Foundational Skills Series
Map & Compass Use

The ability to use a map and compass together to navigate is an essential outdoor skill. To determine your bearing - the direction you need to travel in the field - use the following procedure:

1. Place the compass on the map so that the long edge connects the starting point with your destination or as close as possible
2. Make sure that the direction of travel arrow is pointing from the starting point to the place of destination
3. You can use the distance scale on your compass (if available) to determine the distance you need to travel.

4. Hold the compass flat and firmly on the map in order to keep the base plate steady.
5. Turn the bezel ring until the North-South index lines visible on the bottom of the compass housing are parallel with the North-South lines on the map, and aligned.
6. Read the degree number aligned with the direction of travel arrow. This is your bearing of travel.

7. Hold the compass in front of you. Make sure that the base plate is level and away from any magnetic or metal objects, and that the direction of travel arrow is pointing straight ahead.
8. Rotate your body until the North-South indicator on the bottom of the compass housing lines up with the needle, and the red end of the needle points in the same direction as the arrow.
9. The directional arrows on the baseplate is now aligned to the bearing of travel.

Once you have determined your bearing, you need to maintain an accurate direction of travel. Visually locate a prominent target ahead of you in the terrain - a tree, boulder, or other object – upon which you can maintain a visual fix. Walk towards the target object without staring at your compass. As you approach your target, locate a new target object that is aligned with your bearing, and repeat the process. Check your compass from time to time to ensure that you have not deviated from your bearing.