

Looking for a new direction this winter? Try ski orienteering!

Ski orienteering combines the map-based navigation sport of orienteering with cross-country skiing. Participants use a detailed topographic map showing ski trails, water features (streams, marshes, ponds), clearings, buildings, and other landmarks in order to navigate to a series of checkpoints. Unlike summer forms of orienteering, all of the checkpoints are on trails – if you can use a trail map, you can do ski orienteering! It's a great way to explore new areas, or to see familiar places with a different perspective.

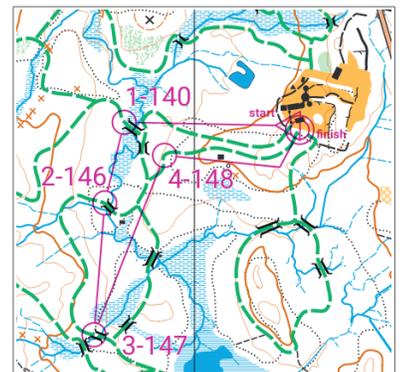
The Rochester Orienteering Club has a series of “sol-o” ski orienteering courses available this winter. Each course will be available for at least a few weeks (conditions permitting) and can be completed at any time. Visit the ROC website at <https://roc.us.orienteering.org> for more information. Difficulties range from beginner to advanced – more advanced courses are longer, have more complex navigation choices, and use more difficult ski trails.

What do you need for ski orienteering?

- Skis – skate or classic. Competitive racers use skate skis, double-poling on narrow trails or when cutting through the woods, but both kinds of equipment are allowed. Classic skis can make some route choices easier. Choose what you are comfortable with!
- A map. Normally participants receive a map just before starting on their course, but for sol-o events you will need to print out your own map ahead of time. Visit the ROC website at <https://roc.us.orienteering.org> to obtain maps.
- A way to carry your map. A ziplock bag is a good idea in order to keep the map dry; the bag can then be pinned to your jacket to make it easier to check the map frequently. For those who are serious about ski-o, there are map holders that strap to your chest and let you read the map while skiing.
- A compass can be helpful if you get turned around or are skiing at a new location, but it isn't essential.
- Also optional is a free app called UsynligO which lets you use your phone to orienteer – it notifies you when you've found a checkpoint and can provide distance and direction hints if you get lost. See the ROC website at <https://roc.us.orienteering.org> for more information if you want to try it out.

How does ski orienteering work?

- On the map, dashed and solid green lines are used for groomed ski trails. Other trails are shown with black dashed lines. Brown lines are contour lines. A white background indicates forest; yellow areas are open (fields or clearings). Blue shows water features, though smaller streams and marshes (blue stripes) may not be visible under snow. Black rectangles denote buildings.



- A purple triangle on the map shows the start of the course; double circles show the finish.
- Visit the checkpoints (purple circles) in order, as indicated by the 1-2-3 labels. (e.g. 1-140 is the first checkpoint, 2-146 is the second, and so forth) The purple lines help you follow the order. For a random or score-o course, checkpoints can be visited in any order; in this case there won't be any purple lines connecting checkpoints on the map.

- Look for a three-sided orange-and-white flag (at Cumming Nature Center) or a small 4" square orange-and-white tag (elsewhere) at each checkpoint. (The start and finish may also be marked.) Locating a flag or tag lets you know you've found the right spot.



Some other tips:

- Don't try to follow the purple lines on the map! They are only to help you see the order of the checkpoints. Instead, look for a way to use trails to get from where you are to the next checkpoint. More experienced navigators might sometimes choose to shortcut between trails if the distance is much shorter than going around. (It is legal to take off your skis and travel on foot as long as you carry your skis and all of your equipment with you. Be sure to follow normal etiquette and avoid walking on groomed ski trails if you do this.)
- Be aware that there are checkpoints for several courses out at once, and you may come across flags/tags for checkpoints that aren't on your course. The notation 1-140 on the map indicates that the "control code" for the first checkpoint is 140, which you can match to a number on the flag to make sure you have found the correct checkpoint. Control codes may also be shown in a separate list; in this example, the control code for the first checkpoint on the course is 31, the second checkpoint is 32, and so forth.

1	31					
2	32					
3	33					
4	34					
5	36					

- Orient the map when you are looking at it – this means to turn the map so that it lines up with your surroundings and the direction you are facing is straight ahead on the map. This makes it easier to know if something will be on the left or the right as you move along a trail, and to determine which way to turn at a trail junction.
- Keep in contact with the map – notice when you get to features such as a trail junction, distinct bend in the trail, building, or bridge and match those up with the map in order to keep track of where you are.
- Conditions change – some trails may not be groomed or may even be closed on a given day, and you may see other tracks in the woods that are not official trails. Keeping track of where you are on the map helps keep you from being confused by these things.
- Have fun!