



equilibrium lifestyle management

MAP READING 101

*“I’ve never been lost, though I will admit to being confused for several weeks.”
Daniel Boone*

Knowing how to read a map is an integral part of trail running and hiking. Being able to determine where you are on a map is key to discovering how you will get to your next destination. Basic map reading skills will allow you to explore new territory and help to get you back to your car safely!

Types of Maps.

Topographic. Portrays the shape and elevation of the terrain using contour lines.

Pictorial. An artist’s conception of a given area based on a topographical survey.

Planimetric. Show major features such as roads, trails, rivers, lakes, peak elevations and many notable man made features. Road maps are a good example.

Orienteering. Very detailed map with a range of symbols- used to navigate through a given course.

Mental. You should always have one of these with you!

Important Things to Look for on Your Map

Scale. Look for a scale symbol to determine the size of your map. 1:20 is a closer view than 1:20000. There will also be a bar with distances marked on it. Use this bar scale to measure out distances on your map using a piece of string or paper.

Legend. These are clues to help you find your way! Common symbols include paved, gravel, or dirt roads, main trails, less used trails, railroads, rivers, lakes, buildings, marshes.

North Indication. Look for the arrow to find your true North symbol (magnetic north is usually shown with declination setting on topographical maps).

Landmarks. These are important points/symbols on your map that are obvious. Make note of landmarks that you will encounter on your route, so that when you come across them you will know almost exactly where you are. These include intersecting trails or roads, sharp corners on trails or roads, human-made structures such as buildings or bridges, as well as fences, train tracks or bodies of water you may cross.



FITNESS ADVENTURES



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Once you have familiarized yourself with the map and symbols, it is time to plot your course. It is a good idea to have a pencil to make notes or write down distances on your map. **No matter where your feet take you, there are 3 simple steps to follow:**

1. You are Here. Determine where you are using recognizable symbols. You need to know where you are before you can plan a route to your destination!

2. Where are you going? Once you know where you are, take a few moments to determine what you are looking for next. Choose a landmark that you will be able to recognize easily once you are upon it. This may be an intersecting trail etc. Make note of the approximate distance to your next landmark so that you will have an idea of how long it should take you to get there. Remember to adjust your minutes/km for the difficulty of the trail. You may run a 5 min/km on the road, but you won't be nearly as quick in steep terrain.

Catch Features: An easily recognized landmark that will tell you where you are on the map once you reach it. I.e.: intersecting trail, creek that crosses a trail, large human made object.

Handrails: A well-established landmark that you can follow with ease for extended periods of time. I.e.: river, lake perimeter, hydro lines, roads, and main trails.

3. How far is it? You can use the km marker on your map (if it has one) to approximate the distance of your route. Simply mark a piece of string or the edge of a sheet of paper with the scale on your map (meters or kms usually) then trace your route for a rough 'guestimate' of distance. Pacing is also a great way to let you know how much distance you have covered in the trails or through the bush. To determine your trail pace: Measure off a 100m section on a typical trail that you run/hike (use a tape measure/odometer/pedometer). Next, run/jog/hike the section at your normal pace. Count the number of strides (one swing of one foot from ground to ground) that you take to cover the 100m. You can count off your strides for a variety of terrain i.e. open trail, open brush, thick brush.

Sarah Seeds is a passionate trail runner and the owner of Equilibrium Lifestyle Management (ELM) a group fitness and personal training company in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Contact ELM for trail maps and information about trail running adventures on Vancouver Island.

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