

On terrain, map and course

The name Soontaga means literally “behind the marsh”. The name of the place gives some hints about the terrain of XV TAOK rogaine – quite a bit of dry land behind the marsh, but obviously some marshes as well. The terrain is actually quite diverse and presents several facets: some hilly pine forest, but also flatter spruce forests; some nice bogs, contrasted by boring marshy forest; some picturesque small forest lakes, but also some ugly wetlands; some maintained meadows as well as overgrown old fields. Nearly one fifth of the terrain belongs to Soontaga nature protection area. The western edge of the terrain is bounded by Small Mother River, which is actually one of the bigger rivers in South Estonia.

A large share of forest is state-owned forest with a regular ride network. There are some fields and meadows and some private forests on the eastern part of the terrain near Tartu-Valga road and in the central part of the terrain, around event center and by Kuigatsi-Tõrva road, which divides the terrain in northern and southern parts. Runnability of the state forest is generally good, in some areas even very good. The latter applies in particular to hilly areas. The flatter areas and private forests are more frequently difficult to pass. One indication of possible thickets are longer “gaps” in the forest ride network – this is likely to reflect overgrown areas with young forest.

The water level in marshes and ditches is not high, but don’t develop too high expectations on maintaining dry feet throughout the course. The ditches are generally easy to cross. Even the streams and wider ditches are generally crossable with the help of fallen trees or beaver dams, but again, there is a higher risk to get your feet wet when crossing those wider watercourses. Be careful if attempting to cross Sauniku stream between controls 26 and 56 as the stream banks are marshy.

As usual at TAOK rogaines, the map scale is 1:30000 with 5 m contour interval. It is a special rogaining map, which is more accurate than the Estonian base map, but not as detailed as orienteering maps. For drawing contours, laser scanning height data of the Estonian Land Board have been used. Some recent clearings may be missing on the map, while some tracks of forest harvesters are not shown on the map. On the other hand, areas indicated on the map as semi-open areas could be anything from a recent clearing with some seed-trees to old fields which are rapidly turning into a young forest. The map is aligned to magnetic north, i.e. the grid lines of magnetic north (indicated with green color) are parallel to the edge of the map.

Observing the requirements of the Environmental Board two special protection areas of Soontaga nature protection area are indicated on the map as out-of-bounds with purple vertical stripes. The course has been set so that there should be no point in entering those areas. However, it is permitted to move along the rides surrounding those special protection areas. Other out-of-bounds areas are pasture lands surrounded by electric fences and some newly sown fields in the middle part of the map. It is also strictly prohibited to enter the territory of farmsteads and private homes, marked on the map with olive green color. Please respect the privacy of local people. In general there are very few houses and farmsteads on this terrain. All dogs met during the mapwork and course-setting were friendly and should not bite, but we can’t give any guarantee. In the southern section of the terrain there are several abandoned farmsteads and this area has also ruins of a former missile base of the Soviet Army.

You may encounter on the terrain several hunting towers, which give an indication of active hunting in those forests, which in turn hint on different forest animals living in those forests. There is an agreement with hunters that there will be no hunting during the rogaine. However, in return the hunters have a somewhat peculiar request to rogainers. In Valga county some dead wild boar have

been located in September as a result of an outbreak of African swine fever. Should you find any corpse of a dead wild boar, please mark the site on the map and upon finish report to the organisers.

Bird watchers, if lucky, may encounter owls, wood grouse or black grouse. At least you should recognize common raven, don't you? These forests are also a nesting area for osprey and black stork, but those birds currently enjoy the warm weather in Africa.

There are 3 water stations marked on the map, two of them are manned by organisers, while the third one (in the vicinity of CP41) is a self-service spring. In the latter place there are no cups, but the water flows from a tube, which makes it easy to fill your own bottles or water bags. The spring is a short distance north of a major forest road and there is a sign "Allikas" pointing towards it. The purity of other naturally occurring water on the terrain has not been tested.

The shortest route through all 40 controls is slightly less than 60 km, according to the course setter. To collect the maximum score of 140 points over 8 hours is to be considered as a nearly impossible task for even the strongest and most experienced rogainers.

Be very careful when crossing Kuigatsi-Tõrva road, in particular shortly after start. Forests south from the event center do hide some pieces of barbed wire. These are remnants of a Soviet era missile base.

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