

THE GILROY DISPATCH

GETTING OUT: 'Orienteering' adds challenge to enjoying the great outdoors

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By Ron Erskine (sports@gilroydispatch.com)

A couple Saturdays ago, I answered the call for trail building labor on the Jim Donnelly Trail at Henry Coe Park. On a cool cloudy morning, I drove out Gilroy Hot Springs Road to the Hunting Hollow park entrance. When I arrived, I could not have been more surprised. A parking lot that usually has half dozen cars and a few horse trailers was busting at the seams. There must have been 70 cars in that lot. I was lucky to find a spot.

All different kinds of people were milling about. Many looked like fit trail runners, but there were also plenty of folks equipped for the trail that didn't appear to live at the gym. What impressed me most were the moms, dads and children I saw.

I have always felt that time spent outdoors is not just nice but very important. It immeasurably benefits our health and happiness. Time in nature has been shown to ease anxiety, depression and stress often more effectively than medications. Richard Louv, in his book "Last Child in the Woods," describes the disconnection between today's children and nature and the adverse affect it has on their physical and mental health.

But to many children, a hike in the woods is just boring. I wondered, "What is happening this morning at Coe Park to attract all these people?" The answer: orienteering, or more precisely, rogaining.

Get Lost!! is a nonprofit that puts on various navigation events in the Bay Area. Most take place in urban settings, but several of the larger events are in wilderness locations. Teams of two to five members are given a map marked with checkpoints. Each checkpoint has a weighted value depending on how difficult it is to find. Compasses are allowed; GPS's are not. So participants must rely on their own basic navigations skills to accumulate as many points as they can in the allotted time.

Vladimir Gusiatsnikov of Get Lost!! explained to me that rogaining (derived by combining the names of the three founders: Rod, Gail and Neil) is different than orienteering. Orienteering events are shorter, people participate as individuals, and control points must be reached in the proper order. Rogaining is a team activity over a longer period of time. Checkpoints can be reached in any order, so it is up to the team to devise a strategy to garner as many points as possible. Since the value of a checkpoint depends on its difficulty to locate and reach, a team may compile more points even though they visited fewer checkpoints.

Get Lost in Henry Coe, the event I stumbled onto, offered four-hour, eight-hour and 24-hour events. Vladimir said 170 people took part, and 26 teams (70 people) signed up for the 24-hour event. A number of family teams took part with participants as young as 7 years old. Winners of the 24-hour portion of the Henry Coe Rogaining event have qualified for the World Rogaining Championship in the Czech Republic next year.

If you want to get out into nature but always felt that a simple hike didn't have enough dazzle, rogaining or orienteering may be the ticket. It is a great way to get your children outdoors and share a common activity with them. Challenge them. You're not just walking; you're searching and reading the landscape. Where's that checkpoint?

Find out more at www.getlostxx.com. You'll see that for many people, it is an athletic endurance event, but it doesn't have to be. For many, it is just a fun way to get into the woods.



Similar to orienteering, 'rogaining' is a team activity in which participants rely on their own basic navigation skills to find checkpoints marked on a map in a limited amount of time. In this 2009 photo, a rogaining team prepares for a competition.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEAM SOAR

Photo by: Special to The Dispatch

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Ron Erskine is an outdoors columnist for the Dispatch. Interested in a hike or two? View past columns [here](#) to find the best spot for your excursion. Reach Ron at ronfoxtail@msn.com.