

[Return to story](#)

Field pointed in the right direction

November 2, 2007 12:36 am

BY KURT NICOLL

A brief hello is an acceptable response when crossing paths with a fellow participant at the U.S. Orienteering Championships.

Asking "Where am I?" is not.

Getting by on mental sharpness and physical fitness are prerequisites for a successful run through Prince William Forest Park. The competition (combining land navigation with a cross country run) begins with a sprint championship today, followed by two rounds of the individual championship tomorrow and Sunday.

A field of roughly 600 is expected to participate.

Playing host to either the U.S. or North American championships proves both a blessing and a curse for Kris Beecroft of the Quantico Orienteering Club.

"Because the U.S. champs are there, the whole park has been embargoed for the past 18 months," the Stafford County resident said following a recent practice run at a park in Fairfax County.

"The course is about 5 kilometers and I try to be under 10 minutes per kilometer, but I like to hit them all cleanly. You can be so fast at all of your controls, but if you have to look for [the control point], you can blow so much time.

"The goal is to run cleanly to each control and keep in contact with the map."

While many participants use a narrow focus to reach each destination, Beecroft prefers to take a broader view by noticing the surrounding topography and how it might influence her efforts.

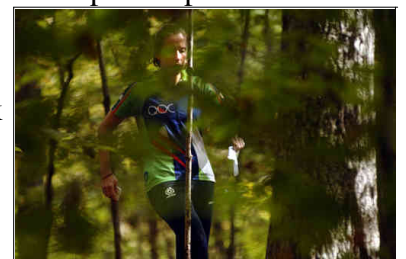
Beecroft has won several national titles--the first as a teenager growing up in northern Virginia--and earned berths on the U.S. orienteering teams that participated in the world competition held in Australia in 1985 and in Norway in 1987.

Beecroft and her mother, Marit Davis, were the first women to join the club and were among the few civilian members in the 1970s. The club now numbers 300 members, most of them civilians.

After twice working as a meet official when Quantico staged an elite competition, Beecroft is anxious at the chance to tackle her own course. She's also looking forward to her first challenge against fellow club member Peggy Dickason (a multiple national champion herself) in the women's masters division.



Beecroft (left) discusses an orienteering course with Quantico Orienteering Club training director Jon Torrance. She will compete in the Orienteering National Championships.



Stafford resident Kris Beecroft negotiates an orienteering course at Hemlock Overlook Regional Park last Saturday.

Although not competing, Jon Torrance has run the three different courses frequently since January as a member of the vetting crew, offering comments, criticism, or possible changes.

Torrance described the terrain as challenging, but not very steep, particularly in the sprint portion of the competition. There is a slight overlap in tomorrow's and Sunday's courses.

"Reading the map is always crucial," the Canadian native said. "The other thing is to always have a plan and don't move until you have a plan. Just running off in the general direction is a recipe for disaster."

Getting disoriented or totally lost can lead to unexpected consequences that can be funny or frightening.

Club member Heidi Onkst experienced some high anxiety when she got lost in a Virginia park.

"I made a big error and ended up where all the animals are and said, 'What is this? Oh my god.'

"First I thought I saw a mountain lion, which everybody thinks is really funny," the Maryland resident recalled. "Then I realized I was in an archery range. I went sprinting for the road and making as much noise as I could."

Beecroft's scariest moment occurred when her son Tanner ventured out for the first time on his own. After three hours, he returned without any problems.

"When you're at a national level meet, you see people quite often," the Verizon director of training admitted. "That's one of the mental aspects of orienteering: You have to not pay attention to anyone else."

"I will help people if they look like they are really lost, or young kids. If I see young kids standing around while I run by, I'll ask, 'Are you OK? Do you know where you are?'"

Persons interested in learning more about orienteering or the area club itself should visit its Web site at qoc.us.orienteering.org.

Kurt Nicoll: 540/374-5441

Email: knicoll@freelancestar.com