

How to Rogaine

Rogaines are won in the planning. Slower teams can win just by being smarter.

Here are some of the things you need to know and some of the strategies for doing well.

Preparation

For any event longer than an hour carry water. As you dehydrate your brain gets tired even before your big muscles and you start missing things or making bad decisions.

Also carry high energy snacks. My favourite is fruit cake as it is so easily digestible. Bananas are good too.

Gear: For rogaines in the country organisers will provide you a gear list. For urban ones at least have anything you need if the weather changes.

Have someone in the team with a mobile phone and a basic first aid kit.

A watch (or mobile phone) for timing

Pens or highlighters for planning your route.

One compass: even for urban events

About Rogaines

Points: check the point values of controls — the idea is to get the most points, not the most controls.

Scale: the map might be at 1:20,000 but what does that mean? Work out how far on the map is one kilometre. The map may have a scale bar. If not it may say how far apart the north-line arrows are.

Topographic maps have a grid of squares with each square 1k by 1k. That makes working out how far you plan to run easy by simply counting squares.

North: As a rough guide, the sun lurks about in the north at lunchtime. On an orienteering map, the top of the page (the top of each control number if you folded your map) is north. On a topographic map (like the Topo50 series) the top of the map is not north: magnetic north is rotated about 23° clockwise and the event planner will usually have coloured magnetic north lines drawn on the map for you to use.

Contours: On most orienteering maps each contour shows a height difference of 5 metres (a two storey building). On Topo maps each contour shows a 20m change (8-storey building), so if you are going to cross more than one contour you have a big climb or descent on your hands. Remember that when you plan your route. Streams are usually the low bits, while contour lines that join up into a rough circle are usually hilltops: work from that.

Symbols: Check out any table of symbols you are given or that is on the map so you know what you are looking for.

Control descriptions: For each control you are given a feature that you will find it beside. Know what you are looking for. If the description uses 'the', it will be on the map eg. the stream junction. If it uses 'a', you will see it when you get there but it may not be shown on the map eg. a bridge.

How to plan your route

This is honesty time: how far can you travel in the time allowed? No, not you, the super-athlete in the team; it's how fast the slowest person in your team can go that matters. Maybe that's 10 minutes per k (so 6k per hour). If you are going to run on rough country it will take you about half as long again as on flat road or park; if you are going to go up or down hills it will likely take twice as long.

Making a plan:

First decide how far.

Then look for the best groups of controls to visit. Ideally that's the highest value ones closest together, but beware: the planner will be trying to fool those who just 'join the dots': work out how you will get from each to the next (there may be a lake or a hill in the way).

Try to plan a continuous circuit, so you go from each control to the next rather than having to go out to a control and back again.

Work out a 'half-way decision point': If you realise you will not reach it when half your time is up, you need to cut short your plan. If you reach it with time to spare, have an add-on loop planned. Allow for getting tired, so your decision point should be more than half way round your circuit: you won't achieve as much in the second half.

Now for string theory: Derek always brings a piece of string and uses it to measure the distance planned laying it along the route on the map. I count squares, but Derek has won more rogaines.

Final thoughts

Look after each other out there. You have different abilities, different fitness levels and so on. Keep an eye on how your team-mates are going.

As in any adventure race (and a rogain is one) never rely on the best navigator to be right all the time. The others should still be keeping track of where you are on the map and keeping a check. And a check on time.

Have fun out there, and we will see you at the finish . . . at a social distance of course . . .

Steve Armon

15 September 2020