FIELD GUIDE · NO. 22

Taking a Bearing

Use the compass with a map to choose a direction, then walk to a landmark — not with your eyes locked on the needle.



FROM THE BOOK

1. Hold the compass flat and level, away from metal and electronics, and let the magnetic needle settle completely.
2. To orient yourself without a map: slowly turn your body until the north end of the needle aligns with the north marking on the housing. You are then facing the direction shown by the direction-of-travel arrow.
3. With a map: place the compass so the edge of the baseplate connects your location with the place you want to reach. Rotate the housing until its guide (orienting) lines are parallel with the map's north-south lines. Then, holding the compass level, turn your body until the magnetic needle aligns with the north marking in the housing. The direction-of-travel arrow now points along the bearing you have chosen.
4. Do not walk for miles staring at the compass. Choose a landmark in that direction — a distinctive tree, boulder, or trail marker — walk to it, and repeat.
5. After a little practice the sequence becomes natural. Check before a trip that the needle still moves freely.

PRACTICE IT

In a park or yard, pick a visible tree, take a bearing to it as the book describes, walk to it, and confirm you arrived at the landmark you chose.