Navigation Basics

Matt Alias - 2026-11-10 - Comments (0) - Chapter 2: On the Trail

Knowing where you are is the most important skill on any walk. Modern tools help, but the basics of map reading never go out of date and never run out of battery.



Reading a map

A map is a picture of the land seen from above. The scale tells you how far a distance on the page is in real life. On a common walking map, one centimetre usually equals 250 metres on the ground.

Learn the key symbols first. Paths, streams, woods, fences and buildings are all marked, and they make useful landmarks when you check your position.

Using a compass

A compass needle points to magnetic north. Hold the compass flat, turn until the needle lines up with the north arrow, and then read your bearing from the marked line.

Bearing	Direction
0 degrees	North
90 degrees	East
180 degrees	South
270 degrees	West

Working out a grid reference

A grid reference gives your position as a short string of numbers. Read along the bottom of the map first, then up the side.

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Easting: 345  Northing: 712
Grid reference: 345712
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Practice at home with a map before you need it on the hill. Checking your position every thirty minutes keeps small mistakes from becoming big ones.