# HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE IML NAVIGATION SPEED TEST.

**What is the test?**

The test is a European Standard and we have to do it although it doesn’t really fit the ethos of the UK mountain awards.

This test is a simple mountain navigation assessment which probably at the point you passed your ML you would have managed easily. But many IML candidates don’t really navigate under pressure after completing the ML and there are a couple of navigation techniques and situations that can help with this kind of task but are not really covered at ML summer. Supervising this test for nearly 20 years at Glenmore Lodge and PYB it is clear that the vast majority of people pass without a problem. However those that fail don’t just miss the time by a couple of minutes due to a lack of fitness or difficult off path terrain. In 90% of cases it is down to poor navigation, a lack of current practice and the use of inappropriate strategies such as straight line bearings as opposed to navigating with the terrain features using strategies such as attack points and catching features. With good navigation there is time to walk around the course, there is even time for at least one error but make more than that over the 6 legs and you will be under pressure. So it makes sense to practice the skills.

The test takes place over rough hill side terrain using a 1:25,000 OS map. Each person has an **individual** route of 5 check points (although there are a number of shared checkpoints to visit) and a time allowance specific to their course.

The courses are generally 5km long with 400m of ascent. Calculations are based on a straight line between check points. Speed is calculated at 4kph plus 1 minute for every contour crossed going up hill, plus a further 10% of the overall time added on. The time for all the routes is about 2hrs – 2.30hrs. Good route choice often avoids climbing as much as the straight line route indicates. This is achievable at a steady walking pace.

5km = 75 minutes

40 contour lines (400m.o.a.) = 40 minutes.

75 + 40 = 115 minutes (1hr 55mins) + 10% (rounded up = 12 minutes) Total time 2hrs 07 minutes.

Equipment carried is minimal and the footwear must not be training shoes (very poor grip) but fell running shoes/hillwalking boots are appropriate.

**How can I prepare for this test?**

It goes without saying that you need to be hill fit. Being able to walk up a steep hillside continuously ascending about 300m in about 30 minutes. That requires a steady even pace with only brief stops. This kind of pace is reflected in the summer assessment and ignores the distance covered.

Nowhere in our walking awards is there clear bench marking to help candidates estimate their navigation competence outside of the assessment process. Knowing where you are to within 100m all the time is rather simplifying the navigation skills required for what is effectively an orienteering type event. At summer ML we don’t quite give people the skills to do this kind of test effectively, operating and making decisions completely alone. So it requires good navigation skills and confidence which comes from **practice.**

**Route planning** is key and that should start at the objective end, identifying a good attack point and any catching feature. Then work back to where you are to sort out the route to the attack point which in reasonable visibility should not require a compass bearing.

**Contours and thumbing your route on the map as you go.** Being aware of what the ground should be doing under your feet and the angle you should be crossing the contour lines at. Remember you feel contours.

**Relocation skills** being slickwith these from just checking progress with map setting through to really lost slope aspects etc.

Being able to read the map on the move and even take a quick bearing is helpful in saving time and in planning the next leg rather than standing for 5 minutes at the check point. (A quick bearing is where you place the compass edge on the map and turn the whole map with the compass on it until the red end of the needle points to the top of the map – no need to turn the dial just look down the base plate and it is pointing where you aim to go. Very useful for quickly checking the alignment of a stream or slope aspect and can also be used whilst you have an accurate bearing set on your compass.

If walking alone it can be difficult for candidates to select appropriate legs to develop and practice the required range of navigation strategies. They need something more to make the navigation tasks realistic and have to deal with what is thrown at them.

Walking around a Green standard orienteering course is the nearest benchmarking and training / practice tool for MLs. Green is the level at which the ML can be challenged around decision making, route choice, contour interpretation, relocation skills, all can be practiced and you get about 15 goes in an hour and a half. You have to do this completely alone without any outside help just like the IML test. You know without doubt you have achieved the leg because there is control marker there. If you want something a bit more testing then go for a Blue course but not until you have a good feel for what Green is about.

On it’s own it doesn’t make up for hill time but it complements it and helps provide useful feedback and practice of navigation skills.

**Orienteering**

Firstly you don’t have to run, or wear Lycra or be a member of a club. On the British or Scottish Orienteering website you will have to look up your nearest club and check where and when they have any events on. You will have to pay about £6 for your map and entry fee. This may need to be done online before the event or may be on the day at the venue. Don’t be afraid to ask for help if you need it. Don’t be put off by some of the hieroglyphics of control descriptions they are quite intuitive but look at the map and you can guess what the feature is. Lastly the map colours and symbols are also intuitive except that white on a map is open woodland and shades of yellow is open land. As an IML you will need to get used to working with different symbols on different national maps.

There are also currently 534 Permanent Orienteering Course (POC) maps which you can find on the British Orienteering website and download, some for free others for a small fee. Some maps can be available from local tourist or park ranger offices. You can then choose your route as you please.

You cannot be confident of something you do not practice. Good luck