

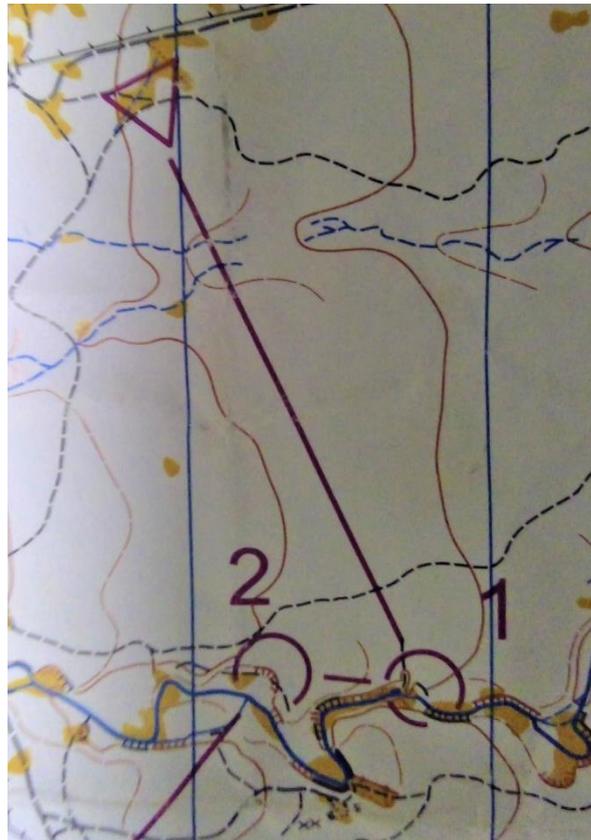
# Taking a Bearing

On August 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> SA Orienteers enjoyed two events in the Mid North.

The event on the Saturday was at Tundarri (some of you will remember it from National Events).

The area is flattish with a few creeks, and a few clearings among Mallee growth.

For our middle distance event here some of us were greeted by a first control which took us some just over 600m to a cliff in the river with very little opportunity to use map to ground skills.



Over a third of the orienteers appear to have fallen into the trap and took longer than they should have on this leg, having eventually come to the river, but not in the correct place. I found myself about 200m away to the East on the tight bend (on the very edge of the picture above) and had to relocate from there, and was already over 5 minutes behind the leader in my class by the time I found my first control!

Being able to follow a bearing was a key skill in succeeding on this leg.

So what are the things to think about when you face a leg like this? I'd love to hear your feedback in future issues, and to learn from the experience of others, but for now, here are my thoughts:

## Learn how to use your compass

Take the time to learn how to use your compass so that it becomes second nature. There are various techniques that orienteers use to take a bearing with their compass. The choice partly depends on whether you use a baseplate or thumb compass. Put into dot points I would summarise the technique that I (and many others ) use for a thumb compass in the following way:

- Put the compass on your map with the edge on the line where you want to go
- Hold the compass there and turn yourself (holding your map in front of you) until the north needle of the compass is in line with the north lines on the map (make sure you have North, not South)
- Follow the line of the side of your compass (or the direction arrow, which should be the same)
- Check your direction by checking that north needle is still aligned with the north lines on the map and that the direction of your compass is still pointing where you want it to be.



In the photo here you can see that the edge of my thumb compass is on the line of travel from the start to control 1 and I have rotated myself so that the north needle is parallel to the north lines on the map. (facing back toward me)

Now all I need to do is walk in the direction of the line and I will be on my correct bearing.

Once you have this technique in your head it is quick and easy to use. It has the added benefit of making it very easy to “thumb” the map using the point at the top of the direction arrow on your compass as you move along.

This technique is described clearly in a training sheet found on the Orienteering Australia website that you might find helpful. [http://orienteering.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/o\\_map\\_training\\_p02\\_compass.pdf](http://orienteering.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/o_map_training_p02_compass.pdf)

Be careful to keep your compass flat when you are using it, and to hold it out in front of you. Also be aware that metal objects (including metal in rocks) can affect the compass accuracy.

## How can I keep that bearing accurate?

It's much easier to keep a bearing accurate if you have good vision into the distance. If you have this you can pick a distant point in the correct direction and keep on heading towards that for the distance that you need to go.

If you do not have a good view it is useful to take shorter bearings to objects that you can see ahead of you and then re-check the bearing , using a new object to aim for.

It seems a bit crazy, but I still find it useful to physically draw a line from my compass in the air in front of me pointing in the direction that I want to go. It seems to help me to keep my accuracy.

If you have obstacles in your way it can be helpful to dodge to the left the first time and then to the right the next time.

Some orienteers find that they tend to veer one way or the other consistently. If you are one of these, then you need to be constantly conscious of it and compensate for this tendency.

Keep your bearings as short as you can. The longer you need to travel on the one bearing the more chance of error there is.

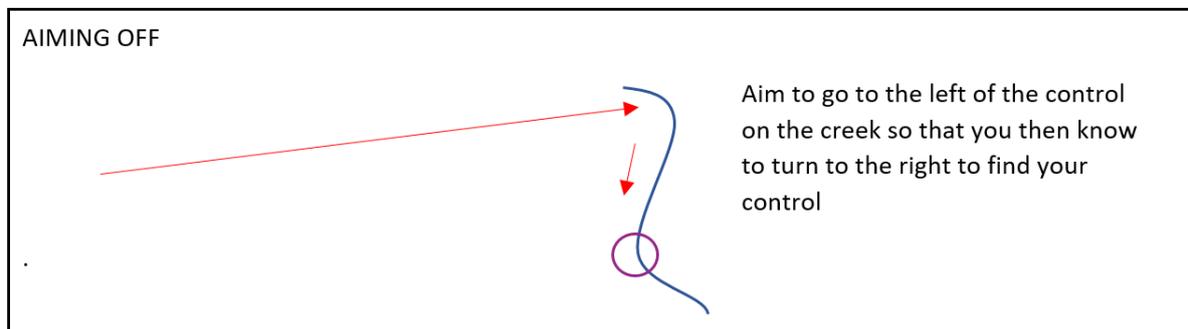
## Use other basic skills as well

When I was first learning to orienteer a wise man told me “always use more than one of the three basic skills”. This is as good advice now as it was back nearly 20 years ago. The three basic skills are distance, direction and map to ground. In this case we are using direction, but we really want to be using map to ground and/or distance as well. Distance isn’t much help – we will get to the river anyway (unless we are very off course!). Map to ground isn’t much help either. Even with a bearing which is quite wrong we are likely to cross the two creeks close to the start, and then there is nothing useful until the track (which goes along the whole way and has no distinct direction changes or recognisable points). Usually there is more than this that you can use.

## What other techniques might help?

So you then need to bring out the armoury and use some of your more advanced skills.

In this case, aiming off will be a useful technique. You can use aiming off any time you are heading towards a linear feature (river, road, fence). What you do is aim deliberately to either left or right, so that when you reach your feature you will know which way to turn to find the control. Although it means you take a little longer because you have to cover a little more distance, you can also save yourself a lot of time.



I hope that this helps you the next time a tricky course setter plans to challenge you with this sort of orienteering puzzle.

Erica