Do you actually run?

Crazy as it may sound at first, yes we do. It's a lot of fun, really. And we hardly ever get injured. Of course, running through the woods is a lot different than running on a road.

### 3) How fast do I need to be?

Not very fast to compete at the local meets. Ideally, a course should challenge you equally mentally and physically. Actually, most people can run a lot faster than they can Orienteer. Anything less than 15 minutes/km at a local meet and you can be very competitive. At a national meet you need to be doing 10 min/km or less to place well in your age group. In the elite classes it's more like 7-8 min/km. For comparison, a 50 minute 10K is 5 min/km.

#### 4) What are the different types of meets?

See Special Events for a detailed description. A "regular" orienteering meet is point to point, take the controls in order, fastest person wins.

A Score-o leaves the order up to the competitor. Controls have a point value. Most points in shortest time wins.

A Night-o is just like regular Orienteering, it's just in the dark, and, yes, you bring a flashlight!

The Bubba Goat is a mass start, following allowed, skip one control, beat the time limit race.

There may be other special rules from time to time.

#### 5) What's an A meet?

A United States Orienteering Federation sanctioned A-meet has all the color courses, age-group awards, and pre-marked maps. The courses are more carefully set and tested multiple times for accuracy. And you can earn national Ranking points at A-meets.

#### 6) What is USOF? Should I join?

If you join [USOF](#) you get the magazine "Orienteering North America", a national Ranking, and a discount at A-meets. If you plan to compete outside Georgia it's probably a good idea.

Here are the Merit Badge Requirements

### Orienteering merit badge requirements



1. Show that you know first aid for the types of injuries that could occur while orienteering, including cuts, scratches, blisters, snakebite, insect stings, tick bites, heat and cold reactions (sunburn, heatstroke, heat exhaustion, hypothermia), and dehydration. Explain to your counselor why you should be able to identify poisonous plants and poisonous animals that are found in your area.
2. Explain what orienteering is.
3. Do the following:
  - a. Explain how a compass works. Describe the features of an orienteering compass.
  - b. In the field, show how to take a compass bearing and follow it.
4. Do the following:
  - a. Explain how a topographic map shows terrain features. Point out and name five terrain features on a map and in the field.
  - b. Point out and name 10 symbols on a topographic map.
  - c. Explain the meaning of *declination*. Tell why you must consider declination when using map and compass together.
  - d. Show a topographic map with magnetic north-south lines.
  - e. Show how to measure distances on a map using an orienteering compass.
  - f. Show how to orient a map using a compass.
5. Set up a 100-meter pace course. Determine your walking and running pace for 100 meters. Tell why it is important to pace-count.
6. Do the following:
  - a. Identify 20 international control description symbols. Tell the meaning of each symbol.
  - b. Show a control description sheet and explain the information provided.
  - c. Explain the following terms and tell when you would use them: attack point, collecting feature, catching feature, aiming off, contouring, reading ahead, handrail, relocation, rough versus fine

orienteering.

7. Do the following:

a. Take part in three orienteering events. One of these must be a cross-country course.\*

☐ Note to the Counselor: While orienteering is primarily an individual sport, [BSA Youth Protection](#) procedures call for using the buddy system. Requirement 7a can be completed by pairs or groups of Scouts.

b. After each event, write a report with (1) a copy of the master map and control description sheet, (2) a copy of the route you took on the course, (3) a discussion of how you could improve your time between control points, and (4) a list of your major weaknesses on this course. Describe what you could do to improve.

8. Do ONE of the following:

a. Set up a cross-country course that is at least 2,000 meters long with at least five control markers. Prepare the master map and control description sheet.

b. Set up a score-orienteering course with at least 12 control points and a time limit of at least 60 minutes. Set point values for each control. Prepare the master map and control description sheet.

9. Act as an official during an orienteering event. This may be during the running of the course you set up for requirement 8.

10. Teach orienteering techniques to your patrol, troop, or crew.

**If you have any further questions, you can email me (Brian Wright) at '[bdwright1947@gmail.com](mailto:bdwright1947@gmail.com)' or Eric Flamm at '[eric@flammga.us](mailto:eric@flammga.us)'**

**Please try it. It really is a lot of fun as well as a very great way to improve your map and navigation skills!!!**