



# INTERNATIONAL ROGAINING FEDERATION Inc.

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With talk of juniors rogaining (#143), and common Schools Rogaining events, there has been interest in revisiting the subject of being lost.

Reprinted from *Rogaining - Cross country navigation*.

## Lost: Protect -> Pause -> Plan

Not knowing where you are happens to most people at some stage and is due to problems either with the map or with the navigator or both.

Map problems: These are often blamed when people get lost but in our experience a map error is rarely the sole cause. All maps have some inaccuracies but these are mainly of a trivial nature in up-to-date government topographic maps. Maps prepared by amateurs may be less accurate. Common problems are tracks being shown in the wrong position, tracks not being marked and contours being drawn with insufficient care such that fine detail is lost. However, if a map is wrong, a careful navigator will note the discrepancy between what is shown on the map and what features can be seen on the ground. He or she will then proceed with caution and will relate progress to features that will be accurate on the map such as major landforms.

Navigator problems: Insufficient attention to navigation is the usual reason for getting lost. This can happen due to carelessness in the middle of the day when good visibility lulls you into letting your concentration lapse, or it can happen in a stretch of thick bush at night where the

difficulties are not fully appreciated. Either situation can lead to you following the wrong creek, for example, or missing a spur leading off a ridge. In each case the key factor in getting lost was a failure to judge how much effort to put into navigation at a given time.

Common sources of navigational error are:

- at the start when you are not familiar with the map and scale and take the wrong track
- taking a turn at the wrong intersection
- coming from bush onto a track and assuming it is the track you want
- incorrectly identifying buildings, roads, creeks or other features
- an incorrect bearing taken from the map
- an incorrect conversion of true and magnetic north
- accidentally following a back-bearing
- relaxing after collecting your last checkpoint before the finish.

Two particular circumstances where rogainers often misjudge the navigational difficulty are travelling up a creek and travelling down a spur. When going up a creek, you must watch for any junctions and tributaries and avoid following one of these by mistake. Similarly, when travelling down a spur, great care must be exercised to avoid veering off the side or onto another spur branching off. By contrast, navigation in the opposite circumstances (i.e. down a creek or up a spur) is usually more straightforward as branching creeks or spurs no longer present a problem.

Getting lost in all these ways can be avoided. With a reasonable map and total concentration on navigation, it is remarkable how every map feature is easily matched with ground features and how close you can navigate to a selected target. Total concentration on navigation,

however, may not make for the most enjoyable walk with a group of friends, nor may it be sustainable for every minute of a rogaine. One approach is to rotate the role of chief navigator between different party members. It also helps to anticipate problem areas before they are reached and to give them the increased attention they require. Other parts of the route that appear less difficult can be given less attention, but you must always remain vigilant. If you want to stop pace counting, use the elapsed-time method of distance measurement to estimate progress and keep an eye on direction.

### **Recovering your position**

If your position does become uncertain, stop and assess the situation. By simply pausing and recollecting the events of the last ten to thirty minutes it may be possible to put together a simple answer as to where you went wrong - even though you are not sure where you are! Decide when you were last certain of your position. Slowly trace forward in your mind and on the map how you progressed from there. What decisions did you make? For how long did you walk? (Place upper and lower limits if you do not know exactly). Did you note the direction of travel? Where was the sun? Which way did the ground slope and how steep was it? Carefully reconstructing your route may be all that is needed to indicate where you must be.

Use your compass. Take bearings along any tracks, creeks or ridges nearby and relate them to the map. Take bearings on prominent landmarks and use these to give a fix on your position. If you were walking along a creek when you realized you were lost, take bearings upstream and downstream. When related to the map, these bearings may help to indicate if you have accidentally followed a tributary and, if so, which one.

Most cases of losing your position are remedied by this initial period of recollection. Perhaps the way to rejoin the correct route is plainly obvious. Perhaps retracing your steps is needed (this is made easier if you have kept looking behind to see the country from this perspective). Occasionally the best way to relocate yourself involves taking a compass bearing to intersect a nearby major road or creek. This feature can then be followed until a recognizable point (intersection, bend) is reached.

#### **Summary : Recovering your position**

Use all available information. Recall:

- your last definite position
- your travel direction
- the distance you have travelled
- the features you have passed
- the slope of the ground.

#### **Further actions to take when unsure of your position**

If, after stopping and thinking, you still cannot decide where you are or how to get back onto your route, do not immediately press on in the hope of finding a landmark. After studying the map, adopt a plan of action. Decide which direction to take (maybe towards higher or clearer ground) and walk on for perhaps five minutes. As you walk, look forwards, backwards and to each side, noting all visible features. Make certain you can retrace your steps if necessary. Take bearings with your compass to major features, or along linear features, whenever possible. Preferably write down all these observations. After a few minutes, stop again and once more work out where you could be. This time, in addition to all the previous information, you have the extra data gathered on the route to your new position. Your position may now be obvious. Occasionally it may help to repeat the whole process, moving on for another few minutes. However

make certain that any move is planned and meticulously recorded.

There is a close relationship between morale and navigation. Low morale can lead to sub-standard navigation. In turn, becoming lost rapidly lowers morale. Use the periods when you are trying to work out where you are to have a quick rest, a drink and a snack. Both the brain and the body will function better if not tired, hungry or thirsty.

#### **Recovering your position without a map**

Rogainers collecting checkpoints near the edge of the event map may make a small error of navigation and move off the map. As soon as this error is realized, stop and think. Work out which of the following is the most appropriate action:

- retracing your steps onto the map (usually the best option if on a track),
- setting a course for a feature you can see and identify on the map,
- identifying a major feature such as a river or road that you can recognize even off the map and following it back onto the map.

At night, none of these three options may be appropriate. If this is the case, then work out where you are as accurately as possible and follow a bearing or course back onto the map towards an obvious collecting feature. If you do not even know which way to go to get back onto the map, you are in the truly lost class - see below.

Occasionally, all team members will lose their maps on a rogaie. This is a more difficult problem than just walking off the map as you are faced with a long period of map-less travel. Getting back to safety depends very much on how well the general area was understood beforehand. Ideally, all members of the team will have noted major features of the map. For instance:

- is the country to the east cleared whereas that to the west is thick forest?
- are you north or south of the road?
- which direction are you from the railway?
- where is the river from here?
- which direction to the hash house?

The best plan is to head for a major linear feature that you can be sure of recognizing when it is reached. If tracks or roads are intersected in the meantime, it is almost certainly better to remain on these if you are without a map. In most cases, it would be preferable to head towards open country rather than into thicker bush and then seek assistance from any person you find.

### **Genuinely lost**

If truly lost, do not make matters worse. If it is clear you will need to be rescued, take time to put yourself in the position of the potential rescuers. Ask yourself questions such as:

- when will they mount a rescue?
- what do they know about your location and route?
- where were you last seen?

Your first priority should be the safety of all members of the party (PROTECT). This might involve shelter and warmth at night or shade from the sun during the day. Make sure everyone eats and drinks adequately.

Do not feel compelled to rush into action, but spend time assessing the situation (PAUSE) and making a plan for survival and rescue (PLAN). A decision must be made about the importance of travelling or remaining where you are. The initial search is likely to be by vehicle along tracks and roads and it is important to stay on these features rather than venturing off into forest. However, if rescuers are

unlikely to find you in your present position, it would be wise to move sooner rather than later.

If a decision is made to stay, make yourselves visible. Hang out bright items and lay bright objects on the ground. Make yourselves heard. Have someone blowing a whistle at regular intervals - sequences of three short blasts, three long blasts and three short blasts. Also light a fire and have leaves ready to make it smoke.

If a decision is made to move, a definite plan is needed. You may decide to head towards open country, towards a major road or to a significant river. In snow country you might choose to lose height to gain added protection from the elements, whereas in other places descent may be unwise as it may lead to heavily vegetated valleys with poor visibility.

It is important to record (preferably in written notes) what actions have been taken, any features passed, the slope of the land, hills, creeks and vegetation changes. A log of travel may be enough to unequivocally identify your position on the map and then enable you to head to safety.

Remember the three Ps:

**Protect** yourself: do not make matters worse.

**Pause**: recall events to determine how you got into the present position.

**Plan**: make a plan as to the best route to recovery.