Recommendations for an effective search for a missing person

This set of recommendations has been prepared following a search exercise at a level C event in a relatively small area adjacent to the assembly field. It may be that some actions have more, less or inappropriate importance in a totally different location or level of event. The key to success is that the set of officials have a well-prepared plan.

In advance -

1. Some key preparatory work needs to be done prior to the event. As soon as the maps are available, the organiser, planner and controller (plus safety officer if one present) should meet for a **safety meeting** to discuss and agree on the following –

   - who will be in charge of the various procedures. The British Orienteering document suggests that the organiser is in charge of the search. If another official is more experienced or trained, then that should be agreed and respected at the event. A defined chain of command is essential and must be adhered to.

   - numbered search areas for every course should be planned and drawn on one of the relevant course maps. This may sound tedious if there are a lot of courses, but will save precious time on the day if needed. These maps should be stored in a folder with the search procedures and kept handy in assembly ready for use.

2. Check and test search equipment – radios, mobiles, torches - and that reception in the event area is adequate.

3. Extra base maps should be printed in case not enough course maps are left for all the searchers. It might be possible to use the base maps from the start lanes for this if they have been returned to assembly. Plenty of all-control maps are also needed.

4. Late Club runners and late shift helpers MUST be told that they are expected to stay until the all clear is given for everyone back. Even if helpers are not mobile enough to search, there will be other jobs they can do - e.g. help with relatives, or the clear up jobs that the searchers would normally be doing, or collecting nearby controls that are not on the missing person's course.

5. Prepare a log form for recording the progress of the search.

If the preparatory work has been done satisfactorily, then on the day –

- The pre-agreed person in charge should organise the search.

- The teams MUST focus on searching and NOT control collecting.

- Controls on the missing person's course should be left out, either in case the missing person manages to relocate, or if the emergency services are called in later, the controls in place will help them.

1. Retrieve the search procedure folder and relevant course search map.

2. Recruit as many searchers as possible and organise into pairs. If there are more pairs than the pre-planned search areas, then divide the areas up further, or overlap. If fewer, then enlarge the search areas.

3. Each team should have a radio or mobile and torch if getting dark. Each person should have a whistle, compass and suitable clothing for searching.

4. Check each team knows how to use the radio.

5. Agree whistle codes if appropriate - e.g. person found, call back - in case contact lost.

6. Agree maximum time for each team to search and report back in case contact lost.

7. Searchers should be given a course map each and copy their allocated search area for their team from the master course search map.

8. Record teams on the log form with search area – teams should sign out themselves and be checked for relevant kit, maps etc., so log entries will match up.

6. Keep the master course search map at base to keep track of areas searched as the teams radio in or report back.

While out searching (within their area) team members should –

1. Retrace the missing person's course and focus on the most likely places where they might be based on their experience – an inexperienced person may wander further from their course.

2. Spread out from each other to increase the width of the sweep but keep in contact.

3. Frequently shout, in case they may be conscious but unable to move.

4. Keep searching unless called back, or not enough visibility, or maximum search time reached.