



Sons of Norway Mini Presentations

#382: ORIENTEERING

In past times, Norwegians spent much of their daily lives outdoors—it was a necessity for some—and getting from one place to another meant traveling on foot, skis, in a boat or on a horse. Modern Norwegians have the convenience of faster forms of transportation, and some may work indoors, but Norwegian society has maintained a passion for *friluftslivet*—the outdoor life—spending time in nature for recreation, rejuvenation and finding balance.

A popular sport in Norway that allows for enjoyment of *friluftslivet* is orienteering. Orienteering belongs to a group of sports that uses navigation techniques with a map and compass to travel from checkpoint to checkpoint in an unknown area, usually as quickly as possible. The original format of orienteering was on foot and was used to train military officers in navigation. More recent types of orienteering include skiing, canoeing, mountain biking, mountain running, and horseback riding as well as other modes of transportation. Orienteering courses are usually selected for their beauty, whether natural or man-made.

The tradition of orienteering finds its origins in the Norwegian and Swedish military in the late 1800s, with the world's first civilian orienteering competition taking place in Sørkedalen, Oslo in 1897. The course was lengthy compared to today's standards: 12.1 miles with only three controls. The winner was Norwegian Peder Fossum, who finished in 1 hour, 47 minutes, and 7 seconds. This event is considered the birth of the sport of orienteering, since it was a public event, rather than a military exercise.

Orienteers use their map and compass to plot their course as quickly as possible from the start, through a series of numbered controls—orange triangular kites—and on to the finish. Runners use a compass with a transparent ruler, and the color-coded maps which show scale and a high level of detail. Maps are made by taking aerial photographs and then filling in the details of terrain. There is no set route between controls; the orienteer must navigate his or her own way. Traditionally, orienteers would use a punch at each control site to mark their control card with a unique pattern. To speed things up, modern orienteering competitions distribute a map and an electronic chip to each participant. This way, runners don't need to stamp their maps, but their chip is scanned as they find each control. Race clothing covers everything but the head and neck. Runners wear special orienteering shoes with cleats, and a headlamp during night-time races. It is common for orienteering competitions to stagger race start times, so that each racer plots his or her unique course.

Various orienteering organizations were founded and disbanded through the years. *Norges Orienteringsforbund* (NOF), the Norwegian Orienteering Federation, was founded in 1945 and by 2008 it had around 24,000 members. Orienteering began gaining momentum in the 1930s and by 1961, the International Orienteering Federation (IOF) was formed by the orienteering organizations of 10 European nations. At present, there are 70 member countries in the IOF. Each nation has its own governing body for orienteering, and the IOF, based in Finland, delineates the rules for foot, mountain bike, ski and trail orienteering. Today, NOF's budget is approximately 20 million kroner and has an office in Oslo with 12 full-time employees. Orienteering is one of the top 13 sports in Norway with around 23,000 members, 18 leagues and 400 clubs.



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In 1962, Norway hosted the first European Orienteering Championships, and hosted the World Orienteering Championships in 1978, 1997 and 2010. Norway played a central role in developing the international standard for symbols and color usage on maps in the 1960s. In the 1970s orienteering had an even larger international reach, spreading to Central and Eastern Europe. The first map norms were introduced in 1975 and since then have been revised approximately every 10 years.

The Nordic Championships (NOM) have been held every year since 1955. There are around 1000 open orienteering competitions held in Norway annually with 50 to 4,000 participants. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognizes orienteering as an Olympic sport, but it has yet to be on the program during the Olympic Games. The IOF and NOF are working toward this goal.