

Barebones 2001 Course Planning Contest

In 2001 the Barebones Classic Course was set by someone that never actually went to map! In fact, the course planner was the winner of the Barebones Course Planning Contest. Here is a description of the Contest along with general comments on the practice of good course planning. Click on the links below...

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Barebones 2001 Course Planning Contest – Judges Comments

Barebones organizers are forever dreaming and scheming up ways to reduce our workload. Back last summer we figured we'd devised a scheme to have other people do our course planning for us. We created a contest. To be sure we even coughed up prize money. We enlisted the help of *Orienteering North America* and the *Canadian Orienteering Federation* to publish blank maps, then sat back and waited for a good course to appear in the mailbox. It was a great idea except for one thing: we got more quality courses than expected and so judging was more work than anticipated (and probably more work than setting the course ourselves). Nevertheless, it was fascinating fun for us sifting through, picking the winners.

Course planning is an art. For most planners it is an endless learning experience, with each new course (hopefully) an improvement over the ones before. Good course planning is crucial to enjoyable orienteering and hence to the growth of our sport. From weeknight training sessions to major competitions, well-designed courses with controls in the promised places are prerequisite to a rewarding experience for both organizers and competitors.

Critically and constructively reviewing our course planning efforts with the aim of continually improving standards seems time well spent. After your next orienteering race we encourage you to discuss with your friends not only your performances and route choices but also issues of the course design and how *you* might have set a course. Here, in this spirit, are the judges' general comments on the entries to the Barebones 2001 Course Planning Contest, and a description of the judging process. The judges wish to point out that they have no special qualifications for being judges, other than the years of experience on which these comments are based, and a passing acquaintance with the Barebones organizers.

Judges' Comments

Shape. The first problem faced by the course planner is to find a general shape that fits an 8km course onto the map, using the Start/Finish locations specified in the contest rules. With a lake in the middle of a 'tall and skinny' map the natural and most common shape was an oval around the lake. A few inserted a figure-eight loop in the south, which introduced some nice changes of direction.

Climb. The next issue to address is the steep slopes between the lake and the east edge of the map. Some avoided these slopes by staying west of the lake, but these missed some good terrain detail. The best approach to the slopes was to set long legs, utilizing the detail and allowing the competitor choices of climbing early, climbing late, or climbing gradually over the length of the leg. A common flaw was to set short steep legs on the slope with limited route choice. Another flaw was to have too much unnecessary climb, with a leg that went up the hill followed by a leg back down, then back up, then down... (Opinion: "Grunt-O" simply isn't fun – courses with climbs that are just a grunt will turn people off our sport.)

Edge of the map. The map is bounded to the east and southwest by a fence; however the north, south, and northwest edges of the map are vague. Some courses had controls too close to the un-

bounded edges of the map. We don't want orienteers running off the map; it's not fun for them and it may be unsafe and it may be trespassing.

Detailed Terrain. Unfortunately this map doesn't have a lot of detail. But there are pockets of it and the best courses took advantage of these areas. Often the strategy was to have longer legs in the more bland areas and short legs in the pockets of detail.

Route Choice versus Navigational Challenge. A common flaw was to set legs that are navigationally quite difficult (which is good) but that provide very little route choice. The best courses provided both navigational challenge and several different route choices on most legs. Often controls could be moved a few meters to provide more route choice.

Lame route choice. Interesting route choice does not come from precisely measuring alternative routes (a.k.a. "Caliper-O") but from a real difference in the terrain options and the navigational and map reading challenges on those routes. For example: 'safe or risky?', 'straight or twisty?', 'over or around?'. Not simply 'left or right?'

Number of Controls. The number of controls used ranged between ten and twenty-eight. The majority of entries had between 13 and 16 controls, which is reasonable. Certainly no more are necessary – using too many controls results in short legs, which tends to reduce route choice. Also the more controls, the more work for the organizers. Courses often could have been improved simply by removing controls to make longer, more interesting legs. A good question to ask is "Is this course improved if this control is removed?"

Leg length. Often the leg lengths were too uniform (watch out for courses with lots of legs that are between 300m and 400m). The best courses had a variety of lengths ranging from around 100m to well over 1.5km. This variety adds to the orienteering challenge by testing concentration and focus. Longer legs also tend to have abundant route choice.

Control Sites. Some courses used vague control sites such as the middle of a long re-entrant, the side of a long hill, or a form-line hill surrounded by bland terrain. Vague control sites can be frustrating for both the organizers (who have to hang the flag 'somewhere around here') and competitors (who have to hunt for it), and can lead to unpleasantness such as protests and the throwing out of courses. It is always possible to improve a course that has vague control sites by moving those controls to someplace specific and unambiguous.

Judging Process

Twenty-seven entries found their way to Barebones headquarters. Faced with an unexpectedly high number of entries and a dearth of judges the culling process was modified, as follows. In the early stages of judging only the long course was considered; in the final stages both courses were. All names were hidden from the judges so that reputation and association played no part. The judges were somewhat surprised, they claimed, by the absence of bribery. ☺

A first pass was made through the 27 entries to narrow the field to 15. Entries dropped in this first stage tended to be of good quality but with one (or perhaps more) easily correctable flaws. The survivors were divided randomly into two groups and ranked. The top entries from each group continued, bringing the number down to seven. At this second stage much smaller flaws were used as the basis of differentiation. In the third stage, the seven survivors were compared in randomly selected pairings, with the 'most enjoyable' course continuing in the contest. This comparison was repeated until only the two winners remained.

Obviously such a method of ranking is entirely personal and unsatisfactory in many ways - but it was what worked to be most convenient for the judges. If you are not the winner (as 96% of the entrants aren't) don't feel that your entry was undeserving. For the judges this was a pleasingly difficult problem of having to choose "the best" from a slate full of quality courses. The winners will be identified following the race that uses their courses on July 2nd at Barebones 2001. If you can't be at the event you can find out who won at <http://www.gumbi.com/fwoc/barebones2001.htm>.

We hope people had fun with this contest and also we hope that it will contribute in some small ways to improving the standard of courses enjoyed in North American orienteering. And we must say that it already has: based on the judges' comments we've reviewed and made improvements to the other Barebones 2001 courses that we had already set ourselves.

Once again we'd like to thank everyone who entered this contest, the judges, and especially *Orienteering North America* and the *Canadian Orienteering Federation* for their support.

Adrian Zissos, April 2001
At Barebones H.Q.

Make-believe course to illustrate some of the Judges' comments

A picture is worth a thousand words – so to make the judges' comments more meaningful I've put together a deliberately lousy course to illustrate.

Leg 1: Vague control site – re-entrant is too long to have a control in the middle. Also, the leg has no significant route choice.

Leg 2: This leg is inserted to provide a more interesting leg 2-3 (instead of 1-3, which encourages the route along the road). Note that removing control 1 improves the course.

Leg 3: This leg isn't too bad. There are three different route choices to control 3: a) east of the hill, attacking from below, b) west of the hill, attacking from the trail, c) along the road.

Leg 4: Too easy – a major catching feature is immediately behind the control.

Leg 5: 'Caliper-O'. There is no significant difference in going north or south around the lake.

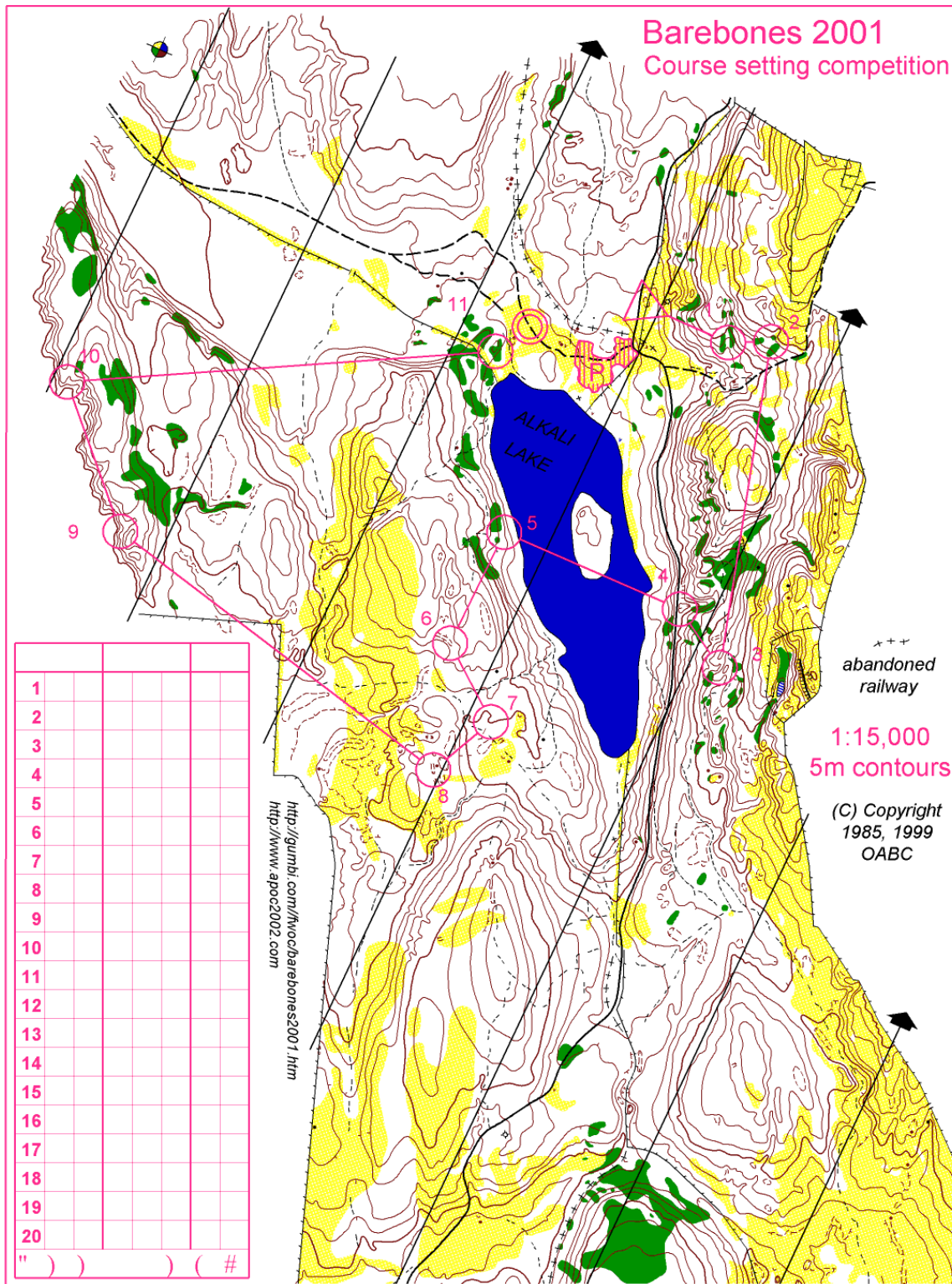
Leg 6, 7, 8: Nice use of the small patch of detail area. Nice changes of direction. Nice variety in the length of the legs.

Leg 9: The fence corner removes any navigational issues in the first part of the leg. Also the control is much too close to the edge of the map.

Leg 10: This is a terrible leg – it provides an option to run off the map. Also the control is too close to the edge of the map.

Leg 11: Too easy. A long run across bland terrain to a fence, then follow the fence to the control.

Another control should be inserted to the south to provide orienteering challenge all the way to close to the finish.



Example course to illustrate the Judges' Comments

Barebones 2001 Course Setting Contest - Announcement

Barebones orienteering encompasses the idea of quality orienteering with minimal organizational effort. Barebones 2001 will take place on the July 1st (long) weekend in the bottom right corner of British Columbia, Canada. We're going to new lengths this year to reduce the organizers' workload and to have a bit of fun for everyone - this contest. We invite you to set the long and short courses for the Barebones Classic event, so that we don't have to do it. There's \$100 prize money in it, along with the prestige of winning a continent-wide competition. And if you win you'll certainly have the advantage over the rest of the field at Barebones, even if you won't know that you're the winner till you pick up your map at the Start. So have some cheap fun over the winter - enter this contest.

Rules

1. \$100 Cdn prize money: \$75 1st Prize, \$25 2nd place.
2. The winning entry will be used (with modifications) in the Barebones 2001 Classic event.
3. The winning entry will be announced following the Barebones 2001 Classic event.
4. Entries must include two courses - M/F -12 (white - 2km) and M21-34/F21-34/M35-44 (blue/red - 8km). Suggested course lengths are based on past experience on this map and aim at winning times of 20 minutes and 60 minutes respectively. The woods are highly runnable and pleasant.
5. The winner will have the best combined score for the two courses.
6. The Parking area is marked on the map as Out Of Bounds. The Assembly area is the adjacent field, marked with a finish circle. The Finish must be anywhere in the assembly area. Distance and difficulty of the walk to start will factor in judging.
7. Electronic punching will be used.
8. To obtain a copy of the blank map (OCAD file, bitmap, or paper copy) contact James Baker (jamesb@merak.com) (403) 241-6891.
9. Celebrity judging panel of at least two humans. Yes, manual judging is in effect.
10. Entries will be sent to judges anonymously by the contest organizers.
11. Decision of judges is final (note this all you Republicans & Democrats).
12. We will make all efforts to return judges' comments to the entrants.
13. Mail printed entries to: Barebones 2001 Course Planning Contest, 1239 Colgrove Ave NE, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2E 5C3. Alternatively, send OCAD or WINCACS files to Adrian Zissos (adrianz@merak.com).
14. Closing date - received by March 31st, 2001.
15. Entries become property of Barebones, and all that other legal jazz.
16. For more info, check the Barebones website www.gumbi.com/fwoc/barebones2001.htm or contact Adrian Zissos (403) 262 4457 (adrianz@merak.com).

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. The scores for the short and long course are combined. How are the scores weighted?

A. The long course is worth 75% of the total score, the short course 25%.

Q. Is there a recommended number of controls?

A. No.

Q. And what about climb?

A. It should be reasonable - certainly no more than 4%

Q. What are the criteria for judging the courses?

A. This will be done quite subjectively. The judges will be instructed to look for fairness, variety of orienteering challenges, suitable length, and multiple route choice, as well as overall enjoyability for the competitor.

Q. An important responsibility of the Course Planner is to check that the map is accurate and appropriate for the courses he sets. How can the winning courses be used in a real event without the Course Planner having visited the map?

A. Good question! The judging will assume that the map is completely adequate. When the organizers set the course in the terrain they may need to make modifications to ensure it uses only reasonably accurate bits of the map.

Q. Is there an entry fee?

A. There should be, but there isn't. We will swallow all the costs in the name of some good clean cheap fun.

Q. Can anyone enter or is this contest just for people going to Barebones?

A. Everyone can enter.

Q. What is the judging procedure?

A. We will use the following scoring procedure (unless we have an unexpectedly large number of entries in which case we'll make modifications to keep the judges' work to a reasonable level).

1. The entries will be divided randomly into four "heats". Each heat will be assigned a judge.
2. Judges will be asked to score each entry on a scale of 1 - 100 and then rank each entry (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc) based on the assigned score.
3. The top two entries from each heat will make it to the final.
4. Each judge will be asked to score and rank all eight finalists in the same manner as for the heats.
5. The final round rankings from each judge will be added together, with the lowest total ranking winning.
6. In the event of a tie, then the scores (1-100) for the tied entries will be added, and the highest total score will win. If it is still a tie we'll flip a coin.

The Buzz...

Here's some of the comments being made about this competition...

"I love the idea that the announcement will be *after* the event and that the surprised winner will pick up a map with his own course!" Dirk D.

"I wish I could hide this competition from Thomas due to that Alkali Lake (North) is not a flat terrain, and Thomas does not use a cow-path principle at all while proposing courses, and the classic is the day after the Enduro, and I might risk to run an up-and-down course set by him. But, unfortunately, he already knows about this competition." O-lav

"We here at ONA think the idea of doing this contest is absolutely wonderful. I hope you get a big response." Donna. A big thanks from the organizers to Donna and Orienteering North America for supporting this competition.