

Planning the Yellow Course

Introduction

This article assumes that you are familiar with the contents of the articles on planning White courses.

The aim of the Planner should be to provide courses that show a clear progression in the use of orienteering skills. The next course after White / 'Technical Difficulty 1' is, not surprisingly, 'Technical Difficulty 2'. However this is better known to most as the Yellow course; JM2/JW2 courses at Regional Events; and M10A/W10A, M12B/W12B at National Events. No matter which, they are all in effect the same course, so for the purposes of this article I shall refer to them as the Yellow course.

What are we trying to provide for Yellow course competitors ?

We must start with the assumption that Yellow course competitors have mastered the basic skills of the White course so are already able to understand the legend, can set the map, and can make the correct decision as to which way to go when reminded to do so by a control banner.

We now want to provide more of a challenge - requiring competitors to make decisions at obvious Decision Points which are not necessarily identified by control sites. Also to provide some adventure by getting them to venture off the paths at times, but without the danger of wandering aimlessly in the forest.

Think of Yellow as the bridge between White and Orange. White is a guided walk. Orange involves basic use of a compass to allow cutting through the forest between line features with nothing to follow. The Yellow course should give competitors skills and confidence as part of this progression.

What skills are we trying to test ?

The technical difficulty of a course is based on the skills needed to successfully complete it, and the Yellow course should test the ability to:

- Orienteer along obvious line features (handrails).
- Make decisions at 'Decision Points' without the assistance of a control to identify them as such.
- Leave a line feature to go to a visible control site near to it, then return to that line feature.

It must be possible to complete the course with just the skills learnt on the White course and those above. If not, then the course is too hard and needs a re-think.

What the Yellow course is not !

- The White course with half the controls simply not on the description list. There will still be a banner at every Decision Point (if not the Yellow course control the White course one) so this really provides no additional challenge at all.
- The White course with just a few extra controls tacked on to it.

This is not to say that some of the White legs or controls cannot be used, e.g. for a relatively easy start or to bring the course into the finish. But it is almost as bad to make the Yellow course too easy as it is to make it too hard. If the majority of the legs are only of White standard then it is not a good Yellow course as it is not setting the correct challenge for those competing on it.

The Start

For the Yellow, as for the White course, this feature will need to be a path or track. Furthermore, it must not require the competitor to decide which way to go without knowing where they have just come from, so path junctions are generally not suitable. If you must use a path junction in order to mark a precise starting point on the map then the only way to do this is to lay out the start in such a way that there is no decision to be made by the competitors on the White and Yellow courses. This can be achieved by ensuring that their maps and start box are on the path which they have to go along and it is absolutely clear that there is no decision making required at the start.

The Finish

As for the White course it is important to ensure that the finish is easily located and that there should be no possibility of a competitor being unable to find the finish after they have visited their last control.

Getting from the Start to the Finish

The route should be all along obvious line features such as tracks, paths, fences, walls, rivers, large ditches and very distinct vegetation boundaries (e.g. forest / open land), with no route choice.

Avoid any road crossings unless they are manned, and look out for other danger points such as steep cliffs, lakes, rivers and marshes. It is still mainly youngsters, typically 9 to 12 year olds, doing this course.

Whatever you plan, it is important to walk the whole course as part of the planning process, and try to look at it from the viewpoint of a child.

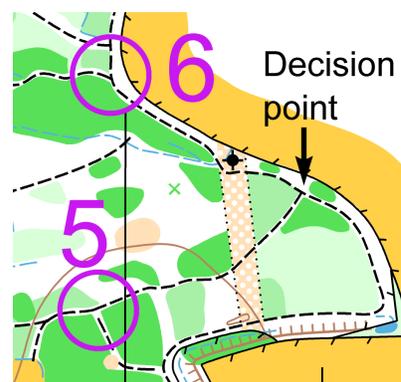
Decision Points

The concept of Decision Points was covered in detail for the White course, so to summarise :

"A Decision Point is a point at which you can no longer continue in the same direction, for example being required to turn right at a path junction." As for the White course, I would extend this basic definition to include "or where the competitor might think they have to change direction".

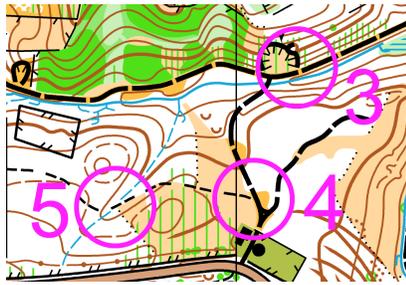
The Yellow course allows up to two Decision Points per leg, i.e. no more than two junctions to negotiate between consecutive controls. (When counting Decision Points don't include any decisions that have to be made at the control at either end of the leg.)

Decision Points without a control must be obvious both on the map and on the ground. Decision Points which are likely to be easily missed should have a control on them. The challenge is deciding which route to follow from the Decision Point, not finding that point in the first place. The course should not be designed to trick the competitor into making mistakes.



Map 1 : Easy Decision Point - path comes to a T junction with another path - no control needed

Indistinct path junctions which are easily missed are not suitable unless they have a control on them.



Map2 : Hard Decision Point - indistinct path joining from behind across rough open land - place a control here (#4)

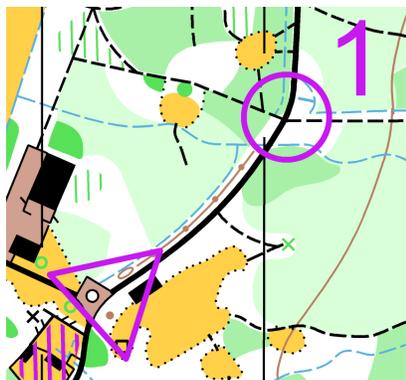
Whilst it is usually easy to spot a path junction, the ends of earthwalls and ditches where they cross the paths are often not that obvious. I would suggest that when going off paths and tracks onto a line feature through the forest there should be a control on the feature where it leaves the path as a reminder to the competitor that they need to do this. In particular, newcomers to Yellow courses will be reluctant to leave the paths, so encourage them to do so by making it clear that they are in the right place.



Map3 : Decision Point - Control to take competitors off the path and onto the ditch (#5)

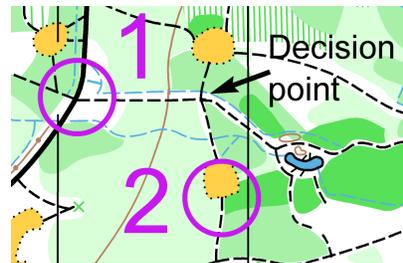
Planning the legs

Yellow courses often start with a quite easy control to give confidence. This should then lead on to plenty of proper Technical Difficulty 2 controls.

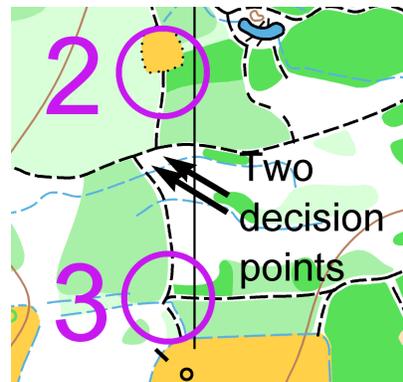


Map4 : No Decision points - typical first control, same as on the White course

A good Yellow course will have one or two decision points on most legs.

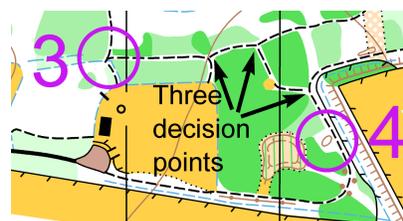


Map5 : One Decision point - turning right at a path crossing without a control



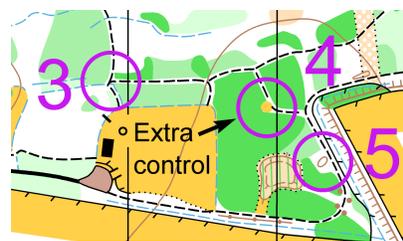
Map6 : Two Decision points - turning right then left

But don't forget the limit:



Map7 : One Decision Point too many - three is outside the guidelines

One way to correct the above is to have a control half way down a path to leave Decision Points on each of the resulting two consecutive legs.

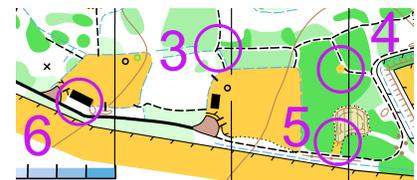


Map8 : Control half way down a path - in this case on a handy clearing

Control sites not on line features

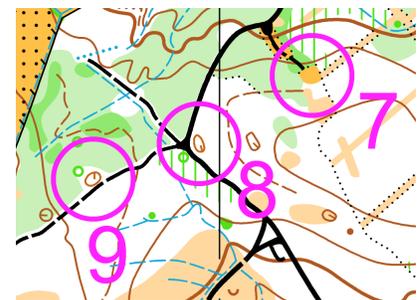
Some control sites will be on the line feature along which the competitor is travelling. However others can be on obvious features close to, with the banner clearly visible from, the line feature. e.g. knolls, boulders, man made objects.

How close is close ? This very much depends on the visibility, and remember that this is the visibility as viewed by a child so get on your knees to test it out. Around 10 to 15 metres is a suggested maximum, but if there is undergrowth then even 5 metres may be too far. Whatever feature you use, make sure the banner is on the side of the feature that can be clearly seen from the path, and that competitors can reach the punch / box without treading through nettles or brambles.



Map9 : Both #5 and #6 are good controls close to a line feature. In this case control #5 probably makes for a better course than the #5 shown on Map8

One point to note is that it also needs to be easy for the competitor to return from the control to the path or track they started from. Any feature that is very near a junction can cause a problem. Whilst the feature and banner may be easy to see, it is also very easy to come away from the control onto the wrong path. Particularly if the feature is a large depression which goes below ground level.



Map10 : Poor control #8 as it is too close to the junction. Control #9 is fine, provided the banner can be clearly

seen, in which case #8 could be omitted entirely

How long should the course be ?

Guidance on the Yellow course length is given in two ways. As a ratio of 0.22 of the M21L course (which will usually result in a figure of between 2.2 and 2.9 km) and within the range 2.0 to 2.9 km. For the Yellow course it is important that the course is of the correct Technical Difficulty rather than an exactly calculated length. It will often be the case that the nature of the terrain forces the course length away from the precise course length ratio, hence the guidance as to the range of lengths which are acceptable.

Control sites

How many controls should there be ? Controls should be reasonably close together (350m maximum), although not all legs should be this long. 350m with two Decision Points is probably a good leg. 350m straight along a track is not. If you have to have a 350m route with no Decision Point then look for an off-line feature en-route to break up the run.

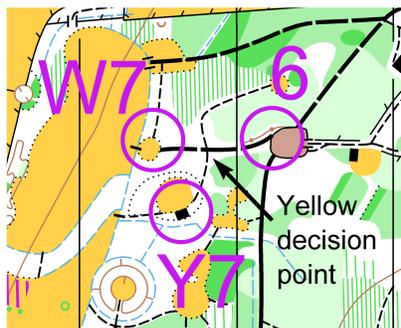
Leg lengths shouldn't vary greatly, although having some very short legs may be unavoidable to get through a tricky area. This means a typical Yellow course will have between 10 and 15 controls on it.

Control Codes and Control Descriptions

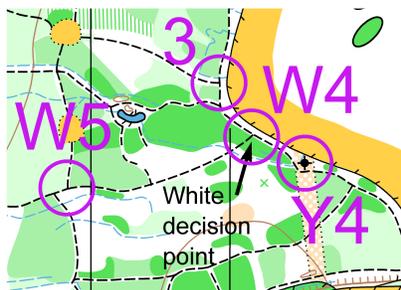
As stated in the White course article, don't use sequences for any course. A Yellow course which uses the same last few controls as the White course, and has controls 11, 12, 13 with control codes 112, 113, 114, is a recipe for confusion, often resulting in disqualifications.

White / Yellow course split

One potential source of problems is at points where the White and Yellow courses diverge. There are a number of possible ways of solving this problem.



Map11 : White has no Decision Point between #6 and #7 but Yellow has



Map12 : White has a Decision Point at the junction (W4) but Yellow goes straight on to the control on the pylon (Y4)

This second example also provides a good learning point for the Yellow course competitor - not every control you pass is necessarily on your course.

What happens when the paths run out ?

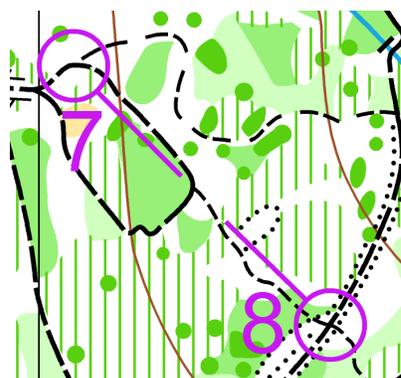
It is inevitable that on some areas at some point the line features just won't join up to make a nice course. See the White course article for suggestions on what to do in such a situation. When taping a route on the Yellow course, if the tape does not go completely from one control to the next do make sure that the tape starts and finishes on definite features and that it is clear from the control descriptions that it does not link the two controls.

Course overprints

The same general considerations as for the White course apply here, but particular care must be taken not to place the red line over important track junctions. It may be necessary to either break the line, or offset it from joining the centres of the circles, in order to make the path junction visible.



Map13 : Poor overprint - red line obscures important path junction.



Map14 : Edited overprint - with the red line now broken the path junction becomes clearly visible.

End result

If your Yellow course follows all the principles outlined in this article then you should have some very satisfied customers who will eventually move on to the Orange course, which will be covered in more detail in the next article.

Credits:

Map extracts courtesy of Bruce Bryant and Mike Hampton

References:

- Course Planning by Graham Nilsen
- British Orienteering Rules
- British Orienteering Appendix B - Course Planning

all of which can be found on the British Orienteering web site under Events / Regulations.

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