



# MASTERING MOUNTED ORIENTEERING'S TOOLS OF EXPLORATION

by CHERYL RHODES

What a thrill it would be to take off on a backwoods adventure, just you, your horse, and your navigation tools — GPS, map, and compass — to solve mysteries. Add to that a time element and a healthy dose of competition and you've got an engrossing activity!

Competitive mounted orienteering is a timed event consisting of a horse and rider team, equipped with the afore-mentioned tools. Riders head out individually or in groups to locate clues and follow a course, finding as many hidden objective stations as possible in the least amount of time.

Before the competition begins, the ride manager, who can be any member of the National Association of Competitive Mounted Orienteering, goes to an area and places five to ten paper plates in the woods. Each plate is identified with two letters, a number, and the date. The plates are placed along the trail system and must be readable by horseback, although sometimes it takes a keen eye and sheer determination to spot them. The plates might be placed on the ground in an open area, on a tree stump, or hanging from a tree. When the ride manager places a plate, he chooses two landmarks that can be easily described, such as a unique tree, a boulder, or a route marker sign.

Riders leave at intervals of five to ten minutes apart; teams can consist of one person or more, though most ride in twos or threes. Teams do not see the ride map before they start and do not need to find the numbered plates in any particular order. Part of the strategy is choosing a route that will allow them to find all the markers in a time faster than the other teams. When a team arrives at a numbered spot they turn the map over to read the clue, identify the two described landmarks, take compass readings, then walk their horses to where the two lines intersect and look for the plate.

The team writes down the two letters on the paper plate next to the corresponding clue on their map as proof that they did find the plate. Teams cannot tamper with the plate and must leave it where it was found. Any team caught hiding a plate will be disqualified. Once all members of the team have crossed the finish line, a team member hands the ride manager their map, and the manager checks that all the letters are correct. The team that finds the most markers in the shortest period of time is the winner. Ribbons are given out to sixth place, but prizes are generally only awarded at the club's year-end banquet.

Competitors tend to be an informal group who enjoy getting together with friends and their horses to enjoy a trail ride with the challenge of finding the hidden markers. Some take the sport more seriously than others, but everyone chooses the intensity of how they compete. Membership dues are \$20.00 annually or \$30.00 per family and this includes an equine liability insurance policy. Each club sets its own rates for a day's competition, but \$10.00 per person is the average entry fee. For

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more information and to locate a group in your area, go to the website for the National Association of Competitive Mounted Orienteering <http://www.nacmo.org/>.

*Cheryl Rhodes is the author of "Recipes My Mother Forgot...Family Style Cooking and a Caregiver's Guide to Alzheimer's Disease." She has published travel, dog, and country living articles, as well as numerous equine articles.*



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[www.maptech.com/products/outdoornavigator/index.cfm](http://www.maptech.com/products/outdoornavigator/index.cfm)

<http://earth.google.com/>  
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### Do Not Leave Home Without Tools for Orienteering

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##### Magellan

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##### Lowrance

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