

FEATURING PARK FRIENDS

# Exploring The West Woods for a Greater Good

*By Jonathan Boyer*

**A**s an outdoor enthusiast, I was recently hooked by the sport of orienteering, which involves navigating a designed course through the forest using a map and compass. The challenge is to find the fastest route through a series of checkpoints, which are orange and white flags with electronic “controls” positioned at strategic locations throughout the woods.

During an orienteering event, navigation is done with a map and compass only – no GPS technology is allowed.

Orienteering is a competitive sport, especially internationally, with top athletes sprinting around, over and through natural obstacles in the forest while searching for the best route for the fastest time. But it is also a great family-friendly activity that can be enjoyed solo or as a team by all ages and skill levels.

The foundation for orienteering is a specially created contour map, where every noticeable detail of the terrain – often down to a few meters – is mapped to an international standard for the purposes of land navigation.





I recently had the opportunity to make such a map for The West Woods in preparation for an orienteering event held at the park in early 2024. The process took 12 months and about 200 hours of time, and it was carried out in all seasons and weather conditions.

Most of my work centered around searching for little-known features and landmarks such as large boulders, marshes, cliffs and gullies. I also spent a lot of time mapping vegetation in order to distinguish open and easily passable forest areas versus thickets or areas with dense trees to avoid – all detail used by

participants for the purposes of knowing where they are and planning the most efficient route through the course.

Making a map like this is a very satisfying process of discovery. In one area of the park stands one of the largest tulip trees in the state of Ohio. In other areas of the park are rock walls with carvings.

I was fascinated to find some old building ruins, faded trails, rusted farming equipment, deep gullies, and rocky cliffs tucked away and seldom seen. The history of the forest speaks in quiet whispers.

With the investment of time into this new map, orienteering events at The West Woods can be enjoyed for years to come. No experience is necessary to complete an entry level orienteering course – a spirit of adventure is the only prerequisite.

I am very grateful for our great park system and look forward to future events where residents can come and experience The West Woods in an entirely new way. 🌿



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Jonathan Boyer is a Nature lover, trail runner, kayaker and competitive orienteer. He hopes to see orienteering grow in our area because of its many mental and physical health benefits for all ages.*

*Orienteering events held at The West Woods in early 2024 were organized as a collaboration between Geauga Park District and the Northeast Ohio Orienteering Club, a volunteer organization.*

