

## Orienteering

“Damn, where the h... am I?” I was halfway lying in a swamp, trying to force my right foot out of the dark mud it had stuck into, that had made me fall. I grabbed my map out of a little water pit. Dirt, blood, and water drops made it difficult to read. The third control point had been an easy one. Now I was on my way to the fourth, which was the first really long distance leg of this course. I looked desperately around me, as I swept my cold left hand over the map to clean off some of the dirt. Where was the big cliff that was supposed to be on the east side of the swamp? I could only see two big rocks. The terrain definitely didn’t match the map.

The scene above describes a scenario in an orienteering race. Orienteering is an individual sport that combines racing with navigation. It is a timed race in which participants use a specially created, highly detailed map to select routes and navigate through diverse and often unfamiliar terrain and visit control points in sequence. A standard orienteering course consists of a start, a series of control sites that are marked by circles, connected by lines and numbered in the order they are to be visited, and a finish. Out in the terrain, a control flag marks the location that the orienteer must visit. Each participant is equipped with an electronic device that registers the visits of the controls. Most orienteering events use staggered starts to ensure that each orienteer has a chance to do his own navigation.

A control point in an orienteering race can be compared with a target in life. A target might be completing an education. That’s a pretty long distance leg, in the meaning of how many years it will take to get there. A shorter leg might be having a target of changing a lifestyle. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that changing a lifestyle is easier than completing an education. On the long distance leg, there might be many obvious clues to follow, such as the big paths named high school and college. When it comes to lifestyle choices, there are so many voices telling you what is good and what is bad for you. What is said to be good from one direction might be considered bad from another. The terrain can get pretty rough, complex and confusing. The map is not always easy to read.

An orienteering race involves numerous amounts of challenges and choices. Which route to choose? Direct line or run the path around? How to cross this river? This bush is too dense! How to get down this cliff? Push yourself up this hill! Both physical and mental limits are meant to be broken. The worst and probably most common feeling during an orienteering race is: where am I? This happens when you run too fast to actually follow the map. In life, this happens, too. As Survivor sang in the famous Rocky theme song, "so many times things happen too fast, you change your passion for glory." Almost every aspect of an orienteering race can serve as or be used to illustrate different challenges and choices we meet in life. I could make the statement that life is like an orienteering race; and write a book about it!