**ORIENTEERING**

Orienteering is a sport using navigation with maps and compasses to find various points in unfamiliar and often difficult-to-follow terrain. Participants, called orienteers, begin by getting a prepared orienteering [topographic map](http://geography.about.com/od/topographicmaps/a/topographicmaps.htm) that features specific details of the area so they can find control points. Control points are checkpoints used so orienteers can ensure that they are on the right path to completing their course.

**Orienteering History**

Orienteering first gained popularity as a military exercise in 19th century Sweden and orienteering as a term was introduced there in 1886. Then the term meant the crossing of unknown land with just a map and compass. In 1897, the first non-military public orienteering competition took place in Norway. This competition was extremely popular there and was followed shortly thereafter by another public orienteering competition in Sweden in 1901.

By the 1930s, orienteering was becoming popular in Europe as inexpensive and reliable compasses became available. After World War II, orienteering grew popular worldwide and in 1959, an international conference on orienteering was held in Sweden to discuss the formation of an orienteering committee. As a result, in 1961 the [International Orienteering Federation](http://orienteering.org/) (IOF) was formed and represented 10 European countries.

In the decades following the formation of IOF, many national orienteering federations have also been formed with support from IOF.

Currently, there are 70 member countries within the IOF. Because of these countries' participation in IOF, there are world orienteering championships held annually.

Orienteering is still most popular in Sweden but as national IOF participation shows, it is popular across the globe. In addition, in 1996, attempts to make orienteering an Olympic sport began. However it is not a spectator-friendly sport as it often takes place in rugged environments over long distances. In 2005 though, the International Olympic Committee considered including ski orienteering as an Olympic sport for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games but in 2006, the committee decided not to include any new sports, ski orienteering included.

**Orienteering Basics**

An orienteering competition is one that is intended to test the orienteers physical fitness, navigational skill and concentration. Normally during a competition, the orienteering map is not given to participants until the start of the race. These maps are specially prepared and heavily detailed topographic maps. Their scales are usually around 1:15,000 or 1:10,000 and are designed by IOF so that a participant from any nation can read them.

Upon the start of the competition, orienteers are normally staggered so they do not interfere with one another on the course. These courses are broken up into multiple legs and the objective is to reach the control point of each leg fastest by any route the orienteer chooses. The control points are marked as features on the orienteering maps. They are marked with white and orange flags along the orienteering course. To ensure that each orienteer reaches these control points, they are all required to carry a control card that is marked at each control point.

At the completion of the orienteering competition, the winner is usually the orienteer who completed the course fastest.

**Orienteering Competition Types**

There are various types of orienteering competitions practiced but those recognized by the IOF are foot orienteering, mountain bike orienteering, ski orienteering and trail orienteering. Foot orienteering is a competition in which there is no marked route. Orienteers simply navigate with their compass and map to find control points and finish their course. This type of orienteering requires participants to run over varying terrain and make their own decisions on the best route to follow.

Mountain bike orienteering, like foot orienteering has no marked route. This sport is different though because to finish their course fastest, orienteers must memorize their maps as it is impossible to routinely stop to read them while riding their bike. These competitions also take place over varying terrain and are the newest of the orienteering competitions.

Ski orienteering is the winter version of foot orienteering. An orienteer in this type of competition must have high skiing and map reading skills as well as the ability to make a decision on the best route to use as they are not marked in these competitions. The World Ski Orienteering Championships is the official ski orienteering event and takes place every odd year winter.

Finally, trail orienteering is an orienteering competition that allows orienteers of all abilities to participate and takes place on a natural trail. Because these competitions take place on a marked trail and speed is not a component of the competition, those with limited mobility are able to participate in the competition.

Resources: http://geography.about.com/od/understandmaps/a/orienteering.htm