

Introduction

The NNAS awards are personal navigation competency awards open to anyone seeking to improve their navigation competence and build confidence in the outdoors. They set navigation standards across the country so no matter where you do your course it should be comparable across the UK.

The Bronze award is designed to develop the foundation of navigation skills and confidence whether you are a novice or regular outdoor person. Upon successful completion, a Bronze Navigator will be able to plan and follow their own walks in the countryside using Rights of Way, paths and tracks, with a good understanding of safety, weather, kit and judgement of time and distance. The course is a minimum of 12 hours over 2 days and a certificate is awarded following successful completion of the course.

Technical Skills

A map and compass is all that is required, the course will not include how to use your GPS if you have one. At this level we are not interested in working out bearings and directions of travel which are only relevant for walking cross country off paths and generally in poor weather. Sticking to paths keeps the navigation simple and safe, it is largely about choosing the correct path at a junction and keeping an eye on your progress. There is no requirement for numeracy so long as you can count to around 65 (for pacing) that is sufficient at this level.

The focus is on outdoor navigation decision making skills and building confidence rather than traditional classroom map reading skills. Developing our cognitive navigation (i.e. building brain mapping) helps the navigator to be engaged and immersed in their surroundings, which leads to a richer outdoor experience.

Maps

Map choice and route planning are simple skills and you may use a few different maps over the 2 days. In some areas around the UK don't be surprised if the provider uses an orienteering map at some point in the training, these enable rapid skills development and build confidence which is then transferred to the more commonly used maps. Orienteering maps have a lot of detail and don't have writing on the map, so they help train the brain to read symbols anyway up. Names of places on a map are only useful if you are at a signpost!

Orientating or setting the map

The most fundamental skill is orientating or setting the map in a heads-up alignment. Similar to Sat Nav in the car, the map is aligned to the path ahead, so it is easy to read the symbols and locate features as you walk. Setting can be done simply by aligning the map to features you see around you or with the north pointing end of the compass needle pointing up the grid line to the north (top edge of the map where the title is). If you master this, pretty much everything else will fall into place.

Contours

The course will introduce the more common landscape features hills, valleys, spurs etc. and how to interpret contour lines and the likely ups and downs of a journey.

Measuring distance

Good route planning before leaving home is time well spent using a map, satellite imagery and any information available in books or websites. Once on the ground there are a number of ways of measuring distance, and even speed, using simple visual estimations, timing and occasionally pacing.

Strategies

Navigation involves a few strategies that help us keep track of our location and help us avoid becoming misplaced if we miss a junction for instance. Use a simple or quick bearing (needle and base plate only without turning the dial or numbers) to confirm the direction of a linear feature.

Other information

There are lots of opportunities for discussion around clothing and equipment, your access rights and responsibilities, anecdotes of getting lost, (we have all done it). Dealing with emergencies and awareness of the use of free mobile phone location apps as a back-up to map and compass.

After the course...

The NNAS Bronze Award is your passport to freedom in the countryside. Many people who attend an NNAS Bronze Award come away feeling positive and empowered with a sense of achievement; they are keen to get out and explore more with their new skills.