

## Orienteering – A Treasure Hunt In the Woods by Bob Burg, Orienteering Unlimited

**Think how magical maps are!** If you make sense of them, you can find your way to a place you've never visited, never seen, never even heard of. What magic! You can get from where you are to **wherever** you want to go – whether a store crosstown or the third moon of Jupiter. But for many people maps remain a mystery, a confusion of direction and features, left and right, north and south. How can we ever get from here to there?

Enter Orienteering to our rescue. No, **not** the old version of compass bearings and pace-counting from your childhood (introduced to America by a compass company no less!), but as an international map-navigating sport classically held in the woods, that makes maps fun again.



*4 year old TJ Running a Beginner's Course at Harriman State Park*

Starting off individually, participants navigate on foot through unfamiliar terrain, guided only by a detailed topographic map, their wits, and sometimes a compass. Keeping the map oriented to the terrain, you must find a sequence of specific features (e.g. hilltops, boulders, corners of fields, stream junctions) indicated by circles on the map. Arriving at each feature, you find a distinctive orange and white flag that looks like a triangular box kite (called a control flag), accompanied by a pin punch to use on your scorecard (or increasingly an electronic timing box to insert an e-chip into) to prove you found the feature. Since how to get from flag to flag is up to you, each orienteer chooses which route is the best match for their navigational and physical skills. Timed from start to finish, competitors afterwards animatedly compare their cumulative times and route choices.

**Best of all**, reading and navigating a map while on the move makes orienteering a sport where using your brain and focusing your attention is at least as important as athletic prowess, where the race goes not always to the swiftest, but to the smartest, the most aware and accurate and efficient.

The beauty of orienteering is that **you can participate any way you want** – from leisurely family recreation to hiking with a purpose, as a way to stay fit in stunning natural settings to challenging cross-terrain competition – on skis, bikes, or horseback, in canoes and kayaks (even wheelchairs), at night with head lamps, in 24-hour team endurance competitions, with pre-schoolers or seniors, individually or as a team, in classrooms and school grounds, corporate centers and city parks, in all sorts of formats from individual to mass starts. Orienteering events always offer a range of courses – from short distances along trails for beginners to long cross terrain distances that challenge the most accomplished athletes.

Done as a map navigating sport, orienteering develops so many **skills you can use the rest of your life**. In addition to lifelong confidence navigating on maps, orienteering intimately attunes you to the environment, making you raptly aware of your surroundings, builds competence and self-confidence progressively, helps you anticipate and weigh choices before you even reach them, problem solve on the fly, choose a course of action that suits your particular skills, quickly recognize errors of judgment and find your way back on course, and done in groups can enrich team-building and cooperative pooling of skills. The list of applications and benefits and potential programs goes on and on.

## Applying Orienteering to Any Subject Matter or Objective, With Any Age Group in Any Setting

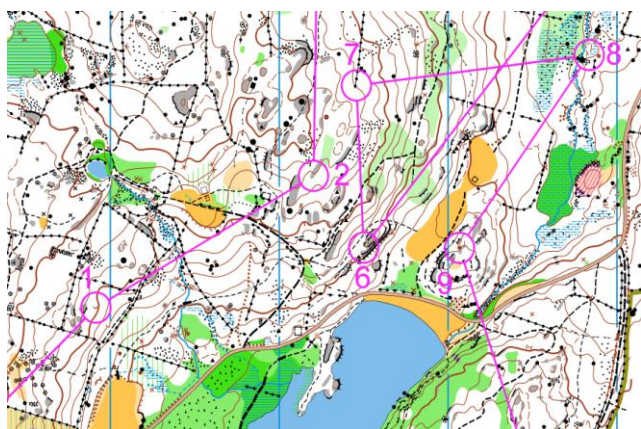
Since the goal is to find a specific feature on a map where the “treasure” is, **how can you prove you’ve found it?** While international orienteering uses pin punches and electronic boxes, really any item (e.g. a question to be answered, information to be gathered, an activity to complete, a photograph to take, an object to retrieve from that feature), can also prove you were there. This makes it possible to apply orienteering to any subject matter, any group objective. The only limit is your imagination – all you need is a reasonably accurate map and lots of curiosity.

When you take a look around you, maps are present everywhere in our lives: road atlases, weather maps, political maps (changing every week), tax and survey maps, maps of the night sky, maps of the shopping mall, blueprints and floorplans of buildings, theater and stadium layouts, trail maps in parks, corporate flowcharts, assembly instructions that come packaged with products. How often do we MapQuest, give someone directions, or try to follow theirs? Maps are everywhere. And yet strangely, how rarely do we ever teach a child how to read a map, let alone navigate by it! No wonder so many of us grow up “map-challenged,” increasingly addicted to obeying our GPS while having no clue where we are.



*OU’s Founder Ed Hicks Teaching a Scout Group*

Many of those who attend their first event find themselves seduced for life. The design of Orienteering welcomes all level of participation and is extremely family-friendly, blending a wonderful mix of features. Who doesn’t love a treasure hunt? Who receiving this article doesn’t love exploring great natural treasures? Who doesn’t want to stay active and fit? Orienteering can be the perfect opportunity for staying enthusiastic and enthralled the rest of your life.



*Section of an Advanced Orienteering Course*

*Based upon decades of orienteering and teaching experience, the staff of **Orienteering Unlimited, Inc.** has a passion not only for orienteering, but also for delivering programs and staff trainings, customizing activities in which progressive mastery flows effortlessly, tapping into the natural enthusiasm of a treasure hunt. They utilize a wide range of orienteering formats that can be applied to any topic or objective, enliven any population in any setting, indoors or out. OU also supplies orienteering equipment, as well as distributing mapping software that can be installed in an entire computer lab. They also produce state-of-the-art maps in both orienteering as well as trail style, which can be incorporated into programs, brochures, kiosks, and websites. Visit [www.orienteeingunlimited.com](http://www.orienteeingunlimited.com)*

For a range of takes on orienteering, from elite athletes to family fun, here is a sampling of YouTube’s to view:

**What is Orienteering:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-H9Tm2cuSU>

**Juniors Orienteering:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb3zSkVFrSw>

**Going Off-Trail:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FswpkQhe0J0>

**Family Sport:** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drmwBZ\\_ntB8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drmwBZ_ntB8)

**Shadowing Orienteer on 2 Legs:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWxTlyFEFqc>