

Environmental good practice

1. British Orienteering Environmental Policy

British Orienteering has adopted an Environmental Policy that can be found at http://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/images/uploaded/downloads/governance_policies.pdf

2. Background

Orienteering is at its best when carried out in intricately contoured forests, woodlands, moors and other open areas. Access to such areas is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve as they come under pressure from both recreation and development. This puts the best and often most beautiful places in jeopardy. British Orienteering is committed to nature conservation and the protection of historic features, 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 wish to orienteer in. Orienteers recognise that, whilst the sport is well organised and quiet, and involves no machines (apart from transport to and from the general location and generators to power computers, etc), our activities nevertheless have a potential impact on the land, for instance through the passage of feet, or disturbance to wildlife.

Quite obviously orienteers will encounter far fewer environmental issues if they hold events in areas that are not formally protected. In some cases, such as Local Authority Parks, Forest Commission or Woodland Trust plantations, we are positively encouraged as part of the broader health agenda aimed at encouraging the population at large to get out into the fresh air and take more exercise. However, and despite many misconceptions, 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 good practice. Orienteering has many human benefits, but represents one of many pressures on the countryside, so it is essential we recognise and acknowledge our responsibilities and make every effort to minimise our impact on nature whilst playing our part in improving the environment and protecting the ecology of areas in which we run.

It is important that the sport is perceived as complementary to wildlife considerations and opportunities should be taken to describe it as a 'Green' sport or 'the Woodland Sport'. Many orienteers are environmentalist and volunteers with conservation bodies and they should take every opportunity to ensure that those they are working with know they are orienteers. In addition mappers and event officials see many creatures as they quietly go about their tasks and may well identify unusual flora. It is good policy to advise the local conservation groups of any such findings.

We must understand that, whatever our personal beliefs concerning the impact of orienteering on the environment, we come from a position of considerable weakness.

The power vested in the statutory conservation agencies is backed by strong legislation not least the Countryside Rights Of Way Act 2000 and they have a duty to ensure that damage will not result from operations carried out in protected areas. All that we have to rely upon is our good reputation and the good will of officers and the public. But we still have more work to do if we are to enhance our reputation.

The key to obtaining, retaining or regaining 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 open up a dialogue which invariable means face to face or at least telephone contact. A letter may introduce the subject but rarely is that sufficient in itself. For such a dialogue to have any chance of success we must understand the problems or any perceived problems, no matter how unfounded, and constructively work with the other party, effectively entering into a partnership with the controlling body. As soon as we get into opposing camps, we will have lost. There exists a lot of goodwill 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 provides a framework, the use of which should help in improving our success rate with planning permissions. Careful planning and reference to the Rules, Appendices, Competition Rules and Event Guidelines will save event officials a great deal of wasted time lost through unsuccessful applications, both now and in the future.

We must however bear in mind that it is far easier to lose a permission, than to gain one, and we must ensure that once we have the opportunity to run in an area we do everything possible to ensure that the way we then conduct ourselves leaves no cause for concern.

3. Environmental Good Practice

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 Natural England, the Countryside Commission for Wales and Scottish Natural 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. Where possible avoid sensitive times of year. Many areas will have known closed periods, and clubs have successfully staged events outside of these periods over many years. This issue is more difficult for clubs putting on a regular series of smaller events but Middle Distance, Sprint and Urban Races in parks, urban areas and in suitable sections of woodlands, forests and open landscapes can be slotted into programmes during particularly sensitive periods, for example when ground nesting birds are rearing their young.

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. If an area is already littered it is good policy to take before and after photographs to be able to demonstrate that the area was left in a better condition than we found it.

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, straw, wood chippings or other suitable material for consolidating the gateway area. For larger events metal track plates can be hired. Organisers should check the condition of the road after the event and, if necessary, arrange for the removal of any mud and debris. Warning notices of 'mud on the road' should be considered for other passing traffic.

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 or the Environment Agency. In all such cases, dug toilets need to be situated well away from any surface water, and discretely located.

Visitors - It is a continuing practice within orienteering to invite important visitors to view the Sport from close quarters and this should include the land owners/managers. This has proved to be of incalculable benefit and the courteous and helpful reception of visitors has a high priority. This 'meeting and greeting' must be given due importance and whenever possible should involve someone knowledgeable on environmental issues as many of the visitors 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 usually 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 is considered a planning skill to keep the number of controls to a minimum with route choice a major element of the sport. Environmental good practice may however require more controls in order to spread the courses and competitors out across the terrain (but see the section on '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 point on the required route. If there remains any risk of incursion, O-O-B 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. Photographs of pre-existing damage are advisable.

Marshes - Studies show that marshy ground is the most affected and slowest terrain to recover from our activities. It is advisable to minimise the crossing of such terrain.

Marshy sites may still be used as control points, but only at the edges and positioned so that runners approaching and leaving the site are not obliged or even tempted to pass through the marsh. In some

circumstances disturbance of marshy ground can have positive benefits for conservation by diversifying the age structure of the plant communities. However, this should only be considered with the support of land owners, their managers or advisory organisations.

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 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 especially in muddy conditions. It can also be quite dangerous. Where this might be regarded as unacceptable due to the nature of the ground or the sensitivity of the area, damp slopes or 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, platforms 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, and most will, 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. It is only constant disturbance over a prolonged period that has been found to cause them stress. 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. However, some of the best areas for deer to lay up in during an event are patches of dense vegetation such as thicket stage woodland or large areas of gorse which may be within the competition area itself.

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. Dogs must never be permitted into any event area where there is stock.

Badger Setts - Badgers are afforded special protection via The Badgers Act 1973 which 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 National Office.

Alternatively, the landowner may know of setts or the local Badger Protection Group (a list is held at British Orienteering National 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 significant disturbance and damage to ground and low-nesting birds during their breeding seasons. This perception is not supported by objective studies. Unfortunately many land managers and local officers of bodies such as Natural England and the RSPB are not convinced by the results of these studies and continue to object to the use of some areas during the nesting

season. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 give protection to most nesting birds, their nests and their young. If the event officials are notified of the existence of any nesting birds in the competition area, they should route competitors away from the nest sites so as to avoid unintentional offence under the Acts. 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. Planners and Controllers of events taking place between March and July should agree, in advance of the event, a suitable course of action to protect active nest sites found at or close to control sites immediately prior to the event.

This may include invalidating the course or the control site but must not include continuing to use the site with the consequent risk of the bird deserting its nest.

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 effort. 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. Photographs of pre-existing damage are advisable.

Litter - There is a potential for litter in the competition area and the Planner should take steps to avoid it. The most obvious 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. 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. One option is to place a discard box 100 metres beyond the drink station and give notice of this at the drinks station. 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.

Historic Features - Many areas contain features which reflect former uses of the land on which we compete. Some, such as funereal mounds, date back to the earliest presence of man whilst others are more recent and are evidence of the activities involved in protecting the UK during World War II. Many, but not all, of these features are protected, or Scheduled, via the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Large earthworks and mounds offer ideal control sites, but care is needed if we are to avoid damaging these important features through soil compaction and erosion. Equally buildings may seem the obvious choice for a control or somewhere to establish the start or finish, however, many such buildings are used as winter roosts for bats and excessive disturbance may result in the bats coming out of hibernation at a time when there is little or no food for them.

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. It should always be borne in mind that the presence of such visitors should not give away the location of the control unless they are to stay there for the duration of the event. It is therefore essential that whilst they can see the control they cannot be seen from the possible approaches which competitors may use.

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 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 responsibilities, 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, or in the assembly area, or 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 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 the Rules, Appendices, Competition Rules and Event 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 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. Tell the Event Organiser; it can be passed on to the landowner or controlling body to good effect.

4. Additional Help and Information

Contact details for the major organisations involved in managing sensitive sites, as well as those organisations with a statutory responsibility for protecting designated sites, are available on the BOF website: (link to *Contact Details*). A simple environmental checklist for event officials is also available on the website (link to *Checklist*).