

BRITISH ORIENTEERING

INFORMATION FOR

LANDOWNERS GUIDE

DECEMBER 2025



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Orienteering is a sport that relies on access to diverse landscapes, from woodlands and farmland to open moorland, parkland and urban spaces. We deeply value the support of landowners, tenant farmers, estate managers, and national conservation bodies who make this possible.

This guide provides everything you need to know about what orienteering involves, how events are managed, and how we work with landowners to ensure responsible, respectful access.



If you are a landowner and have any questions or concerns regarding orienteering activity on your land, please do not hesitate to get in touch with British Orienteering's Access Officer, Gracie Grant at ggrant@britishorienteering.org.uk

Orienteering Key Terms

Coloured course names – Organisers may refer to the courses by colour, indicating the difficulty and length of the course. This helps participants choose a course suited to their experience level.

Control – The checkpoints participants navigate between are called controls. During events, these are marked with a white and orange flag (see an example [here](#)).

Dibber/Punching – A dibber is a small piece of equipment worn on the finger. When reaching a control, participants ‘punch’ the electronic box by inserting the dibber to record their visit.

Electronic control box – A small device placed at each control that allows participants to register their visit electronically.

Event assembly – The central hub of an orienteering event, where participants register and access facilities such as toilets.

Line Course – Participants navigate the course in the specific order shown on the map. These courses are usually timed, with participants placed based on the time taken to complete the course by reaching all the control in the correct order.

Marshal – A volunteer stationed at key points (e.g at road crossings or out-of-bounds areas) to ensure safety and compliance.

Orienteering map – A specialised map, which is highly detailed showing specific features such as water, forest density and buildings. On an orienteering map, areas can be highlighted as out of bounds and prohibited to enter.

Permanent orienteering course – A course that remains in place permanently, typically marked by wooden posts with coloured plaques. These plaques are shown on a map, which can be accessed online or at a designated location such as an information centre.

Score course – Participants can navigate the controls in any order and earn points for each one visited. A score course will have a time limit, with points deducted for exceeding it.

Virtual (GPS) Orienteering Courses – Often referred to as Maprun. These courses are digital and accessed via a mobile device or tablet. Relying on GPS data to confirm location, they do not need permanent infrastructure. Maps are available to download via the free Maprun app direct to a device, or paper-based versions for use with the app via Go Orienteering and Club websites.

What is Orienteering

Orienteering is an outdoor adventure sport, where participants navigate between checkpoints (called controls) using a specially designed orienteering map. It is a non-motorised activity, meaning there is no need for vehicles or heavy equipment. An organiser may bring a small generator to power laptops or lighting.

Courses vary in length and difficulty, so participants will visit different controls depending on their course difficulty. There is no set route for participants to follow, which helps spread footfall and results in minimal environmental impact.



Orienteering Formats

Line course

Participants navigate the course in the specific order shown on the map. These courses are usually timed, with participants placed based on the time taken to complete the course by reaching all the controls in the correct order. These courses are often colour coded or split by age group to devise differences in difficulty and distance for competitors.

Score course

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Trail-O

TrailO provides an orienteering competition for people of all levels of physical ability, including those who are physically challenged and may be confined to wheelchairs. There are two types of Trail-O; PreO and TempO. You can find out more about Trail-O, [here](#).

What is Orienteering?

Orienteering Equipment

The Controls

The images below show a typical orienteering control. A control consists of an electronic box mounted on a stake, which can be inserted into the ground, attached to existing infrastructure, or placed on a freestanding base. Each control is marked with an orange and white kite, making it easily identifiable to participants.

As competitors reach the control, they will approach it as shown in the image. The participant, punches the electronic box, which records their visit and confirms that they have reached the correct location.



Event Assembly

The assembly point for the event may resemble the two images below. These examples illustrate the variation in size of the assembly point or event arena, depending on the scale of the event. The first image shows a small local event setup, while the second depicts a larger area used a British Championships. The size and layout of the assembly will vary based on the type of event and the expected number of participants.



Event organisers will seek permission for temporary infrastructure such as tents and signage. All infrastructure will be removed promptly after the event, with organisers ensuring the area is left clean and undamaged.

What is Orienteering

Participant Profiles

Depending on the type of event, there may be many different participant profiles. At smaller-scale, local events you will find a mixture of beginner and experienced orienteers, including small groups and families. For regional level events and up, there will be more experienced orienteers across the senior and junior categories.

Seniors

Seniors are orienteers over the age of 21.



Juniors

Juniors are anyone below the age of 21.

Families & Groups

Local level orienteering events will welcome families and groups to navigate the course together.

Working in Partnership with Landowners

British Orienteering is committed to working collaboratively with landowners to promote:

Responsible Recreation

- To ensure events are carefully planned to avoid environmental damage, and make sure participants respect the land. Clubs must follow best practices in land use and event management.

Education

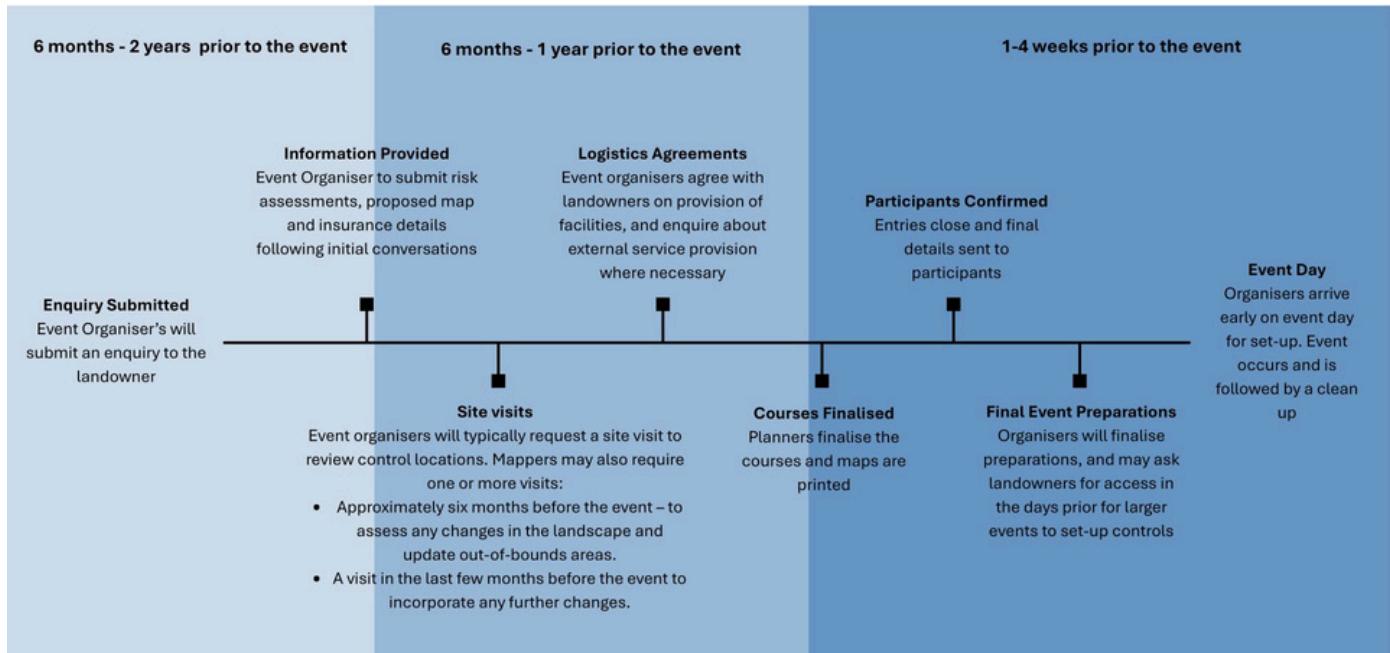
- Orienteering is a mentally and physically engaging sport that teaches valuable skills such as map reading and compass use. It also raises awareness of environmental seasons and encourages exploration of natural spaces that participants might not otherwise visit.

Health & Wellbeing

- With many people in the UK not meeting recommended activity levels, orienteering offers an inclusive and enjoyable way to get active. By supporting orienteering, landowners play a vital role in helping communities access the outdoors and improve their physical and mental health.

Orienteering Event Timeline - Guidance For Landowners

Below is a typical timeline for an orienteering event, showing key stages and what landowners can expect



Before the Event

Landowners can expect an organising club to be in contact with the following information:

- Proposed dates and times
- Estimated number of participants
- Maps showing planned routes
- Risk assessments for the event
- British Orienteering Public Liability Insurance details

The organiser will likely request a site visit, to assess suitability of control locations and analyse any changes to the landscape if the current map is outdated. Course planners design routes to avoid sensitive areas and minimise environmental impact.

The organiser will make necessary arrangements and agreements with the landowner regarding event day factors such as parking, toilets and external vendors if required.

Events are advertised and entries managed, in advance. Entry on the day is often not allowed, especially for larger events. This helps prevent unexpected crowds and ensures participant numbers are controlled.

During the Event

Event setup

- The organiser will request access ahead of the event to set up the controls around the course.
- The event arena will be set up to ensure access to all necessary facilities.
- Signage may be placed throughout the event to direct participants to key areas such as the start, toilets or water stations.
- Marshals will be stationed ahead of the event start.
- No vehicles or infrastructure are required unless agreed in advance. Some clubs may request permission to set up gazebos and club flags, particularly for larger events.

Participant activity

- Participants arrive at the site, at either a pre-agreed parking location or parking off site with arranged transport to the venue.
- Wave starts are often used to avoid overcrowding on the course and mass starts.

Spectators

- There are often limited spectators across the course area, as this can unintentionally lead the competitors to the controls, particularly over terrain courses.

Safety and stewardship

- For all major events, first aid is available on site.
- Final details emails are sent to participants with important information, including any Out of Bounds areas to be respected and other considerations from the landowner. These will also be reiterated throughout the event and shown on information boards at the Event Centre and at the start lanes.
- Marshals help manage areas of concern and ensure safety throughout the event.

After the Event

Event clean up

- The event organisers and volunteers will collect all controls from the course.
- All temporary signage and infrastructure will be removed, and the event arena will be restored to its original condition.
- Any litter will be collected and disposed of according to prior agreements.

Feedback

- Organisers welcome feedback from landowners, to improve future events and the overall event process.

As the National Governing Body for the sport of orienteering in the UK, British Orienteering recognises the vital role that landowners and land managers play in enabling safe, responsible, and enjoyable access to the countryside. We are committed to upholding the highest standards of land stewardship and partnership.

We aim to support landowners in achieving their strategic goals, whether that be encouraging families to enjoy the outdoors, promoting environmental sustainability or enhancing community engagement.



Respect for Land and Property

- Orienteering events will only take place with the permission of the landowner or managing authority.
- Organisers and planners will work closely with landowners to avoid sensitive areas, including livestock, crops or conservation concerns.

Environmental Responsibility

- Clubs and members must adhere to British Orienteering's Environmental Code of Conduct, which can be found [here](#).
- Courses are designed to disperse footfall reducing erosion and environmental impact.
- Biosecurity measures, such as clean footwear, are implemented to prevent the spread of invasive species or disease.

Leave No Trace

- Organisers are educated to ensure all controls, signage and temporary infrastructure are removed promptly after the event, unless agreed otherwise.
- The event area will be checked for litter or damage, with any issues reported and addressed immediately.

Safety and Risk Management

- A full risk assessment is required for every event.
- Event organisers must state the location of the nearest hospital within information made available for all those at an event.
- Marshals are deployed at key locations to ensure the safety of participants and the public.

Communication with Landowners

- Clubs and organisers will maintain clear communication with landowners before, during and after events.
- British Orienteering are available to support both organisers and landowners throughout the planning and delivery of events.
- Feedback from landowners is welcomed and valued, as we are committed to continuous improvement in how the sport engages with landowners.

Community Engagement

- Hosting orienteering events builds community engagement. Organisers are always grateful for landowner support and strive to build lasting relationships.
- Events help landowners connect with local communities and promote physical activity outdoors.
- In a time when access to outdoor spaces is limited, support from landowners is incredibly important to outdoor communities and orienteering.

Minimising Impact: Orienteering's Environmental Approach



Orienteering is designed to be a low impact sport, and British Orienteering's Sustainability Guide for Clubs gives guidance on how to promote environmentally responsible practices at events and within club operations.

How is Orienteering Low Impact?

- No permanent structures are required for events
- No digging or alteration of the land takes place
- Clubs are responsible for a sweep of the event site to ensure no litter is left behind
- Events avoid sensitive habitats and are respectful of seasonal restrictions (for example: nesting areas, SSSIs)
- Participants take varied routes to controls, which minimises footfall across land and limits the impact of activity

British Orienteering's Environmental Policy

Clubs must follow British Orienteering's Environmental Policy. This policy gives guidance to organisers and competitors on environmental considerations for when organising an event.

British Orienteering Environmental Policy

British Orienteering's Club Sustainability Guide

This guide informs clubs of practical advice on promoting sustainability across orienteering. Including actions to reduce the carbon footprint of participants and how to ensure waste is correctly disposed of and not left at an event site.

British Orienteering Club Sustainability Guide

British Orienteering Habitat Report

Ecology Resources released a report in 2024 which investigates the environmental impact of the orienteering. The report was created for an event which took place in April 2023, where approximately 2400 people competed.

British Orienteering Habitat Assessment Report - May 2024

See the conclusions of this report, on the following page.

Minimising Impact: Orienteering's Environmental Approach

The field survey concluded the orienteering event to not have any significant impacts upon vegetation throughout the land extents shown as Figure 1. Only two areas of trampling external to Yewbarrow Woodland SAC and SSSI were identified, which reflected recovery from new vegetative growth. The survey visits completed in April 2024 confirmed evidence of purple moor-grass growth, which is a species that typically occurred in the low-lying bog area. Most importantly, there was no evidence of newly established desire lines that could otherwise be used by other recreational users post the orienteering event.

The survey did have limitations that reduced the focus of the study. This related to the complexity of the site, confidentiality of data that could not be provided and the limited scope / methodology linked to the event. As such, the recommendations detailed below are given to improve upon field survey to enable for collection of data that can be used for monitoring of future events.

The recommendations below area also given to ensure the event is planned to avoid sensitive habitats across the site, and to factor in seasonal timings to avoid and minimise any future potential trampling effects.

FAQs

What is Orienteering?

Orienteering is an outdoor adventure sport that exercises the mind and body. The aim is to navigate between checkpoints (the controls) marked on a special orienteering map. There is no set route, so the challenge lies in choosing the best path between controls. In competitive orienteering, the goal is to complete the course in the quickest time. Orienteering can take place across a range of terrain, such as in forests, parks and urban areas.

How many people will attend?

Attendance varies depending on the level of the event. Entries will normally close prior to the event. Below are attendance estimations based on the type of event.

- Local level – 25 - 200
- Regional – 50 – 500
- National – 250 - 1000
- British Championships – 500-2500

How long will the event last?

An event will normally last for one day at any site. The amount of time required at your site will likely depend on the size and scale of the competition. Organisers' will be able to provide a timeline of the event to outline arrangements.

For Local and Regional Events, courses are likely to be open for participants to take part over a 3 or 4 hour window. Set up is likely to be around 2 hours prior to the event and 1 hour after the event. For larger events the event duration can extend to 6 hours, with additional time needed for set up/take down.

What happens with insurance? Do I need additional cover?

All affiliated clubs are covered under British Orienteering's public liability insurance when the event is officially registered. Organisers will provide you proof of insurance during the permissions process. No additional insurance is required by the landowner for the event to proceed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to sign any legal agreements or permissions?

Yes, British Orienteering require formal permission to be evidenced in writing. It may be a formal signed contract with clubs and association, or it may be a copy letter sent to a landowner confirming their consent.

Will the event damage my land?

Orienteering is a low impact sport. Participants spread out across the terrain and choose their own route, which minimises wear. Courses are also planned to avoid sensitive areas highlighted by landowners.

Out of Bounds areas can be clearly marked and respected. Any stock walls and fences that can only be crossed at pre-agreed or permanent crossing points are also clearly marked on the map for participants.

Events are covered by British Orienteering insurance, so in the unlikely event of damage, the organiser will report and resolve it.

What equipment is used during an event?

Competitors carry a map, an electronic timing device (a dibber), and a control description sheet. The course will be set out with the control boxes and flags. See an example, [here](#).

Upon landowner permission, clubs may wish to set up a tent for registrations and result downloads. At larger events, organisers may also use reusable tape or string to channel competitors at the start and finish.

Temporary bins and toilets may be required in the event assembly for competitors.

Will anything be left behind?

No, it is the responsibility of the organiser to ensure nothing is left behind. Any temporary structures must be taken down, and all litter removed. Rubbish must be bagged and disposed of as agreed with the landowner.

Can I restrict access to certain areas?

Yes, as the landowner you can restrict access to parts of your land that must go untouched. This will be marked with a special hashing on the map, and in some cases a marshal may be placed at a boundary if planners think confusion could occur.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will runners open gates?

Competitors will only use gates marked as part of the course. If gates are required to always stay shut, competitors will be briefed to ensure this. [British Orienteering Environmental Policy, section \(3.4\)](#) advises competitors to close any gates they open and report any open gates at the finish.

What if livestock is present?

If livestock is present and you permit access, competitors will be briefed to proceed with caution and ensure gates are closed behind them. This should also be reflected in the Organisers' Risk Assessment.

We are concerned about the levels of traffic around the course, what will the organiser do to ensure competitor safety?

Event organisers will ensure that a marshal is positioned at any road crossings which are deemed to be heavy with traffic or dangerous. When courses are planned for junior competitors, additional thought and care is taken over routes.

What will happen if the weather is bad?

Event organisers may cancel an event if the weather poses a safety risk, such as heavy snowfall, strong winds or flooding. Organisers will consult with landowners and communicate any changes promptly.