

# Rogaine Beginner's Guide – Top Ten Tips

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Are you thinking about trying your first Rogaine but not sure if it's for you? Hopefully these suggestions will encourage you to take the plunge, demystify the experience, and ultimately suffer just a little bit less. I'm a beginning Rogainer myself, competing in several of the "Big Muddy" Rogaines sponsored by the Columbia River Orienteering Club (CROC), held in central Oregon over the last few years. There is something in the absolute bizarreness of this event just grabs me on a gut level. (It's also fun to see the expression on people's faces when they innocently ask you, "So, what did you do this last weekend?", and then you tell them =^)

There are many more experienced Rogainer's out there than I, and I'm sure their ideas may well be better than mine. If you know someone who is done a Rogaine or an adventure race with a navigation component, try to get a few tips from them as well. Part of the sport is "paying your dues", and suffering through an event or two in order to discover for yourself what works and what doesn't. I do have some concerns that I'm giving away too much, and that doing so takes some of the mystique out of the event. But in the end, I decided to share.

The ideas below are from my own Rogaine Journal, a sort of rambling account that I've kept after each event of what worked, what didn't, and what I would do differently next time. Various web searches trying to find information like this have turned up nothing worthwhile, so in the spirit of the Internet, I put it out there for your use. I hope you find it useful, and that some of the information here inspires you to go try this wacky sport for yourself. The tips are written for a 24 hour event, but most of it applies well to a shorter time frame.

A final word of advice . . . enjoy the moments you're out there. Hear the nighttime call of the owls and the dawn warble of the meadowlarks, be mesmerized by the wind's rhythmic ripple in the tall spring grasses, take a moment to look into the center of the blooming wildflowers, admire the deer antler you found next to the water hole. A Rogaine is a unique experience and usually in a special landscape few people will ever see, let alone over an entire day and night. Remember and hold these small moments and memories, and you may find years later they are the most special.

*"Rogaining is 14 hours of fun followed by 10 hours of character enhancement."  
Big Muddy race organizer Mal Harding*

And remember: It doesn't have to be fun . . . to be fun.

Happy Rogaine adventures,  
John and John  
Portland, Oregon

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### **Training for a Rogaine**

A typical Rogaine for a competitive team can mean more than 40 miles of almost all off trail hiking, about 5000+ vertical feet of elevation gain (depending on the course, naturally) and keeping sharp mental focus for an entire 24 hours. World-class teams can top 60 miles in a day's competition. This type of extreme event is rarely something we encounter on a normal day hike, so unless you are already a genetic super-freak, some training will definitely be beneficial.

Keep in mind that although raw aerobic conditioning is of course important, it's not the whole story. The off-trail hiking puts tremendous strain on the connective tissue (ligaments, tendons, micro stabilizer muscles) of your lower legs. It's vital that your training also include long hikes of off trail travel, to condition your lower legs to this type of abuse. If, for example, you can swim 2 miles nonstop or have no problem with a century bike ride, you may still suffer big-time in a Rogaine, because these activities are relatively low stress on your lower body.

The type of training I've found to be a nice combination of body conditioning and map and compass practice is to head out to a fairly wide open area (in Oregon, BLM or Forest Service public lands in central Oregon of the eastern Columbia River Gorge) and, along with your compass and 7 1/2 minute quad map, and simply pick interesting map points and start walking for the day. Also, on these hikes, note what clothing combinations and food keep your motor running.

Keep up with your base conditioning all year round, and then start with the all day, 15 mile plus hikes about two months before the event. While you should probably never actually replicate the mileage and vertical gain of a real Rogaine during your training, these long day hikes should be the ticket to condition your lower legs and mental focus.

For your last few training sessions before a Rogaine, wear the clothing, shoes, pack, gear, etc you'll take on the real event. New clothing or pack straps can chafe in places you don't expect, and give new shoes a thorough break-in before trying a 20-40 mile hike in them! For example, I've found that most chafing from shorts can be solved by wearing a pair of spandex exercise shorts, like UnderArmor, underneath my main pair.

### **Map prep**

This may read like a trip to the office supply store, but I'll always remember my big embarrassment at my first Rogaine. During the hectic route planning session before

the race, I had to sheepishly ask the well-equipped team next to me if I could borrow some pens and tape. Hint: This is not considered good form! Two hours before the actual start of the Rogaine, maps are distributed to all teams. You get these two hours to try to plan the best course. A big help in doing this is having the following items to make your map easy to read and durable. Note: you do not need these items on the actual course, just for pre-race planning.

- 1 ultra fine tip Sharpie pens, in red and blue (for annotating map, drawing in distances and bearings to control points)
- 2 two colors of highlighter pens (one color to mark every control 50 points or higher, the other color to mark all of the water controls)
- 3 pencil (general purpose writing)
- 4 scissors (for trimming map)
- 5 wide clear packaging/strapping tape (for joining two map halves; duct tape works okay too. Adding a "frame" of wide clear strapping tape all around the edge of the map, and on the fold lines, makes the map a lot more durable over the course of the race.)
- 6 About 6 feet of string or twine with a knot tied every 2 miles at the scale of the map. (Hint: On a 1;24,000 scale 7.5 minute USGS map, 2.6 inches on the map equals 1 mile on the ground, so a knot tied every 5 inches should be about right.) A pace of 2 mph for a long loop out of the hash house is a reasonable goal, which factors in elevation, eating/water stops, etc. Use this string to determine the actual distance of your proposed route.

### **Route planning**

As noted above, it's crucial that you properly utilize the two hours you get to plan your route. Here's a few suggestions to get started. Keep in mind that this is some very subjective advice, and I'm sure some expert Rogainers will differ on some of these ideas. This tip alone could easily be several pages, but I'll try to keep it short. Also bear in mind that these tips are for a moderately fit team who will be walking, not running, the course.

1. First, **mark all controls** that are 50 points of higher, and mark all water controls with your highlighter pen(s).
2. **Plan Night O** - Approximately one third of your Rogaine time (8 hours) will be in the dark. This means approximately one quarter to one third of the map needs to be marked off for nighttime travel. Try to choose a quadrant of the map that has the greatest number of obvious linear features (ideally roads, but streams and big trails work too) that will be easy to navigate at night. Using a pencil, lightly draw a series of diagonal lines on the part of the map you think would be best traveled at night. For now, mentally set aside this "night portion" of the map and focus on the rest, which is the Day O portion.
3. **Plan Day O** - Now you have your day and night portions of the map delineated, and the higher point and water controls marked. In general, try to plan a route that gets as many 50 point or above control points. This usually involves heading for the edge of the map and moving around the perimeter in a zigzag manner. Try to avoid going up, over and down ridgelines. For easier terrain, plan on hitting 2 controls per hour for the day shift. For tougher terrain and hotter weather, plan on 1.5 controls per hour. For a "day shift" of 11am to 11pm, that's 24 (or 18) controls. Don't mark many more than this on your daytime route plan. If you do plan more than 24 controls, prepare to drop some near the end if you are getting behind

- schedule.
- Decide on the first 4-5 controls you'll hit, and draw the best route from one to another onto the map with a fine tip pen.** Note that the best route to a control might not always be a straight line. If from the map colors and contours you determine that it's light vegetation and not too steep, you likely can travel in a straight line. This is a good thing! If so, draw it using the edge of your compass as a straightedge. Then, from the map (and hopefully the scale on your compass) determine the distance and bearing from each point to the other. Write the distance and bearing on the line you drew – this will help you get into the groove on the first few points.
  - Avoid picking up all the lower point controls near the hash house early on,** on your way out into the field. If you're making two or three large loops in and out during the event, there's plenty of time to get these - work them into your loops out AND back into the hash house. (Note: some event designers put more lower point controls close in, others mix the points up a lot more - look for this during your route planning!)
  - Water:** Try to hit a water control every three to four hours, depending on temperature. Keep in mind that location of water controls usually depend on some kind of road or ATV trail access, and thus water controls may not be evenly spread out on the course. If it's hot, you might want avoid any large part of the map that lacks a water control. I bring a few water purification tablets in case I really need water and can only find a stream, lake etc. on the course.
  - Plan your night route:** Once you've mapped your daytime course, apply the same strategy to the nighttime part of the map. Plan on moving more slowly at night and the following morning when you are tired! Plan on approx. 1.5 controls per hour for the night shift. If you're out from midnight to 10:30 am (10.5 hours), that's 16 controls.
  - Plan your end game:** Plan loops out and back to hash house which give you "cut off/add on" options. If you're ahead of plan, you can deviate a bit and pick up another control or two. More often than not, you'll be a little behind schedule instead of ahead - it's nice to have an easy one or two controls to cut off your list at the end and head straight in for the finish. Working hard for hours and hours only to lose lots of points for being a few minutes late is a real downer.
  - Assign 'check times':** To stay on track, have a reality check after 6, 12, and 18 hours to see if you're keeping up with your scheduled pace.
  - Timing:** Try to take no more than 1 1/2 hours to do your route planning, so you have 30 minutes prior to the start of the race for any last-minute gear futzing. Trust me, you'll need it.

### Foot care

Proper care of your feet is critical to a happy Rogaine the experience. It can be pretty amusing to walk around the Hash House 30 minutes before the start and have a peek at what everybody is doing - some people get pretty carried away with wrapping their feet. Here's what I found be useful.

- Insoles** - some kind of aftermarket insole, such as Superfeet, can be a good idea.
- Socks** - for every Rogaine, I buy two brand new pairs of really nice socks. Remember that wonderful "Ahhhhh . . ." feeling when you put on a cushy pair of brand new socks? Well believe me, that's a great feeling to have at midnight when you're heading out on the night shift.

- 3 **Blister prevention** - if you know you're prone to blisters, taping that area well before you head out as a good plan. Putting some tincture of benzoin on the skin before the blister pad helps keep the adhesive stick a lot better. Nexcare brand Waterproof Bandages (made with 3M adhesive) stick very well, and are good for preventative bandaging on blister prone spots. Some folks prefer to use a pair of light hiking liner socks underneath their main pair, or wear new outdoor socks incorporating blister-guard material.
- 4 If you feel a blister developing during the event, a good gob of **Vaseline** on your hotspot does wonders to stop the friction. Vaseline, as well as baby diaper rash cream, can also work for crotch chafing. This is a widespread yet little-discussed Rogaine ailment that usually strikes about 4 am. Lanolin-based lubricants work well, too. If you feel a crotch rash starting, wiping down with unscented baby wipes in a small plastic baggie can help postpone it.
- 5 **Footwear** – Rogainers seem divided between running shoes and light hiking boots. If you are not used to a lot of off trail travel, I suggest going with the light hikers.

### **Food and hydration**

This is probably the most subjective area of Rogaine advice, so I will tread carefully. While sucking down a few packs of carbohydrate gel and chugging a liter of sports drink might work well in a three-hour mountain bike ride, most of us need something more substantial during a Rogaine. The psychological (not to mention caloric) boost of, say, a fat salami and cheese sandwich at dawn can be huge! For me, I like a combination of an hourly carbohydrate gel, water with your additive of the choice (Cytomax, Gookinaid, etc.) along with more substantial treats such as sandwiches, corn chips, and chocolate covered coffee beans.

Water found at the water controls will be warm and not terribly palatable. I like to bring some extra sports drink mix in an 8 ounce plastic jar (sturdier than a ziplock bag) to add to the water refilled on the course. Electrolyte replacement powder or capsules can be vital on a hot day.

While it's great that event planners provide food, don't count on a five-star meal at the Hash House. Some are well-catered, others are simple affairs and can end up low on more popular foodstuffs by the end. While U.S. events tend to have one central hash house, some international events (in Australia, for example) may have more than one location where food is available. I've found that a cold orzo pasta salad (heavy on the olive oil), kept in a cooler in the car, is a great dinner as well as post race food. And on that note, be sure to have some ultra yummy post-race food stashed in your car. Potato chips, olives and canned fruit juice will work well for me. Adult malted beverages might be tempting, but keep in mind you may well have to drive home soon after to drink them. Adding a buzz to sleep deprivation and physical hammering is not a good combination for safe driving.

You may also find yourself not wanting to eat much after several hours - sometimes called "rogaine tummy" - caused by extended physical exertion. But not eating occasionally will cause you to end up worse off. During an endurance event like a rogaine, always eat before you're hungry and drink before you're thirsty - though it can often be hard to know exactly when that is...!

Check in advance about water availability on the course. While many rogaines

include maintained water stops on the course, some do not. Here, you'll be expected to bring your own water to the event and/or use a water purifier while out in the field. New backpack style hydration packs are popular and speed progress on the trail. I once had a teammate end up in bad shape as he'd packed water bottles in his pack - and then never stopped to drink from them! He ended up noticeably dehydrated 4 hours into a 6 hour mini-rogaie. Fortunately, his other two teammates (with Camelbacks) saw his deteriorating condition before he did, and we stooped long enough to sufficiently rehydrate him before continuing.

### **What's in Your Pack?**

Here's another highly subjective topic. Every pack will be different, but this is what I wear and carry. The loaded pack should not weigh more than 10 lbs, food and water included. The hardcore racers will carry a lot less, conservative folks a bit more. This is planned for one return to the hash house during the event. You don't need much for a first aid kit - blisters and a twisted ankle are by far the most likely injuries.

For the car: A cooler well stocked with ice, a plushy sleeping pad and folding camp chairs are great to have. Hydrate slowly and continuously the evening before the event.

For your water bottles, mix up 4 one liter quart/liter of your preferred sports drink at home, and freeze them all. Keep them well iced in the cooler. Take 2 bottles out for each leg. When you add more water on the course, it'll get cold, yum!

Try to have all needed gear prep and packing DONE before the map handout. This means water bottles ready, food packed, toes taped, heels wrapped, daypack loaded and ready. Cramming all this in 30 minutes before the race starts creates unneeded stress.

#### **Wearing:**

- long sleeve silkweight synthetic shirt
- sun hat (with full brim or baseball style)
- sunglasses
- outer shorts with some good cargo and zippered pockets
- spandex "underwear" shorts
- trail running or very light hiking shoes
- yummy pair of brand new socks
- low top gaitors (to repel evil grass seeds)

#### **In a small pack:**

- 2 liters of frozen water with your preferred additive (Gookinaid, etc.)
- extra drink additive mix in plastic jar (to add to water found on course)
- 6-8 packets Gu or Hammer gel
- electrolyte tablets (for salt/potassium repletion)
- 2 yummy sandwiches / bagels
- olives in 4 oz. plastic jar
- whistle
- watch
- small digital camera (optional)
- pencil stub

- \_\_\_ map (each partner carries one)
- \_\_\_ control card (paper or electronic)
- \_\_\_ ultralight raincoat or windbreaker
- \_\_\_ good headlamp with new batteries
- \_\_\_ compass (I like the Suunto model M3)
- \_\_\_ backup compass (1 per team)
- \_\_\_ single trekking pole (2 poles don't work well, as you need a hand free for the compass)
- \_\_\_ velcro ankle support or Ace bandage
- \_\_\_ blister pads
- \_\_\_ allergy meds (Zyrtec) to combat grass/pollen, etc
- \_\_\_ ibuprofen (6 tabs)
- \_\_\_ lip balm with sunscreen
- \_\_\_ sunscreen (apply lots before start of race)
- \_\_\_ vaseline or Sportslick in small tube (for chafing)
- \_\_\_ empty ziplock sandwich bag (for trash)
- \_\_\_ toilet paper or baby wipes, in sandwich bag
- \_\_\_ diaper rash cream, in small tube
- \_\_\_ tincture of benzoin in tiny eye dropper bottle (help blister pads stick on sweaty skin)
- \_\_\_ water purification tablets (optional)

### **General Navigation**

- 1 It's important to be able to recognize terrain in which you'll be able to walk a straight line to your next control, versus terrain in which you need to do some creative zigzags to get to the control. Obviously, straight line travel is a lot easier.
- 2 Try to avoid going up, over, and right back down ridgelines.
- 3 Try to avoid sidehilling, that is, traveling along the side of a hill at a constant elevation, any longer than you have to. This puts serious abuse on your legs, and is no fun for long periods of time.
- 4 Travel along ridges and in drainages is generally the easiest terrain to both see on a map and travel on the ground.
- 5 If the distance to the next control is critical to determine, both team members should be pace counting. That way, if one person loses count, the other person can remind them.
- 6 When you get within 1/10 of the mile of where you think the control point is, team members should spread out (but staying within shouting distance, according to Rogaine rules.) By spreading out, you cover more terrain and have a better chance of hitting the control.
- 7 Don't take too long back at the Hash House between the day shift in the night shift. It's easy to let a planned 30 minute dinner break stretch to an hour and a half. Some of the hardcore teams stay out the entire 24 hours without ever coming back to the Hash House. (Like I said, hardcore!)
- 8 Get the harder to find, more distant controls in the daylight, and save the easy controls near obvious roads and features for the walk back to the Hash House after dark.
- 9 Especially later in the event, it's very easy to start taking longer and longer breaks at control points. Think about it this way: if you hit 30 control points over the course of the event, and if you can save an extra two minutes at each one, that gives you an extra hour of time, which could translate into 100 more total points (if you can keep up a solid pace of 100 points per hour.)

Translated, be efficient at the control points. As one partner is punching the control card, the other should be grabbing a bearing and determining the best route to the next control.

- 10 Even if one person is the main navigator, each partner should check all bearings. This is more important late in the game when you're tired. There is nothing that takes the wind out of your sails like realizing you just walked a mile or so in the wrong direction.
- 11 Consider doing a 8 or 12 hour event for your first time. Night navigation is hard and you should practice it in advance! Distances feel different at night, esp. when you're fatigued. Most rogaines (though not all) are held on nights with full or nearly full moons, though the weather may not always cooperate. You can see a lot by the light of a full moon while walking on a dirt road at 2 am. Know when to expect moonlight, sunset, sunrise by checking a web site in advance, like this one:

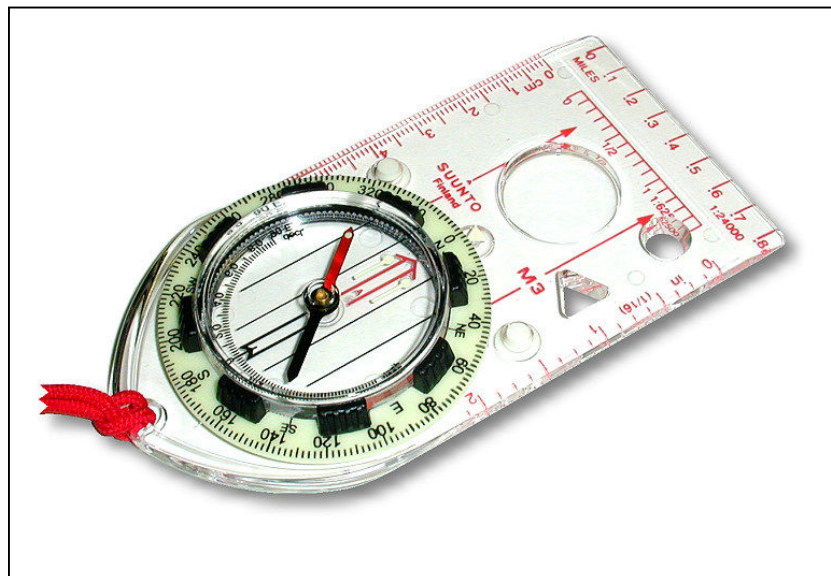
[http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS\\_OneDay.html](http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS_OneDay.html)

### **Pace counting**

In normal orienteering events, maps are always metric. Thus, knowing your pace count for 100 meters is very useful. However, in a Rogaine (at least in the United States) maps are often based on the USGS 7 1/2 minute quad, and are not in metric units. With these maps, that knowing your pace count for 1/10 of a mile (528 feet) is more useful.

It can be somewhat tricky to determine this. Probably the best way is on a good high school running track, walking exactly 100 meters, and then doing a little arithmetic to extrapolate this to 528 feet. I will leave the math to you - geez, we can't tell you ALL the secrets, can we? Okay, here's a hint: 160 meters = 528 feet.

The compass I like for Rogaines is a Suunto model M3. This wonder of Finnish engineering has a 1:24,000 map scale directly on the end of the base plate. This allows you to put the end of the baseplate directly on a control, rotate the compass so the next control is under the end of the baseplate, and instantly see the correct stance between the two in real world distance. Remember to set your compass declination to zero - O-maps are set to magnetic north and do not use declination. Link to Suunto compass; <http://www.thecompassstore.com/51m3dl.html>





### **Keeping the Mental Mojo**

Like any good relationship, keeping things happy between you and your partner is crucial. There will times when both of you hit a low point and need a boost. It's the task of your partner to hopefully notice this (or better yet anticipate it) and do what they can to bring you back up. It can be as simple as reminding your partner to eat a Gu packet and drink every hour, or as dramatic as them telling you they want to quit entirely after a missed control and a 3:00am meltdown. Ideally, your partner is someone you know well and has a background in some sort of endurance sports, such as century bike rides, triathlons, marathons, mountaineering, etc. A past history in sports like this is some assurance that they know how to maintain a moderate level of suffering for a long period of time - probably the most important factor in completing a Rogaine.

Talk about your goals in advance and stick to them. Mountaineers call it "summit fever" - the drive to reach the top blinding all other thinking. Rogaining, like mountaineering, is a team venture - strive for mutual success by moving only as fast and hard as your slowest team member can reasonably sustain. 4:00am in the middle of nowhere after 17 hours of exertion can be a cold and lonely place - you want to be there with willing friends, not new enemies.

### **Night O and Lighting (and the Secret Weapon!)**

Ahhh, the joys of Night-O. Nailing a control point in the dark usually tastes twice as sweet as those you find during the day. It's a great idea to have your Night-O gear ready to grab and go in your car or tent before the event begins. For me, my nighttime gear bag looks like this:

- \_\_\_ toilet paper or baby wipes, in sandwich baggie
- \_\_\_ 4 packs Gu or Hammer gel
- \_\_\_ lightweight fleece cap, maybe gloves, depending on temperature
- \_\_\_ 1 yummy sandwich / bagel
- \_\_\_ 1-2 cans energy drink (Red Bull) or canned coffee, drink it at the car
- \_\_\_ 2 liters of frozen water with your preferred additive (Gookinaid, etc.)
- \_\_\_ face-melter super flashlight, with fresh batteries, see below

I'm a flashlight freak, and I own at least five. The current headlamp battles between Petzl and Black Diamond, not to mention the amazing advances in LED flashlights, give the Rogainer many options. My preferred combination is a quality LED headlamp for general walking and map reading, combined with what I call "the Facemelter" handheld flashlight, used when you know you're close to a control, or need to see how tall that cliff is over which you're about to stumble. At present, for general lighting, I love the Petzl Tikka XP headlamp, which has several light settings and a "boost" feature for a short term extra blast of light. Some models even have a red bulb, which might be nice for reading a map without ruining your night vision. (Hmm, this may be my next headlamp upgrade . . .)

Depending on the course, control points may or may not have reflective tape on them. The tape obviously makes the control point much easier to find at night.

I'm sure the master Rogainers out there will never forgive me for revealing the secret to their amazing Night-O scores, but you've read this far, so here is **the Rogaine Secret Weapon**: a super duper bright flashlight. There are a few solid

brands out there, but the one I love is the Surefire G2 model. Surefire makes flashlights for SWAT teams, Special Forces etc., and they rock! The G2 weighs just 4.1 ounces, costs about \$40, runs on 2 small lithium batteries, and throws out a 60 lumen beam for an hour, brighter than a 4 D cell Maglite.

An even better option might be the lights made by Fenix. These are even smaller, have a greater light output, and run on cheaper and readily available AA batteries. Note that the Facemelter is meant for a quick burst of a few seconds, not for continuous use, as battery life is fairly short on most models. The night controls practically jump into your lap when you have this puppy. Available online or at various places in Portland; I got my Surefire G2 at the knife shop in Lloyd Center mall (Portland). Use the nifty "dealer locator" feature on the Surefire website.

Surefire: <http://www.kk.org/cooltools/archives/000728.php>

Fenix lights: <http://www.kk.org/cooltools/archives/002531.php>

### **In Conclusion**

Your first (or second!) Rogaine is not the place to "be all you can be" in a single 24-hour period of your mortal existence. Train well in advance for it. Try a shorter one (8-12 hours) the first time. Pick a partner you know you'd enjoy a less than perfect hike with - you'll be together for a day or more in some less than comfortable conditions. Enjoy the scenery, the weather, the wildlife and the competition. Remember, "any fool can skydive once". Come prepared, so you'll have a good time and want to be back for your next Rogaine...!