

Appendix F: Environmental Good Practice

1. British Orienteering Environmental Policy

British Orienteering has adopted an Environmental Policy that outlines its commitment to the conservation of the natural environment and to ensuring that all orienteers recognise their responsibilities towards the land. This Appendix supports the policy by providing guidance to event officials and competitors about how to address environmental issues that may arise.

Further information can be obtained from the British Orienteering website at www.britishorienteering.org.uk. Where specific advice is needed on conservation or access issues, the Environment Officer, can be contacted via the British Orienteering Office.

2. Background

Orienteering is at its best when carried out in intricately contoured forests, woodlands and moors. These are increasingly rare and under pressure from recreation and development. This puts the best and often most beautiful places in jeopardy. The British Orienteering Federation is committed to nature conservation and welcomes legislation that has increased the protection of the most special places whilst enhancing responsible access. The protection of Britain's landscape and natural heritage, also safeguards the sort of places we orienteer in. Orienteers recognise that, whilst the sport is well organised and quiet, and involves no machines (apart from transport to the general location), our activities nevertheless have a potential impact on the land, for instance through the passage of feet, or disturbance to wildlife.

Orienteers will encounter far fewer environmental issues and problems if they hold events in areas that are not protected. In some cases, such as Forest Enterprise or Woodland Trust plantations, we will be positively encouraged. However, there are many places where orienteering and the conservation of special areas can co-exist, and the responsible pursuance of permissions to run in such areas is to be encouraged.

We believe that, by championing exemplary standards in protecting the environment during the organisation, timing and management of orienteering events, significant adverse effects can be eliminated. However, we are determined to further our excellent reputation for taking pains to clear up after competitions, leaving land in at least as good a state as it was found, and support research that will help identify best practice.

Orienteering has many human benefits, but represents one of many pressures on wild areas, so it is essential we recognise our responsibilities and make every effort to minimise our impact on nature whilst playing our part in improving the environment in which we run.

We must understand that, whatever our personal beliefs concerning the impact of orienteering on the environment, we come from a position of weakness. The power vested in the statutory conservation agencies is backed by strong legislation (recently further strengthened in the Countryside and Rights Of Way Act 2000) and they have a *duty to ensure that damage will not result from*

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operations carried out in protected areas.. All that we have to rely upon is the good will of officers and the public, and here we have more work to do.

The key to gaining (and re-gaining lost) permissions to run in environmentally sensitive areas is to start from a position where any arguments that we make in favour of our sport will be listened to. To get to that point, we must

- a. Understand the problem and
- b. Enter into partnership with the controlling body.

As soon as we get into opposing camps, we have lost. There exists a lot of good will towards our sport among the conservation bodies which we need to build on. The information in this Appendix, and the extensive guidance that backs it up, provide a framework, the use of which should help in improving our success rate with planning permissions. Careful planning and reference to the guidelines will save event officials a great deal of wasted time lost through unsuccessful applications now, and in the future.

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3.1 Advice to Organisers

The Organiser's main areas, particularly the car park and assembly field, are those where environmental measures are more likely to be about public relations than ecology, but are no less important. Car parking and the impact of journeys and movements are one of the biggest concerns about orienteering expressed by all the agencies and land owners.

Land owners will normally know of environmental sensitivities, special sites and wildlife in relation to their land. Bodies such as English Nature, the Countryside Commission for Wales and Scottish National Heritage may need to be involved or consulted when finalising event details. Many clubs have already built up an understanding with the relevant officials. In cases where problems have arisen it is often due to a misunderstanding of what the Sport involves. The guidance in this Appendix should help to address many of the objections that can be raised. The British Orienteering Environment Officer can provide advice and help in this area.

Time of year - Consider the proposed location, timing and detailed restrictions so that the event is likely to have the least possible impact on the land. Seek to avoid areas where vulnerable features are known to exist. Avoid sensitive times of year. Many areas will have known closure periods, and clubs have successfully staged events outside of these periods over many years.

Litter - The image of orienteering as non-littering, and even as litter-gathering, is extremely important. Measures to contain and recover litter, such as plastic sacks on stakes and thorough scouring of the areas at the end of the event, should be provided for.

Gateways - Field parking in wet weather can lead to churned-up gateways and mud being carried onto the road. Consider a lorry load of gravel, chippings or other suitable material for consolidating the gateway area. Organisers should

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check the condition of the road after the event and, if necessary, arrange for the removal of any mud and debris.

Toilets - In seeking to minimise the impact of an event, portable toilet services that include the removal of all waste should be used wherever possible. If occasions arise when toilets have to be dug, permission must be sought from the land owner, and rules regarding such facilities checked with the local water company. In all such cases, dug toilets need to be situated well away from any surface water, and discretely situated.

Visitors - It is a continuing practice within orienteering to invite important visitors to view the Sport from close quarters. This has proved to be of incalculable benefit and the courteous and helpful reception of visitors has a high priority. Many of them will be interested in the environmental aspects of the Sport and will wish to visit the competition area. The Organiser will need to liaise with the Planner and Controller to arrange this.

3.2 Advice to Planners

The competition terrain is the focus of interest of conservationists. Environmental measures in planning should aim to lessen the impact of the event as seen by observers during the event (such as competitor density) and afterwards (such as marks of passage in the terrain).

Controls - It used to be considered a planning skill to keep the number of controls to a minimum. Environmental good practice may require more controls in order to spread the courses and competitors across the terrain (but see Sanctuaries and Livestock below).

Compulsory routes - Where compulsory, or obvious routes are used to channel competitors away from a restricted area, ensure that the ground can cope with the heavy use, and that the route is obvious.

Out-of-bounds - Areas notified as out-of-bounds, including all walls, fences, hedges and boundaries which may not be crossed, need protection against accidental competitor incursion by good reliable planning. This means that the best routes should naturally avoid the out-of-bounds areas. If there is doubt, place a control banner on the required route. If there remains any danger of incursion, OOB boundaries should be clearly marked (e.g. by tapes) and patrolled. With sensitive boundaries, such as walls and fences, it is worth checking them before and after the event, and rectifying any damage found.

Marshes - Studies show that marshy ground is the most affected and slowest to recover terrain in orienteering. It is advisable to minimise the compulsory crossing of such terrain. Marshy sites may still be used as control points, but at the edges and not the centre, and positioned so that runners approaching and leaving the site are not obliged to pass through the marsh.

New paths – Be aware that temporary trails may be created through vegetation. These will normally disappear quite quickly, certainly over a growing season. In areas frequented by people and animals a temporary trail could be consolidated into a path by regular treading in the weeks and months following the event. If

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such a possibility is likely and undesirable, block off the potential path with brushings or other material after the event.

Erosion – Descending and ascending steep slopes can cause erosion. Where this might be regarded as unacceptable due to the nature of the ground or the sensitivity of the area, unconsolidated sand dunes for example, consider adjusting the leg or the position of the control banner. Whenever control sites are on or adjacent to steep slopes, including pits, depressions, knolls, gullies, spurs and so on, give thought to the routes in and out before fixing the position of the banner. An adjustment of a metre or two may make a considerable difference to the potential for erosion.

Deer sanctuaries - If the competition area contains deer, they may be disturbed by competitors and take flight. This is a natural response for deer and their sensitivity to disturbance should not be overrated. Studies show that deer return to their normal haunts and base level of anxiety soon after an event. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the provision of one or more deer sanctuaries that deer can flee to during the event. There may be suitable places adjacent to the competition area. If not, provision might be made within the competition area itself by selecting a no-go zone and keeping all competitors out by suitable planning or declaration of out-of-bounds.

Livestock - If the competition area contains livestock, they may be disturbed by (or even disturbing to) competitors. Similar measures to those for deer should be considered but on a much smaller scale, since disturbed livestock tends to move only short distances. If courses have to cross fields with livestock, it is better to concentrate the courses across one end of a field so that the stock can congregate and remain undisturbed at the other.

Badger setts - The Badgers Act 1991 makes it an offence to damage a badger sett or disturb a badger in residence. The Act does not distinguish between the unintentional interference that might be caused by orienteers passing across a sett and the deliberate and serious measures directed specifically against badgers for various purposes. It is therefore good practice for active badger setts to be avoided in competitions. Crossing points and control sites should be selected so that runners are not encouraged to cross active setts. Mappers and Planners may recognise active setts using notes available from British Orienteering Office. Alternatively, the landowner may know of setts or the local Badger Protection Group (a list is held at British Orienteering Office) may be willing to give locations of setts in the competition area. It must be understood that Badger Groups will be reluctant to release such information unless they can be assured it will be held in confidence. For this reason Mappers should not label badger setts as such on orienteering maps. Nor should Planners mark out-of-bounds on the map or on the ground. The aim should be for competitors to compete in an area containing an active badger sett without being made aware of its presence.

Nesting birds - It is widely held that orienteers must cause disturbance and damage to ground- and low-nesting birds during their breeding seasons. This perception is not supported by objective studies. Therefore, there is not likely to be significant environmental value in volunteering general out-of-bounds

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restrictions during the bird-nesting season. However, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 lists a schedule of protected birds (such as Woodlark, Dartford Warbler). Orienteers are not expected to recognise scheduled birds but, if the event officials are notified of the existence of any such bird in the competition area, they should route competitors away from the nest sites so as to avoid unintentional offence under the Act. Where event officials feel the need to seek advice on nesting birds, they should consider approaching local ornithological groups. Considerable care should be exercised in making such contact; experience shows that such groups will have much knowledge about the locations of nest sites but will considerably overestimate their sensitivity to orienteers.

Out-of-bounds - Areas notified as out-of-bounds, including all walls, fences, hedges and boundaries which may not be crossed, need protection against accidental competitor incursion by good reliable planning. This means that the best routes should naturally avoid the out-of-bounds and that the competitors are able to recognise these without too much mental agility. If there is doubt, place a control banner on the required route. With sensitive boundaries, such as walls and fences, it is worth checking them before and after the event, and rectifying any damage found.

Litter - There is a potential for litter in the competition area and the Planner should take steps to avoid it. The most serious risk comes from separate description sheets, particularly those issued at the start. These are loose and liable to be dropped out on the course. They are clearly identifiable as orienteering material, and each time one is lost and later picked up by a non-orienteer, the Sport is at risk. The late issue of separate description sheets is not compatible with environmental good practice. Other potential litter arises from drinks stations on the course. Some competitors carry drinks for considerable distances before discarding the cups. The Planner might bear this in mind when positioning drinks stations: for example, it may be better to place the drinks at the start of a track run rather than at the end. A third but less serious form of litter is the control site tag. It is good practice for control collection to include bringing in the tag as well as the flag and punches.

Visitors - If visitors are invited to the event, it may be appropriate for them to visit a typical control site. This should be selected with care. It should be reasonably accessible and be a fair representation of the event, on typical terrain and with a typical frequency of use. The most likely comments that the visitors will make are that it is so quiet (they expect to see a good proportion of the number known to be at the event, not the one or two per minute average that even a busy control site has). These comments will stem naturally from observation of a typical event in progress. There is no need to "dress-up" the event or bias its image, to attempt to do so would be a disservice to the Sport. Visitors will need escorting by a responsible official, the more senior the better.

3.3 Advice to Controllers

The environmental recommendations above refer to specific measures that the Organiser and Planner can take and which the Controller may check as considered necessary. However, the Controller has a more important role from

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his or her position of overview; by looking at the event through the eyes of the public or through the eyes of the conservationist and recommending worthwhile changes. For this reason the Controller is often the person best suited to dealing with important visitors. At the other end of the scale, the Controller, whilst becoming familiar with the terrain, can remove the tags left from any previous event. Some Controllers carry a bag to take other litter but the value of this depends on circumstances.

3.4 Advice to Competitors

Travel to events - This has a major impact on both event planning and access permissions. We will all make our own decisions regarding our environmental responsibility, but we must do so in the knowledge that unnecessary car journeys are environmentally damaging. Consider using public transport or sharing cars with others where possible.

Do not litter – Not in the car park, nor in the assembly area, nor in the forest. Make sure your description sheet is properly attached to yourself or the map. Do not carry your mid-course drink hundreds of metres into the forest and then discard the cup; if you must hold on to the drink, crush the cup into your pocket and bring it back. Orienteering is renowned for being litter-free: let's keep it that way.

Do not shout – Orienteering is also renowned for being noise-free (except events with public address). The image of the Sport as one where the competitors go about their business without noise is well worth maintaining.

Crossing boundaries – If you cannot clear a wall or barbed wire fence with a single bound but have to think about climbing over, check the map carefully to see if there is not a crossing point nearby. And if you do have to climb over, avoid damaging the wall or fence as well as yourself. Remember that gates are best climbed at the hinge end. And if there is damage, report it to the Finish so that remedial work may be undertaken. If you open a gate don't forget to close it as it may be retaining livestock, even if it adds a few seconds to your time. The best advice is to leave gates as you find them – whether open or closed. If you are uncertain whether a gate has been left in the right condition, report that concern to the Finish.

Educate newcomers – Newcomers are unlikely to be aware of the provisions of these Guidelines. Since they are the most likely to make mistakes which may detract from the environmental image of the Sport, it is up to the experienced orienteers to go out of their way to help and educate newcomers.

Be environmentally aware – It is sometimes said that orienteers charge around oblivious to their surroundings. Even orienteers themselves often use such language to describe why they missed some control or other. But this is simply an example of gross overstatement for effect and 'missing' a control means losing no more than a few tens of seconds. The truth is that orienteers are perfectly aware of their surroundings, and that awareness is heightened by vigorous exercise.

When talking to non-orienteers draw out this point, mention those features of

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your run/walk which are not simply about the technology of getting from one control site to another. Perhaps you noticed a particular bird or animal, or species of tree. Perhaps you are concerned about the spread of Rhododendron. Perhaps you were impressed by the standard of husbandry by the landowner. Perhaps you just enjoyed the view.