

The clever navigator in gully-spur terrain

1) **Don't leave a control (or the start) until you have a plan!** Orientate your map, face the next control and then make a plan. Take lots of care to get the correct exit direction.

2) **Use big simple features to make a plan.** Your plan should take advantage of big contour features (or other big features) such as big hills, saddles, ridge lines and gullies. Ridge lines and gullies can make good linear features to follow.

3) **Read the detail to maintain exact location.** Although your plan uses large distinct features, when you execute the leg, you should then use smaller features (shallow gullies, rocks, termies, earth banks, vege boundaries) to continuously cross-check your exact position. Keep looking ahead and to each side to spot these features and cross-check them with the map. And keep checking your compass to ensure you are going exactly the right way.

4) **Cross-checking to avoid errors.** As you cross any gullies or ridge lines, stop and check that they line up with your map. If they don't go in the correct direction, STOP and check that you haven't made a mistake. Also as you cross any gullies or ridge lines, look to your left and right for any features that might allow you to check exactly where you are crossing.

5) **Thumbing the map to keep contact;** When running, you should be thumbing the map with the tip of your thumb compass (or your thumb if you use a base plate compass), predicting what features you will see next. Your map should ALWAYS be orientated to the north. Hold the map flat and out in front of you so that you can quickly cross check features. Fold your map so that you can comfortably hold it, and can thumb the map. But keep enough map visible that you can see LOTS of terrain around the leg (to the left, right and beyond) and also enough map to place the thumb compass directly over some magnetic north lines. This makes orientating the map more accurate. You will have to re-fold your map many times during the race.

6) **Accurate direction;** ALWAYS keep checking your direction! There is NO excuse for running in the wrong direction when there's a compass in your hand. Check your direction every 5 or 10 seconds, even along tracks or on easy legs. A useful technique for running accurately on your bearing is to line up trees (or other features) in the distance. You then run to this feature and then line up another feature further into the distance. This is particularly useful when the forest is very open. It is also a very useful technique for short legs of say 50-200 metres.

7) **Estimating distance;** For each leg, estimate a rough distance to the next major feature (or the control). This doesn't have to be accurate, just so you know it is 50 metres and not 200 or 600 metres or vice versa. Always keep some idea of distance. Some people pace count to keep an idea of distance. Personally, I never pace count because I think it distracts me from my navigation.

8) **Slow down near controls.** As you approach a control, always slow down and scan the forest. It is amazing how many times you can see the control from a long distance away if you bother to look ahead. Also look to the sides in case you are slightly off-line. You also might see other nearby features that lead you into the control. Take your time and look at the subtle detail within the control circle.

9) **Always check the control code!** When you reach the control CHECK the code!

10) **Slow down and keep concentrating when tired.** If you are getting tired and losing concentration, slow down! Keep cross checking everything, even along tracks or fence lines to keep your concentration on the navigation. If it helps, talk out aloud, telling yourself what you can see and what you are navigating by. This can help maintain concentration.

11) **Relocation;** If things don't fit, STOP! Orientate your map and then look around the forest (ahead, to the left and right and behind) and check the shape of the land (hills, gullies, knolls, rock features etc). You might see some major feature (either near you or in the distance) that helps you relocate. Often you might be only just slightly off-line and you will pick up your location very quickly. If things still don't make sense, think about where you have gone since leaving the last control. When did you last know exactly where you were? Think about what you did since then and try to work out where you have gone. If you think you know where you are, continue towards your control and see if you can regain map contact. If this doesn't work, think about heading for a large safety feature where you know you will be able to relocate (top of big hill, fence line, track etc).

12) **Concentrating on your own navigation.** At big events, there will be lots of other runners around you. IGNORE them! They might be going to a different control and they might be lost! You are a good navigator and only you know where your next control is. If you are near other runners, take extra effort to cross check your location and do your own thing!

13) **Minimising lost time.** Everyone will miss a control at some stage and lose time. Minimise the lost time by remaining calm and following the relocation procedure outlined above. Use all your detective skills. It's amazing how many clues are out there if you look! Remain calm and professional and just get on with the job. And once you find the control, take a deep breath and then take the next control slowly and carefully. The key is to remember you can never regain time, so don't try sprinting to the next few controls. You'll just lose more time.

14) **Keep concentrating to the very end!** The race is not over until you reach the finish line. It is no use getting 14 out of 16 controls well, then running faster and losing 5 or 10 minutes on the second last control. In fact if you get three-quarters of the way around your course and you've run well, slow down a bit and take extra care on the last few controls. It's not worth risking a good run just for a few extra seconds. Navigate carefully to the VERY last control. Don't get reckless.

15) **Contours and compass.** In summary, for gully-spur the emphasis should be on reading the contours and checking your compass direction. Contours and compass!

Have fun.

Anthony Scott, 2006