

The Norwood School O-Challenge

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Suppose someone asked you to introduce a group of 6th Grade Girl Scouts to orienteering at their school. Would you take on the challenge? On one hand, the task might be fun because you'd be helping young people experience our sport for the first time. But on the other hand, you might also feel some angst about having to find an exciting way to interest twelve year olds in orienteering for at least a couple of hours, hopefully longer. With these thoughts in mind, I accepted the assignment of acquainting Troop 1137 of Bethesda, Maryland, with orienteering, at The Norwood School on January 5, 2001.

The first idea about how to handle the introduction came when I contacted Kathy Jahn, one of the troop's leaders. Wishfully thinking aloud, I asked: "Is there a map of the school grounds?" When Kathy replied, "Well, there's an old architectural rendering of the school," I figured why not turn it into an o-map and set up a small course. So what if it didn't have a normal o-scale, or any decent contour lines. At least the basic features would be there for an active in-the-field introduction to the sport.

Photos and map by David Onkst



Beth Hagerty and Amanda Ingersoll racing out of a control.

What alterations to the rendering were needed? First, due to the drawing's sheer size, it was impossible to reproduce it in color because the oversized copying machine only made black and white copies. Several of the school's trees and roads had changed since the architect had created the sketch. That was easily fixed with a little White Out and black Magic Marker. And while the rendering obviously didn't have any North-South compass lines, I made an in-the-field determination of where North is and marked the new map accordingly.



Lauren Tillitson and Mallory Polak stopping to rehang a fallen

On meet day, I first went over some basic orienteering skills (i.e. map reading and compass work) with the young ladies in a classroom. Then we headed out to the school's front field, and two inches of freshly fallen snow, for the start. Rather than have them go out on a traditional course where they would have to get all of the controls in order, I sent them out in teams. The participants were allowed to find whatever bags they could within thirty minutes—a mini score-o, if you will. However, none of the bags had any point values. The only restrictions were that each group had to stay together throughout the course and each team had to go to a specific first control that I assigned them. That way, the teams wouldn't have as much opportunity to follow each other. In all, four teams of young ladies and two groups of moms headed out, or rather shot out, on the course!

After nineteen minutes, Jenny Keeley, Mallory Polak, and Lauren Tillitson were the first team to finish, having visited all the controls. Then within another two to five minutes, all of the teams, except a, ahem, mom team, had completed the course. In all, everyone appeared to have a great time and was proud of their team-

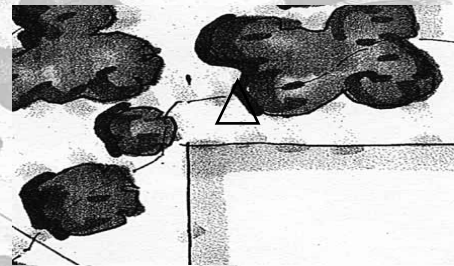
work and accomplishment.

After the "competition" we headed back inside for a discussion. At that point, I shared some "real" orienteering maps from some of our local parks and asked how many of them thought they could tackle a course on those maps. They all assured me that they could and seemed quite excited by the prospect. We then talked about taking a field trip to a local meet.

If any of you get the opportunity to introduce a group of students to orienteering, jump at the chance—it is a very rewarding experience. The energy and excitement with which they embrace the task of learning and experiencing the sport is invigorating. It also makes you realize that if those of us who are already hooked on the sport will continue to share it with others, orienteering will only continue to grow. □



Jenny Keeley, Lauren Tillitson, and Mallory Polak, the first place team, at the finish.



This article shows that you don't need any fancy preparation or big numbers to create a wonderful learning experience. Please share your experiences in bringing orienteering to kids. Send articles and pictures to the address at the front of this magazine, or e-mail Greg Sack at: raphic@fuse.net.—ed.