

Contours



An orienteer acquires a 'toolbox' of skills to help them with the **PLAN** for the leg between controls. Here are some of those skills:

- Using simple handrails (paths, fences etc.)
- Interpretation of the vegetation shown on the map
- Working out the best Attack point for the control
- What the Route choices are and which best suits you
- Aiming off to cut through the forest / terrain
- Use of Catching features to know where you are as you navigate a leg
- Simplifying the map along your 'navigation corridor'
- Having the courage to relocate quickly (although being a 'headless chicken' seems to appeal more!)
- Contours – as Handrails and to help with deciding Route choice.

We live in a world of ups, downs, undulating and flat areas. The map is a flat sheet of paper. Contours are drawn on the map to show the shape of the land, so being able to work from map  ground is a skill which will help you with planning your route and **Picture**. Contours on the map are the thing which is least likely to change – we alter paths, put up new buildings, cut down trees etc. but very rarely alter the shape of the ground (and if this is done, a new map is needed!).

The steepness of a slope is shown by the contours; closer together = steeper slope, further apart = gentle slope. On many orienteering maps, the contour interval is 5m (sand dune area often have a 2.5m contour interval); at times the mapper thinks this does not show the ground clearly enough so they insert a form line. A form mapper's interpretation of the ground.

The mapper also puts 'tags' onto the contours – these are on the downhill side of the contour.

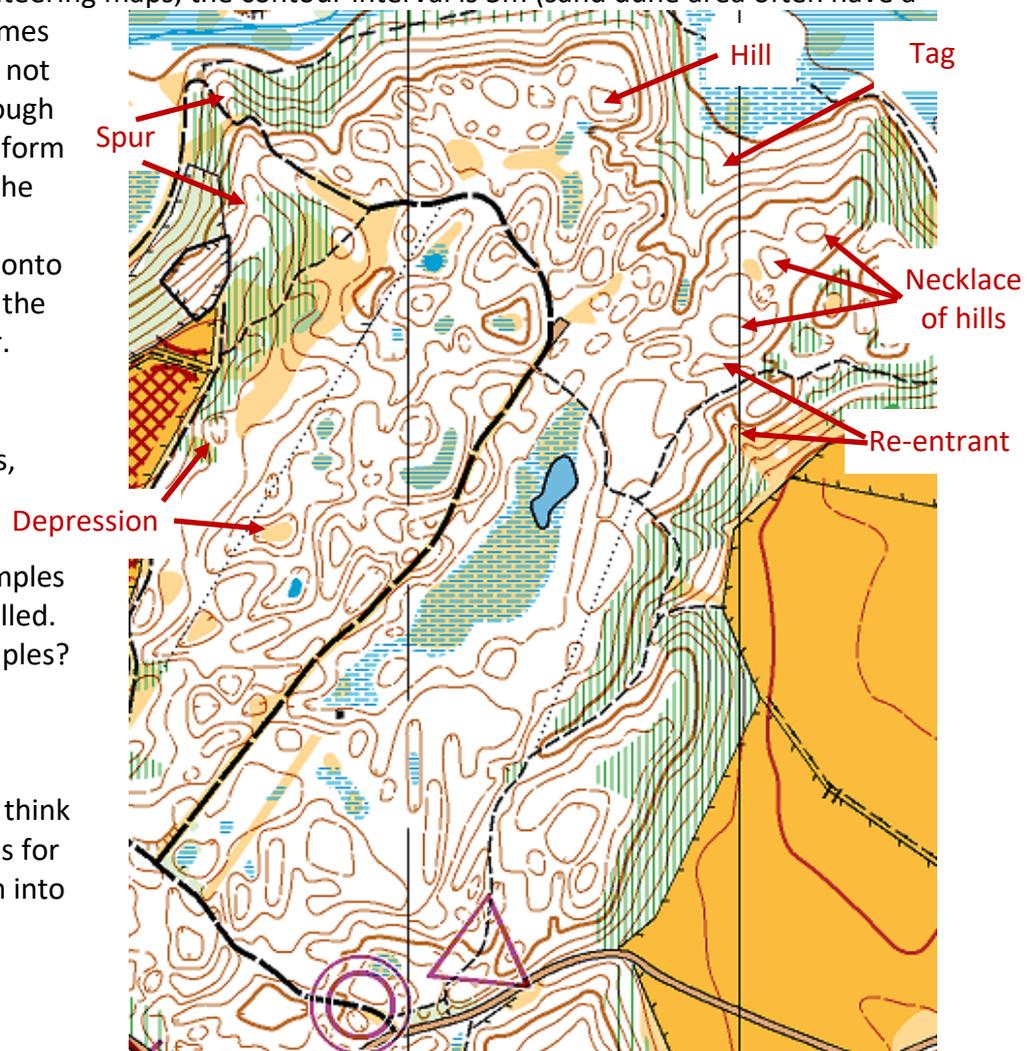
Up features = hills, spurs.

Down features = re-entrants, depressions.

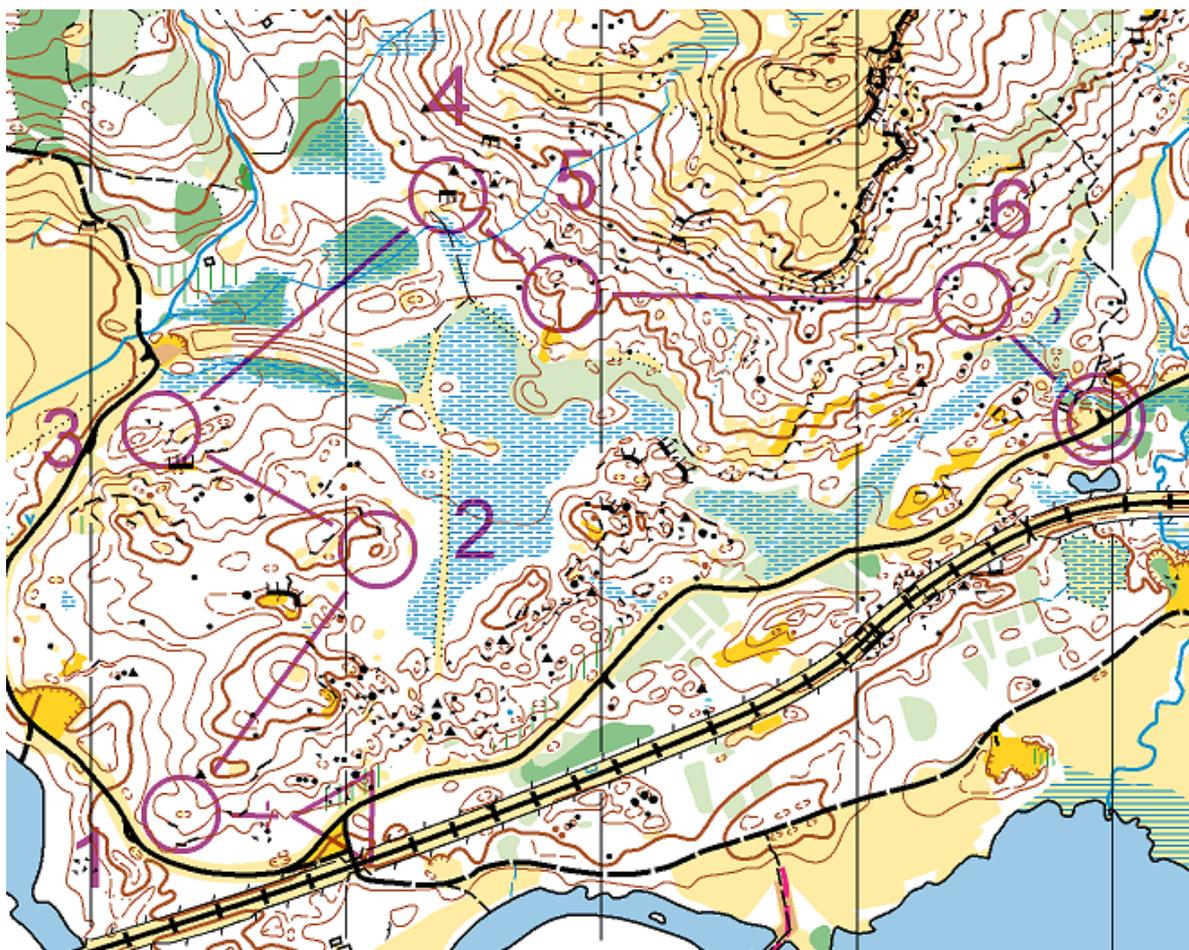
On the map opposite, examples of contour features are labelled. Can you identify more examples?

Watch the short video '[Large contour features](#)'.

This will help you to start to think about using contour features for navigation and turning them into handrails.



Now have a look at the course below. How will you navigate each leg, using contours to help you?



To take you further:

- Moor of Alvie has a couple of MapRun courses for you to try.
- Go to Loch Vaa SE for contours in a heathery ups & downs area. By the end of June BASOC are hoping to have some MapRun courses in there.
- Head to the MOR areas on the Moray coast. Here in the sand dune areas you can 'play' with contours for ages!
- Watch the video '[Intricate Contours](#)' in the Think Fast, Run Hard, Go Orienteering series. In this video, the athlete simplifies the **Picture** of the terrain; he also speaks on hills in terms of a '2 contour hill' as this translates to a mental picture for him, he knows the size of the feature he is looking for.

The more you work with the contours on the map the better your understanding and confidence will be.

