
FOLLOWING A COMPASS BEARING ACCURATELY

We spend a lot of time in orienteering looking for **linear features** that we can easily follow to find our way from one feature to another. At first these are easy ones, like a track or fence. Later they get a little less obvious, like a spur or ridgeline, watercourse, or vegetation boundary.

Once we have checked their direction with the compass to make sure they are correct, they make an easy handrail from one point to another, and a good safe route choice, provided they are not too far off-line.

Sometimes, it is necessary to cross a flat or slightly undulating area, or a broad ridge, hillside or gully with no definite lines. This is when it is very important to follow a compass bearing accurately. In this situation, the **red line** becomes our “**Handrail**”

1. Find the **Correct Direction** carefully with your compass – let the needle settle properly. **Map North** must be exactly parallel to **Compass north**, and your **line of direction** must be pointing **straight out in front of you, the same way as your feet**.
2. Lift your arm, both if unsure, and point out a **distinctive feature** (eg a tree) in front of you, exactly on the bearing. See if you can remember where it is if you take your eyes away from it. You must be able to find it easily again. It should be a distinctive colour or pattern, or an odd shape.
3. Run towards the feature. You must be able to look left and right as well, to keep checking map to ground regularly. Keep picking out new features along the red line, resetting your compass accurately.
4. When you cross any linear feature (**collecting feature**) try to be sure where you are along it. There may be a cliff or other point feature, a bend or junction to help you **pinpoint your position**. It's worth going a little off line to be certain of these at times.
5. If you **practice** this consistently, you will become very good at it, and be able to do it fast and accurately. Being able to run straight across flatter, blander areas will make a big difference to your orienteering times, and save you getting lost!