

A Short Guide to Permanent Course Orienteering

About Orienteering

Orienteering is finding your way, usually on foot but sometimes by bike, from one marked point on a map to another. At the top level, it is done against the clock and is very competitive. However, it is also a recreational activity, providing extra interest to a walk in nice surroundings.

The Map

An orienteering map is large scale, usually 1cm on the map representing 100m on the ground (1:10000) or 75m on the ground (1:7500). It contains detail which is not shown on Ordnance Survey maps - for example, the density of trees and undergrowth in green, open and lightly wooded land in yellow and ditches and marshes in blue. An orienteering course is marked in purple: the start is shown with a triangle, the control sites are marked by circles, and the finish is two concentric circles, or a circle over the start triangle.

Permanent Orienteering Courses

Around the country, there are a large number of POCs. Each POC has a set of permanent posts, sited at places marked on a map which is usually available locally, and via the local orienteering club's website. In a POC, there is a post at the centre of each marked circle. The post is inscribed with a letter, which corresponds to a letter on the map, and a number which you can record to prove you've found the post.



Starting out

If you are new to orienteering, you need to get used to the map. The easiest way to do this is by keeping the map **orientated**. This means that North on the map – shown with arrows – faces North on the ground. You can use a compass or GPS to decide where this is, or, in good weather, shadows in the middle of the day also point North. Keeping the map orientated, put your thumb so that it is behind your position on the map and walk around some nearby features. Each time you change direction, North the map again by turning it round, keeping your thumb on your current location. Once you can do this, you can look for some controls.

Middleton Woods Permanent Orienteering Course

The POC on Middleton Woods is best accessed from the Ilkley Lido swimming pool car park at GR 119485 is accessible from two points. The course has some easy posts – see below – but it can be tricky when the bracken is up, from mid-June to November, and it is often muddy. It is very pretty when the bluebells are out in April/May. Children will need help to get going, especially in the West wood. As this involves crossing the road, you may rule this out. The road is not very busy, but it is a potential hazard. On the course, the difficulty of the posts is indicated by stars – more stars means harder to find.

Introducing children

Start from the swimming pool car park and walk East to G. Explain how to keep the map Northed (North arrows facing away from the Wharfe valley and the sun, if visible) and walk with them round a couple of posts (eg G and H) pointing out map features on the way. They can then have a go, in small groups, at finding, say, A and I, meeting at K. Then give each group a challenge, possibly timed, of finding as many posts as they can in the East wood, including those they've already found, meeting back at the car park. But warn them that some are much harder than others: look at the star ratings on the map. After that, with older children, they could try the posts in the West wood, but watch the road. The easiest strategy is to give them a time limit, say an hour, and tell them to get as many posts as they can in the time. Both woods are quite good for beginners as they are bounded by fields or houses, and heading down hill will get to one of the roads.

Courses on the 1:7500 map

Easy from Ilkley Lido: N, F, K, A, H, G

Fairly easy, a bit further: G, K, I, A, B, E, F, N

Makes you think; crosses the road: F, H, I, A, C, D, J, L, Q, X, Z, S, T, Y, N

The ultimate: get round all the posts in any order in the shortest time.

To find out more

Nearby POCs include Danefield and Ilkley Moor, Roundhay and Temple Newsam Parks, Penistone CP near Haworth. For more details, including maps, and for more information about orienteering, see:

In Airedale and Wharfedale, www.aire.org.uk

In Britain, www.britishorienteering.org.uk