

## How to use control descriptions on an orienteering course

Alexei Azarov

Usually when you run on an orienteering meet you get a clue sheet besides of map. The clue sheets also known as control descriptions. The control descriptions appear in table form as convention symbols. It is because of “Orienteering is a worldwide sport. It is the aim of the IOF control description symbols to provide a stable means for orienteers from all countries to be able to understand control descriptions without ambiguity or the need for language translation” [1]. An example of clue sheet is given on Fig.1a. On the right side (Fig.1b) you can find an explanation for the symbols in this example. Both pictures are reproduced from [1].

### Sample control description sheet

IOF Event Example			
M45, M50, W21			
5	7.6 km	210 m	
▷		↗ ↘	
1 101	↘	↖	<
2 212	↖	▲	1.0 ○
3 135	⊗	⊗	≡
4 246		○	○
5 164	→	□	○
○ --- 120 --- →			
6 185	↗	↘	└
7 178			○
8 147	≡	≡	2.0
9 149	↗	↘	×
○ --- 250 --- → ⊙			

Control Descriptions for IOF Event Example

Control Descriptions for IOF Event Example		
Classes M45, M50, W21		
Course number 5.	Length 7.6 km.	Height climb 210 m.
Start	Road, wall junction	
1 101	Narrow marsh bend	
2 212	North western boulder, 1m high, east side	
3 135	Between thickets	
4 246	Middle depression, east part	
5 164	Eastern ruin, west side	
Follow taped route 120m away from control		
6 185	Stone wall, ruined, south east corner (outside)	
7 178	Spur, north west foot	
8 147	Upper cliff, 2m high	
9 149	Path crossing	
Follow taped route 250m from last control to finish		

(a)

(b)

Fig.1 Example of control description sheet  
(Reproduced from [1])

Let's discuss how to read the information in description sheet. According to the rules a clue sheet has the following structure:

- Header.** The first row in the descriptions table usually contains event title. Might also contain the date of the event or other information about it. Next row contains information about classes, which use the course. And the third row shows the course code, course length and the total climb on the course. All rows in header are optional. So, you might not see some of them appear sometimes.
- Start location.** It is the first line of descriptions after the **Header**, which describes start point as if it were a control feature. This line must appear in description sheet by rules, but sometimes it might be omitted.
- Description of individual controls.** One row is appeared for each control in order they have to be visited. Also it may contain some rows, which contain special instructions such as the length and nature of any marked route during the course. The individual control rows are

divided for a number of columns, so each row consists of a number of individual cells (see Fig.2). Each cell contains specific information about the control. If somebody tried to translate symbolic descriptions to normal language (words) each cell would be translated to one word or number and each row would be translated complete sentence, which describes the control position. The purposes of individual cells in a row are listed below:

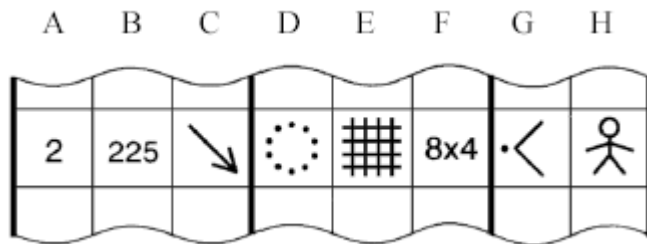


Fig.2 Individual cells in control description  
(Reproduced from [1])

**A. Control number.**

**B. Control code.**

**C. Which of any similar feature.** If there is more than one of the similar feature within the control circle this cell shows which one exactly, e.g. north eastern.

**D. Control feature.**

**E. Appearance or second control feature.** Additional information on the nature of the feature like overgrown;

ruined if it is required is shown here.

**F. Dimensions/Combinations.** If the control feature appears out-of-scale (symbolic size) on the map, the size of the feature should be given here. If the control feature is a combination of two objects like trail and creek crossing or junction it should also be shown in this column.

**G. Location of the control bag** with respect to the feature, e.g. south foot.

**H. Other information**, which might be important like refreshment, radio control and so on.

**4. Nature and length of the rout from last control to the Finish.** It is just special case of i.3.

**Use the control descriptions on each leg you running** even if you think you the situation on the map is absolutely clear. Nowadays orienteering courses usually consist of many (more than 10) controls. If you lose 5sec on each control the total time loss on the course will be around 1min or more. So the control descriptions allow you to come to the controls precisely avoiding this time loss.

It is a good idea to **read description for the next control right after you punched on the previous control or when you were living from the previous control.** If you try to read the description of the control somewhere in the middle of the leg there is a good possibility that you forget to do it. From other hand if you try to read in the vicinity of the control it might be too late and you might lose time because of you did not know the additional information about the control position.

#### Recommended Internet sources regarding control descriptions:

1. <http://www.orienteering.org/footo/IOF%20Control%20Descriptions%202004.pdf> – Most recent version of IOF control descriptions from official IOF web site <http://www.orienteering.org>
2. <http://www.alexplace.com/Orienteering/2004/Camp0303/Presentations/clue.pdf> - Summary of control descriptions symbols (taken from the HVO web site <http://hvo.us.orienteering.org/> )
3. <http://www.fortnet.org/icd/> - the interactive learning and quiz tool for IOF control descriptions