

Navigating to nowhere.

If you are an adventurer or adventurous type of person and you have never been lost, you are very special. Being lost is very easy. Whenever I walk through a shopping mall, I see many lost people. They are lost in a world of loneliness, empty of adventure, isolated and gathering things instead of living to make a difference. Some can hardly walk they are so stuffed with too much junk food, genetically modified nonsense and artificial sweeteners. The people walk as if on their way to nowhere and on their way, they observe nothing. Nobody makes eye contact, and very seldom do they acknowledge a greeting by just even the driest smile or nod. Lost man, I tell you, they are lost.

Whilst participating in adventure races the worst thing that can happen is that you get lost. "Where are we now?" These words team members never want to hear after they have raced for hours, are tired, running out of food and water and worst of all, running out of daylight.

Getting lost in broad daylight with a topographical map in an area with many landmarks is unforgivable. Getting lost in an area like the bushveld is another thing. When you are in an area that is fairly flat, with trees just higher than yourself and very few large land marks, natural or artificial, you can very easily get lost if you do not stick to basics. By basics I mean real common-sense basics. I always ask kids what the **most important rule** is about Adventure Racing. My simple answer is without failure "**always know exactly where you are**". This statement is two-fold. The one part is to know where you are on the map and the other is to know where you are physically on the ground. If you do not know this then you are lost.

The **second most important rule** when navigating in an adventure race after knowing where you are is **to know where you are going**. If you do not know where you are going, you are also lost. It is imperative to plan the route that you want to follow. By planning your route there

are many things that you must take note of. How long will it take? How much water or fluid must I take with? How much food must I take with? If it is a cycle leg, what will be our average speed, where do we have to turn, where will we possibly have to carry our bikes and for how far, will we get wet, do I take wet lube or dry lube? Is it going to rain and do I carry rain clothes or will the sun shine and do I pack extra sunblock? If it is a hiking leg you must choose footwear to suite the terrain, etc, etc. Socks are very important. Blisters are enemy number one and advance planning on how to deal with blisters can be the difference between an experience to be shared and an experience out of hell.

The **third rule** to consider is the simple one of "**never follow another team**". They might be lost and as a rule of thumb, they will never admit it. So instead of following another team rather make sure that you know where you are and where you are going. If you do not know then just ask the other team to show you where you are on the map. From there you re-plan your route if you are not on track.

Rule number four is as important as all the others together and normally is the difference between success and failure. **There can only be one navigator** in the team. Only one person can make the final decision on where exactly to go next. I have seen over many years of racing and coaching teams that the successful ones follow a simple method. The navigator makes the decision on the route and confirms it with the assistant navigator. After confirming it with the assistant the navigator informs the rest of the team of the plan of action and thereafter keeps the team up to date as the race progress. If you do not trust your navigator, do not race with him or her, you will only get frustrated and won't have fun. You should also be honest with team mates when you realise you are not a navigator as some people just do not have a sense of direction. This does not mean you cannot be a valuable member of the team, it just means you should stay away from the map.

On top of the list when preparing to pack your kit for an adventure race must be the one and only tool that is imperative to the success of your race. Yes, the Compass is the one tool you cannot go without and failing to use it is the downfall of 80% of teams that have navigation problems. It is the first tool to use when orientating the map and thereby yourself. When racing in the dark you cannot go without having your compass handy the whole time and making sure you are going in the right direction. Remember, at night you do not necessarily see landmarks that are normally easily identifiable in daylight and therefore cannot rely on features indicated on the map. Knowing how to determine true North to orientate your map with a compass by allowing for the magnetic declination is critical. **Rule number five is to use your compass constantly.**

Rule number six could also be rule number one but according to me it is less important but still something important to consider. **If the captain of the team is not the navigator then he cannot overrule the navigator's decisions.** He can only assist and make recommendations like the other team members.

Basically, an adventure race is very similar to real life.

Know where you are at all times. Know why, where, how and with whom you fit in. Your work, social, mental, physical status and position in society at large must be known by yourself.

If you do not know where you are, how would you know where you are going? Everybody, does not matter what age you are, need to have goals, aims and vision of where they want to go. Be it work, sport or social goals, the fact is that you need to have some sort of future planning in place. I have heard the saying, "if you do not know where you are going then any path will lead you there". You need to choose a destination and then plan the route or path that you are going to follow to get there.

If you do not plan or use certain tools to guide you in the right direction, then you could find yourself lost. Sometimes a good friend could be the compass that guides you in the right direction, literature or gut feel are also tools that could help guide you.

You must make and execute your own plans. Do not be a blind follower, be a leader.

If you find yourself in a team you must understand and respect each member of the team's position. Accept their input and decisions but feel free to give input with recommendations.

Adventure can be more than just the pursuit of adrenaline