



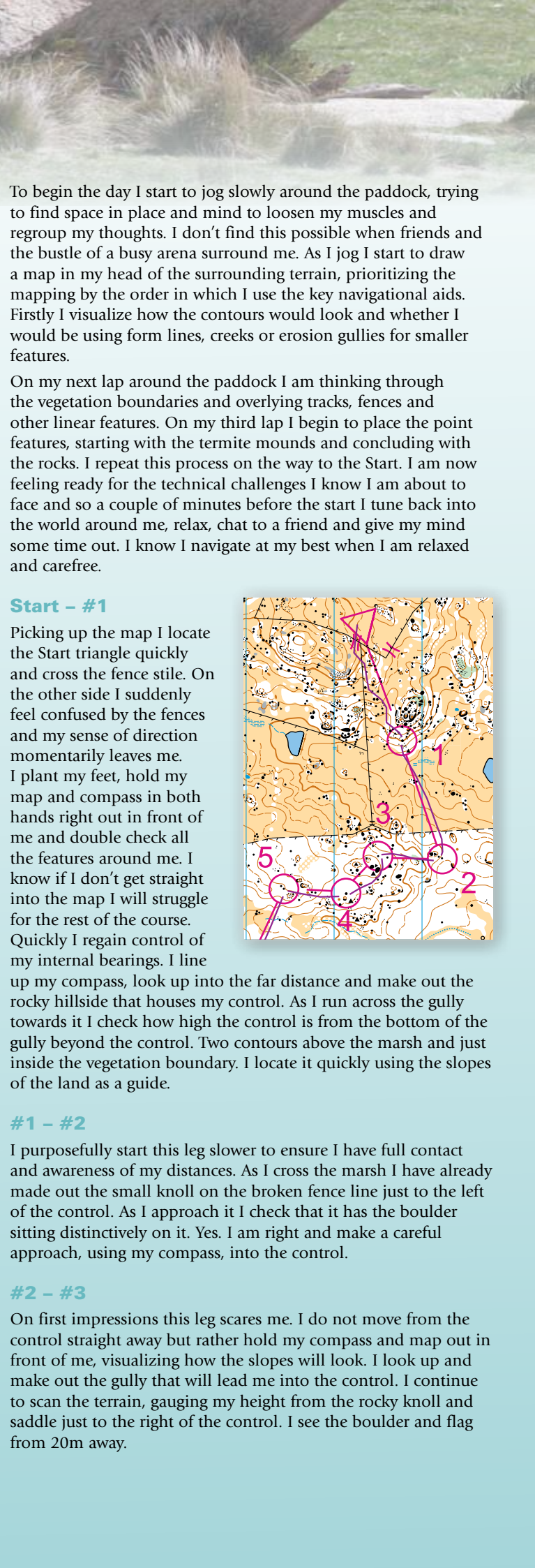
# Hanny's Long Race

Hanny Allston

## Before the event

**D**riving to the Australian Long Distance Championships I am very distracted. Frazzled by the sciatica travelling down my leg and the worry of a grumpy hamstring gnawing away in my mind, I am having trouble believing this is the National Championships.

The injury stems from twinging my back whilst stretching a week earlier. This in itself was a lesson. I had just begun to ramp up the intensity of my training whilst ignoring some of the warning signs to balance the harder work with more recovery. The muscles yelped and injury occurred. Yes, lesson learnt. But I can't change the situation now so rather I must adapt. After all, Orienteering is not just a running race but instead a continual process of high-level, fast-paced decision-making with accurate execution. An orienteer can be the fastest and fittest runner in the world but if they do not bring complete control and technical skill to their course they can run a very long way at great speed in the wrong direction.

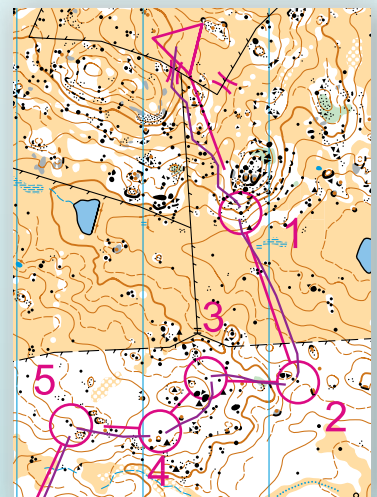


To begin the day I start to jog slowly around the paddock, trying to find space in place and mind to loosen my muscles and regroup my thoughts. I don't find this possible when friends and the bustle of a busy arena surround me. As I jog I start to draw a map in my head of the surrounding terrain, prioritizing the mapping by the order in which I use the key navigational aids. Firstly I visualize how the contours would look and whether I would be using form lines, creeks or erosion gullies for smaller features.

On my next lap around the paddock I am thinking through the vegetation boundaries and overlying tracks, fences and other linear features. On my third lap I begin to place the point features, starting with the termite mounds and concluding with the rocks. I repeat this process on the way to the Start. I am now feeling ready for the technical challenges I know I am about to face and so a couple of minutes before the start I tune back into the world around me, relax, chat to a friend and give my mind some time out. I know I navigate at my best when I am relaxed and carefree.

## Start - #1

Picking up the map I locate the Start triangle quickly and cross the fence stile. On the other side I suddenly feel confused by the fences and my sense of direction momentarily leaves me. I plant my feet, hold my map and compass in both hands right out in front of me and double check all the features around me. I know if I don't get straight into the map I will struggle for the rest of the course. Quickly I regain control of my internal bearings. I line up my compass, look up into the far distance and make out the rocky hillside that houses my control. As I run across the gully towards it I check how high the control is from the bottom of the gully beyond the control. Two contours above the marsh and just inside the vegetation boundary. I locate it quickly using the slopes of the land as a guide.



## #1 - #2

I purposefully start this leg slower to ensure I have full contact and awareness of my distances. As I cross the marsh I have already made out the small knoll on the broken fence line just to the left of the control. As I approach it I check that it has the boulder sitting distinctively on it. Yes. I am right and make a careful approach, using my compass, into the control.

## #2 - #3

On first impressions this leg scares me. I do not move from the control straight away but rather hold my compass and map out in front of me, visualizing how the slopes will look. I look up and make out the gully that will lead me into the control. I continue to scan the terrain, gauging my height from the rocky knoll and saddle just to the right of the control. I see the boulder and flag from 20m away.



### #3 - #4

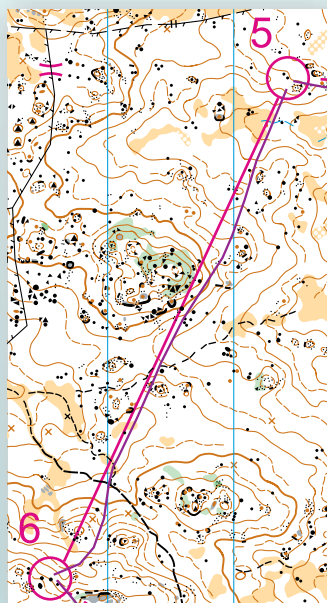
The exit towards my next control is easy but I still check my compass and look up to locate the boulders on the LHS of the hill. They are huge and easily identifiable. I find rounding curves of slopes hard so I pause after I pass the foot of the boulders and take a careful compass bearing. Looking up I can make out the area of the cliff by how sharply the land falls away below it. I know my control will be at the base of this.

### #4 - #5

From the control I pivot and point my feet in the direction I want to travel. I can already make out the three rocky knolls in front of me. I know that my control lies just beyond the third one in a slight indent in the contours. I run confidently straight to the control.

### #5 - #6

My first real error. My confidence has built and I have no concerns about my hamstring at the moment. I exit carefully from the control and make out the large rocky hillside with the distinct saddle on its left flank. I only take a rough bearing from here and power my way to the saddle. With my momentum and confidence both high I am now entering the danger zone. I see that I have to cross another, more broad saddle followed by a track and think, 'this will be easy'. I do not take a bearing and so when I arrive at the saddle I am caught off-guard by how broad and vague it appears.



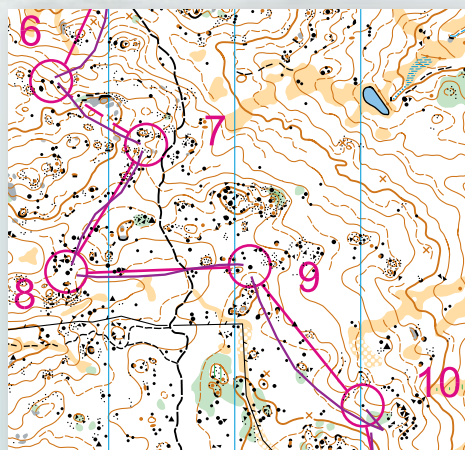
I cross the track but don't know exactly where I have crossed. My speed and confidence plummets. Now I am navigating behind my feet and I enter a gully between two rocky knolls. Finally I say 'STOP' out loud and bring myself to a complete pause. I look around, scanning the contours and quickly determine that I am still on course to the control. Phewww! I 'walk' on a bearing into the control, guided by the small gully and flat-topped spur with a large boulder just behind the control. I have no trouble locating it and use the time to regain my composure and discipline.

### #6 - #7

Exiting the control I look up and pick out the line of bare rock. I use the RHS of the rock to guide me into the gully just beyond it. Visibility is slightly lower so I check my compass, look up and make out the rocky knoll to the left of where my control will be. This gives me security and I navigate cleanly from the bare rock into my control.

### #7 - #8

This leg looks complicated and first impressions are to go very, very slowly. I decide to use a strong bearing whilst breaking it up into frequent attack points. I begin by bouncing to the left of the round, rocky knoll, then distinct cluster of rocks on the spur, then finally the round rocky knoll to the right of the control. From here I can easily see the control as I scan the terrain.



### #8 - #9

With little point features to use on the next leg I go back to basics with my contours. I aim to run between the top of the spur and the cluster of rocks just below it. Crossing the track I come to a complete stop. I look up and on my compass line can make out the first and second rocky knolls. I aim between them and know my control is on an isolated rock just beyond the second knoll. I double check my placement using the large rocky hillsides around me.

### #9 - #10

My second error. This time I am fearful when I look at the leg. I dislike contouring as I find it disrupts my sense of distance. So I move higher on the slope so I can use the rocky knolls, checking my direction as I pass each. I become too focused on my direction and misread the location of the control, thinking that it sits in the saddle which, in truth, is actually beyond the flag. Getting to the saddle I quickly realize my error and retrace my steps to the isolated boulder where my control is.

### #10 - #11

By now I have started to see more of my competitors and have enjoyed the company of Kathryn Preston close behind me for around five controls. Rather than feeling her presence as a hindrance, I use the company of my competitors as confidence that my navigation is mostly going smoothly. I pause at the control to take a gel and regroup my thoughts after this small error. I let the others depart the control before I make a careful bearing for the next leg. I decide to aim for the flat-topped spur then gully junction below the control. When I reach it I check the location of the control, determining that I need to move onto the spur and climb up to an area of rocky ground. I find my control just to the left of this. I am back amongst the girls.

### #11 - #12

I stop again and carefully find my exit direction. This time the girls also stop. I ignore them and make a bearing towards the fence corner. As I reach it I am already looking up and locating the RH edge of the broad hill. As it is only marked by form lines I try to pick up the rock point features. However, when I look up and scan the forest I can clearly see the two rocky knolls in front of me. I know my control sits between them.



**#12 – #13**

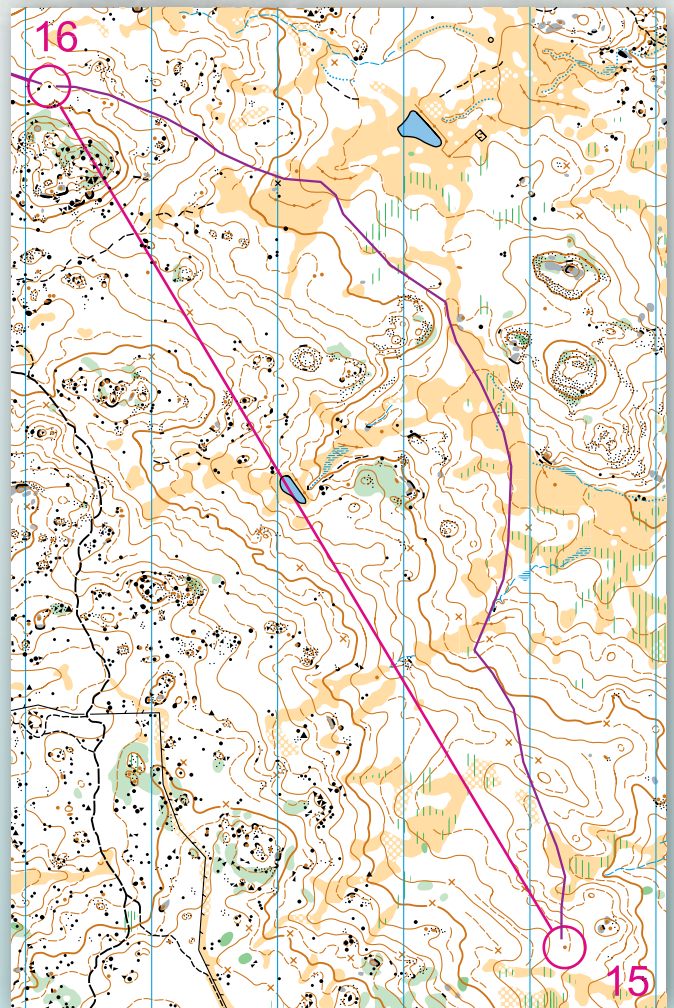
Straight away I am cautious of this leg. There is lots of green vegetation on the map so I try to take as accurate a compass bearing as I can, looking right up in the distance beyond the greenery for something I can aim towards. I power straight through the green so there is no risk of going off course. When I pop out of the vegetation I come to a complete stop, double check my position then look up. I can see the bare rock in front of me and know the control is on the RHS.

**#13 – #14**

This leg looks fun and easy to break up into sections. Firstly I aim for the flat-topped spur with obvious greenery in the gully. I then follow the contours down the gully into the broad valley. The next section is more dangerous so I stop and take a strong bearing, picking up the faint gullies that will guide me towards the control. The green, rocky knoll is my obvious attack point and as I near it I am scanning for the boulder marking the control location. It is easy to spot so I run smoothly into the control.

**#14 – #15**

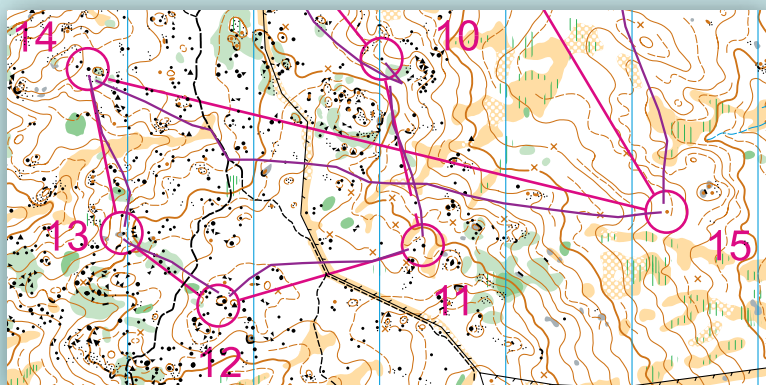
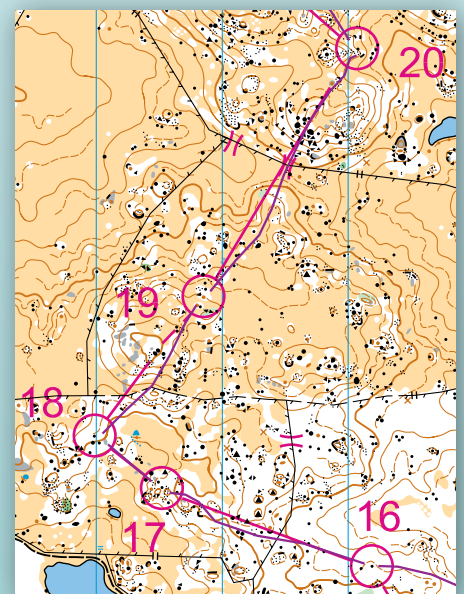
I have already thought about this leg in advance but I still stop momentarily to check my thoughts are still relevant to how I am going. Yes. I run out on a compass bearing but mainly aiming for the open gully and track intersection just beyond the distinctive flat-topped spur. I run right along the track for a short while till I see the cluster of rocks to my left, pause, take a good bearing, and aim for the fence, all the while checking my position against point features such as the bare rock on my right. Crossing the fence I run down the gully to its fork then on a bearing sidle across to the large group of distinctive boulders on the right. From here it is a matter of carefully following my compass down the RHS of the broad spur, keeping an eye on the shapes of the gullies to my right and the position of the control in relation to the flat, open part of the spur. I know if I run too far I will see the rocky knoll beyond.



man-made feature in the gully system to the north-west. I am tiring so, on reaching it, I walk a few paces before aligning my map and compass, looking up and picking out the edge of the rocky spur. From here I slowly climb and contour into the control on another bearing, carefully judging my distance by shapes of the hill to my left and rocky spur below me on my right. I am now alone on the course. I feel at peace.

**#16 – #17**

Feeling like I am over the hump of the course, I try to run with a faster cadence out of the control on a bearing towards the fence. Crossing it I take time to plan my direction and attack points into the control. I carefully contour through the knolls, picking off four and then knowing that my control will be just before the fifth and only one contour above the farmland.



**#15 – #16**

Up until now I have been running amongst competitors and my leg has become more uncomfortable from bounding over all the logs (and snakes!). I decide to take a dramatic route choice to give my body and mind a bit of a rest. I aim right out of the control and cross over a hill into the broad, open gully system to the east. The vegetation is still heavier than I expect and I can feel myself tiring. However, I remind myself everyone will be and try to run efficiently up to the head of the gully, marking my position on the surrounding hillsides. As I reach the bare rock at the head of the gully I take a very careful compass bearing, aiming for the

## #17 – #18

Despite this short leg I stop, take an accurate compass bearing and look far into the distance. I pick out the three knolls on the edge of the farmland, aiming for between the right-hand two. I pass between them, note the large boulder to confirm my location, and then easily approach the control on the bare rock.

## #18 – #19

I'm feeling heavy legged in these runnable sections so I try to be even more careful. Taking a compass bearing I climb the hill as efficiently as I can, crossing the fence at a slight corner. Once I reach the crest of the spur in an open clearing I take a bearing and can easily see the green rocky knoll that slightly obscures the rocks where my control sits. I approach it with no trouble and use the break from navigating to have a rest.

## #19 – #20

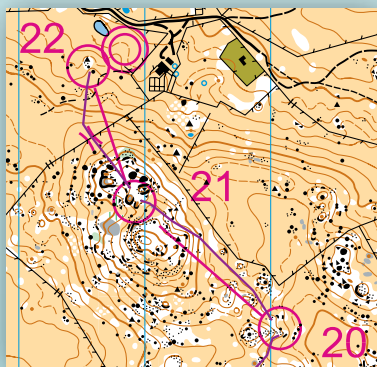
My tired brain feels like it wants to head too far north out of this control so I triple check my compass and try to trust it. Once I am around the rocky knoll to the north-east of the control I have my bearings back and move easily down the spur to the fence crossing. I decide to climb straight up through the boulders, ignoring the detail until I reach the top of the hill. I move across to the far edge and can see the rocky hill beyond. I know my control is on the right-hand spur and I locate it easily.

## #20 – #21

I'm now very tired so I decide to run along the fence line until I see the large gully that marks the open saddle between the two large rocky hills. Sadly, for the first time on the course, I have to walk up this short, steep hill. This is to ensure I have brainpower, as I know the assembly area is approaching and I don't want to make an error with the added distractions. When I crest the hill in the open saddle I stop, look up and see my partner filming me. Distraction! I stop again, check the location of the control, take a careful bearing and easily find the flag located between the two cliffs.

## #21 – #22 - Finish

From the last control I take one last bearing as I leave the hill to ensure I pick up the fence crossing, check the location of the last control, look up to pick its location and move through the remainder of the course on automatic pilot. I know I have done my best and that I am proud of this run. My body is not so happy and I know it is time to rest.



*(Hanny won this event in a time of 1:13:32 by 3min 40sec from Grace Crane (TAS) with Lizzie Ingham (NZ) third.)*

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