***MAP READING GUIDANCE FOR THE ‘NOVICE’***

I strongly suspect that most people learned the basics of Map Reading, the same way as I did – By heading off into the wilds, equipped with a new map, compass, and some well worn overconfidence in my own abilities. The results, at the start, were always the same – getting magnificently lost in an impressively short time, followed by sore feet, grumpy companions, and huge ‘bashes’ to one’s Ego.

For those who would like to save the time (and anguish) the above method requires, I have been asked to lay out some simple guidance so here goes:

**FIRST**

Get yourself a good Map & Compass. Most Outdoor Equipment shops stock both, and usually have knowledgeable staff that can help.

Compass – A Vast array of types, sizes, and prices.

Strange little thing, but actually quite handy. The funny red painted needle will always point towards Magnetic North, 24 hours a day, 7days a week, 365 days a year. If you are convinced the compass is wrong… take a deep breath and remember, it is NEVER WRONG – YOU ARE !

However, If you are close to your car the compass may well point towards your engine! TOP TIP - When using a compass always stand clear of any large metal objects.

Maps - The Ordinance Survey Explorer 1:25,000 Series are excellent, as they clearly show all the bridleways, cycle trails, footpaths, and Public Rights of Way.

Get yourself a copy of the Map covering the area you wish to walk/ cycle in. At first glance, a map looks like some young children have had great fun with the felt tip pens on your best tablecloth. There is however, method to the madness, as explained in an Index entitled ‘Customer Information’ across the bottom of the map. If you like, a map is a reasonably sized piece of paper, on which somebody has tried to draw to scale, all of the bumps, roads, buildings etc. across (in the case of the 1:25000 Series) some 20 square kilometres of countryside. TOP TIP – Spend some time reading the index, and finding out what all the funny coloured lines and blobs mean. SECOND TOP TIP – Start with a map covering where you live, this will help you to relate the reality to the maps pictorial representation.

**SECOND**

Now you are ready for the dark art of Grid References. There are some ‘Smarty pants’ around who can play with eight figure grid references, but most of us mere mortals seem to get by on the six figure system.

As you may have noticed already across your map, there is a ‘grid’ of narrow blue lines, with blue numbers shown around the edges, and about every 10 lines across the map, This is the ‘grid’ referred to in grid reference . They do not exist on the ground so there is no need to worry about tripping over them. They are only drawn to assist you in getting from where you are to where you want to be. For our purposes, both the Map and the grid are drawn so that the top of the Map is North, the bottom South, and you’ve guessed it, the left is West, and the right East.

The distance on the map between the blue lines (either horizontally or vertically) represents a kilometre of ground. The vertical lines going from the bottom of your map sheet to the top are numbered from the left hand side across. The horizontal lines going from the left to the right hand side are numbered from the bottom up.

A Grid Reference is a combination of the number on the vertical line, added to the number on the horizontal line, ALWAYS **IN THAT ORDER!!!!**

TOP TIP – A way to remember this - Imagine you have just finished watching your favourite TV programme in a grand mansion, and are now off to bed. Once everything is switched off, you walk along the ground floor corridor until you reach the foot of the Stairs. You then climb the stairs to the floor your bedroom is on! So with Grid References - Move along the ‘corridor’ of lines (left to right) along the bottom of the map until you reach the number you want, then go up the ‘stairs’ of lines (bottom to top) until you reach the next number you want !!

To quote the TV MeerKats - “ Simples!”

**THIRD**

Now you are ready to venture into the great outdoors clutching your two new best friends, “Charlie Compass, and Molly Map”… almost!

First, I suggest that you initially, walk known routes, to see how they look on the map. This will achieve two aims:

a/ Make you look like a highly skilled navigator to friends and family .

b/ Enhance your known routes, as the map will always show you stuff that you have never noticed to date.

Secondly, start choosing well marked footpath routes on the map, and go out and walk them. This will introduce you to the next key set of information a map holds for you – funny light and dark brown Contour Lines.

Contour lines are a pictorial representation of the height of the ground. Somewhere along the Contour line will be number, this is the height above Sea level in metres. If the route you have chosen crosses several contour lines with rising numbers, then you will be travelling up a gentle slope – good plan! If the route you have chosen crosses lots of contour lines with rising numbers, then you may well be attempting the North face of the Eiger – not so good a plan !The reverse is true if the Contour line numbers descend – well spaced lines is a gentle downward slope, lots close together is the edge of the grand Canyon .

Happy Wandering………………………………….