SCOUTS BUSHCRAFT

# Navigation and Tracking

60-minute practical lesson plan | Map skills, compass work and wildlife observation

| Duration | Suggested group | Location | Delivery |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60 minutes | Scouts / small teams | Safe outdoor area or woodland | Practical, supervised |

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the session, young people should be able to:

• Identify the four main compass directions and explain what a bearing is.

• Orientate a map and use a simple map feature or bearing to navigate between nearby checkpoints.

• Explain how to read a basic animal track and identify at least two other signs of wildlife.

• Record observations accurately and explain why wildlife must be watched without disturbance.

## Equipment and preparation

• Local map of the activity area (ideally an appropriate Ordnance Survey map), baseplate compasses and waterproof map cases.

• Prepared short route with 2–3 visible checkpoints; mark clear boundaries and a safe assembly point.

• Wildlife track identification cards or guide, observation sheets, pencils and clipboards.

• Optional: printed track photographs or instructor-prepared clue cards if natural tracks are not present.

• Leader first-aid kit, whistle, charged phone/radio as appropriate, drinking water and suitable weather protection.

## 60-minute session outline

| Time | Activity | Leader delivery and Scout activity | Check learning |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0–5 min | **Welcome and safety brief** | Introduce the session and explain the two skills: finding a route and reading signs of wildlife. Set boundaries, buddy groups, stop signal, meeting point and what to do if separated. Explain that tracks are clues, not proof on their own. | Ask the group to name one navigation tool and one wildlife sign. |
| 5–15 min | **Map and compass basics** | Show north, east, south and west. Demonstrate orientating a map and taking a simple bearing. In pairs, Scouts point to a named landmark on the map and align the map with the landscape. Keep the exercise close to the leader. | Each pair demonstrates a correctly orientated map and identifies a direction. |
| 15–30 min | **Mini navigation challenge** | Teams follow a short, pre-checked route to 2–3 checkpoints using map features and simple bearings. At each point, they confirm their location with a visible landmark before moving on. Leader remains positioned to supervise the whole activity. | Teams state where they are and explain which clue helped them. |
| 30–40 min | **Track detective** | Show a real track, photograph or track card. Ask Scouts to observe shape, size, toe count, claw marks and ground conditions. Compare possible identifications with a guide. Look for other signs such as feeding marks, feathers or pathways without touching them. | Each team records one track/sign and gives evidence for its identification. |
| 40–52 min | **Observation trail** | Run a short, bounded trail using natural clues or instructor-placed picture cards. Teams record what they notice and discuss what each clue might mean. Emphasise that wildlife should not be followed, approached or disturbed. | Teams share two observations and distinguish fact from guess. |

| Time | Activity | Leader delivery and Scout activity | Check learning |
|---|---|---|---|
| 52–60 min | **Review and close** | Bring everyone back to the assembly point. Recap map orientation, bearings and the evidence used to identify tracks. Ask each Scout to name one skill they improved and one safety or wildlife-respect rule. Check all participants and equipment before leaving. | Quick round: one navigation skill, one wildlife clue, one safety rule. |

# Teaching notes and activity guidance

### Map and compass demonstration

Keep the first navigation task simple. Show how the compass needle points towards magnetic north, and explain that map grid north and magnetic north are not exactly the same. For a short beginner activity, use obvious landmarks and follow the compass manufacturer's instructions. Do not introduce declination calculations unless the group is ready and the leader is confident with the map being used.

### Tracking and observation

Encourage careful description before identification: “four toes, visible claw marks, oval print” is better than immediately guessing “fox”. Prints change with mud, rain, slope and the animal's movement. Use photographs or prepared cards if the site has no suitable tracks. Never handle droppings, bones, nests or unknown remains.

### Adaptations

• For younger or less experienced Scouts: use direction cards, a simple picture map and one checkpoint at a time.

• For more confident Scouts: add a six-figure grid reference, a short pace-count estimate or an additional bearing.

• For wet weather or a sensitive habitat: run map work under shelter and use laminated track cards rather than searching through vegetation.

• Offer clear written/visual instructions, buddy support, shorter routes and accessible checkpoints to include different abilities.

# Safety and risk controls

| Hazard | Control measures |
|---|---|
| Getting lost or separated | Use a defined activity boundary, buddy system, head counts and a clear stop/return signal. Keep the group within leader supervision. Explain the lost/separated procedure before starting. |
| Uneven ground, slips and trips | Inspect the route beforehand; avoid steep, slippery or obstructed ground. Wear suitable footwear and walk, rather than run, between checkpoints. |
| Roads, water or other site hazards | Choose a route away from roads, deep water, cliffs and hazardous areas. If unavoidable, exclude these areas from the route and set clear no-go boundaries. |
| Weather, cold, heat and dehydration | Check forecast and conditions. Require suitable clothing, provide drinking-water breaks and shorten or stop the activity if conditions deteriorate. |
| Ticks, brambles, nettles and insects | Stay on suitable paths where possible, wear covering clothing, avoid dense undergrowth and check for ticks after the activity. Do not touch unknown plants or animals. |
| Animal waste or wildlife disturbance | Do not touch droppings, carcasses, feathers or nests. Observe from a distance, do not approach dens/setts and wash hands after outdoor activities. |
| Compass/map distraction | Stop in a safe place to take bearings. Do not walk while looking down at a compass or map. Keep away from water edges and obstacles. |
| Group movement and inclusion | Use suitable group sizes, agreed pace and regular counts. Consider individual needs, confidence, mobility and supervision ratios under local guidance. |

# Assessment and follow-up

• Observe whether each Scout can orientate a map, identify a direction and use a simple bearing with support.

• Check that teams use visible landmarks to confirm their position rather than relying on guesswork.

• Review observation notes for specific evidence: print shape, toes, claws, size or other signs.

• Suggested follow-up: repeat the route with fewer prompts, practise four- and six-figure grid references, or create a woodland wildlife sign log.

# Leader’s session record

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date / location** | |
| **Leader(s)** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Number attending** | |
| **What went well?** | |
| **Changes for next time** | |

**This lesson plan is a planning aid, not a substitute for the leader's site-specific risk assessment, current organisational rules or local safeguarding and supervision requirements.**