

## **Orienteering makes strides in Canmore**

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You're running through tough terrain, over fallen logs and under hanging trees with a map and compass in hand, navigating between checkpoints in the wilderness, checkpoint to checkpoint, mixing instinct with precision planning.

If you're doing that, you're orienteering, not Indiana Jones, although, come to think of it, parallels could be drawn between the sport and the adventure.

"I was a bit intimidated by the sport at first," Canadian Orienteering Federation president Charlotte MacNaughton says. "But then I loved the challenge of finding a balance between pushing yourself physically, so that you're going as fast as you can, but trying to keep your mind sharp, so that you're navigating well. It's like doing a puzzle while you're running, and I love the mental-physical challenge of the sport."

There are three different formats for competitive orienteering: 15 minutes for sprint distance races; 35 minutes for middle distance races; and 90 minutes for long distance races.

MacNaughton, a Canmore resident originally from Calgary, has been involved in the sport for the past 17 years, having competed as a member of the national team at the World Championships in Japan in 2005 and again in Denmark in 2006. In the upcoming weeks, she will head to Ottawa for the selection races for this year's national team, which will compete in the World Championships in the Czech Republic in July.

MacNaughton's training will comprise of exactly what the sport features: running, off-trail running and technical training with an orienteering map and a compass.

"That's what's so much fun about the sport, is you see some amazing terrain all over the world. You just go to places that you wouldn't necessarily go to as a 'normal tourist,'" she says.

True the sport can take you to some worldly spots, but it can also take you to your own backyard, as Canmore residents found out last Saturday.

As a part of National Orienteering Week (May 3-11), in which clubs across the country put on events to introduce newcomers to the sport, Try Orienteering came to the Canmore Nordic Centre.

"I think a lot of people do get that high from solving the puzzle," course setter Adrian Zissos says. "A lot of people get the high just from being in the outdoors, running through the forest, that really is a wonderful feeling."

Zissos is a member of the Foothills Wonderers Orienteering Club and introduced MacNaughton, who was also a course setter at the event, to the sport nearly two decades ago.

Both were pleasantly surprised by the 70 plus people who turned out to get a taste of orienteering.

"There's a real strong appreciation for the outdoors," Zissos said. "But even so, we were thinking, 'well, orienteering is a bit of a strange sport for most people and some people find it quite intimidating,' so we didn't really expect much more than 20 or 30 people." Although orienteering has remained out of the limelight in North America, the COF has been around for 40 years, and is especially popular in northern Europe, MacNaughton says.

"I think a lot of people have heard about orienteering and wanted to give it a try, and a lot of adventure racers are keen to come out orienteering, because it's going to help their navigational skills," she says.

Despite ideal terrain throughout the Bow Valley, the sport has not hit the ground running in Canmore, which Zissos finds somewhat surprising.

"I personally think that Canmore is very ready for (orienteering)," he says. "I think out of Canmore we could find many elite athletes; I think we could quickly have some of the best competitive athletes in North America, because people are generally fit, they're very comfortable in the outdoors and there's all sorts of opportunity to train and get better." Orienteering will return to Canmore on Aug. 29 for the Barebones Tune Up Clinic, Aug. 30 for the Canmore Pursuit and again on Oct. 4 for Mountain Bike Orienteering. Zissos recalls the precise moment he got hooked by the sport.

"The first two checkpoints that I went to were disasters, the plan didn't work at all, but eventually one of them worked – absolutely exactly the way that I had planned it – and I executed it just the way that I imagined I would, and I turned around the corner into this clearing and said, 'if everything is done right, that check point should be just to my left,' and I turn and there was this amazing rush in my body."