

Asking Directions

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Orienteering is a skill that all Scouts are expected to master. A friend of mine, David Elrod, was a Scout years ago and now tries to establish proper directions wherever he is. This is actually a very good idea. But he expected everyone else to have that same sense of direction, and at work he would tell me that something was located at, for example, the northeast corner of a building. I much preferred that he just point it out for me.

David once bought a small compass and placed it on his watchband, but when he found that it wasn't very accurate as he drove around in his truck. He finally realized that the metal in the door drastically affected the natural magnetic field around the compass needle. The needle just acted crazy (much like my friend). He was very disappointed. Now the latest cars all have a compass readout.

I once went on a trip with David to New York, and when we picked up a car at the rental place he asked a man, "Which way is east?" When the man asked David why (presumably he thought if he knew where we wanted to go he could direct us better) and David said, "Because I want to go north!" Some of you might wonder, as we did, why he asked about east at all. We have never let him forget that.

Another friend of mine, Blanton Miller, and I once went on a camping trip to what was fairly familiar territory. But we got a late start, and we lost the trail in the growing darkness. We ended up camping by a creek and having a great campout there that night. We explored the creek the next morning and saw some beautiful waterfalls. Eventually, however, we knew that we had to try to find our way back out. We used common sense (yes, we had a tiny portion), kept going uphill out of the valley, kept trying to choose the best path as a team, and we eventually came to rest on a log that stretched across the trail. We had absolutely no idea where we were. We stayed for about five minutes discussing our options, and as soon as we crossed the log to move on we saw an old barrel that we had passed on the way down. We had found our way back onto the original trail! It was a great relief, and a learning experience. We decided that next time we would bring our map and compass no matter how well we thought we knew the area.

I kid around with my friend David about asking which way is east, but recently I found that this is just what the word orienteering means. The word Orient, of course, refers to the land to the east of Europe. Keeping track of where we are at all times is not a joke, though, for our direction on the trail of life is of crucial importance.