

Map Clarity

Clarity is defined as 'the quality of being able to see' and the ability to be able to see many orienteering maps is diminishing. With an increasing age demographic within orienteering it is important that we have maps that are clear to read, but it is equally important that our maps meet the requirements of all participants. The IOF has a set of map specifications (ISOM and ISSOM) which have been developed over many years to best show the vast range of features and landform shapes that we encounter in orienteering. These have a set of defined map scales which meet the requirements of the different orienteering disciplines. The challenge for map makers is to ensure that our maps fit into this frame work and remain clear to read.

The main factors which influence map clarity are:

- Map detail

The level of detail on a map is the main factor influencing map clarity. The IOF and British Orienteering specifications have clear minimum feature dimensions as to which features should appear on maps. Many areas contain very little detail and to meet the desire that many competitors have to navigate on detailed terrain there is a tendency to map small features to increase the detail. If this level of mapping is repeated this leads to it being seen as the norm. Too much detail leads to a cluttered map which is difficult to read or as Eduard Imhof, the famous Swiss cartographer, stated:

'A map with few well chosen features will give a much better map than a map cluttered with many insignificant features'

Therefore it is essential that mappers are able to adhere to minimum feature sizes and are able to generalise in areas which are rich in detail. As an aid to this generalisation the IOF suggests that maps should be surveyed at a set scale (ISOM 1:7,500 & ISSOM 1:2,500) as this forces the issue upon the surveyor and prevents them from adding too much detail.

- Symbol size

There is considerable confusion over symbols sizes and map scale. It is if often believed that changing the map scale makes a map clear to read. In fact it is the size of the symbols which influence the clarity of the map and these are defined within the map specifications. For ISOM maps (traditional maps) the symbol dimensions are defined for a map at 1:15,000. Any change of scale should have the proportionate change in symbols size. So if a map is to be made at 1:10,000 then the symbols should be 150% larger (150000/10000 enlargement).

- Printing method.

The method of printing plays a big role in the clarity of a map. You only have to compare a map printed on draft mode with one printed on fine/best mode to see the difference for yourself. It is essential therefore to consider the method and quality of the printing process.