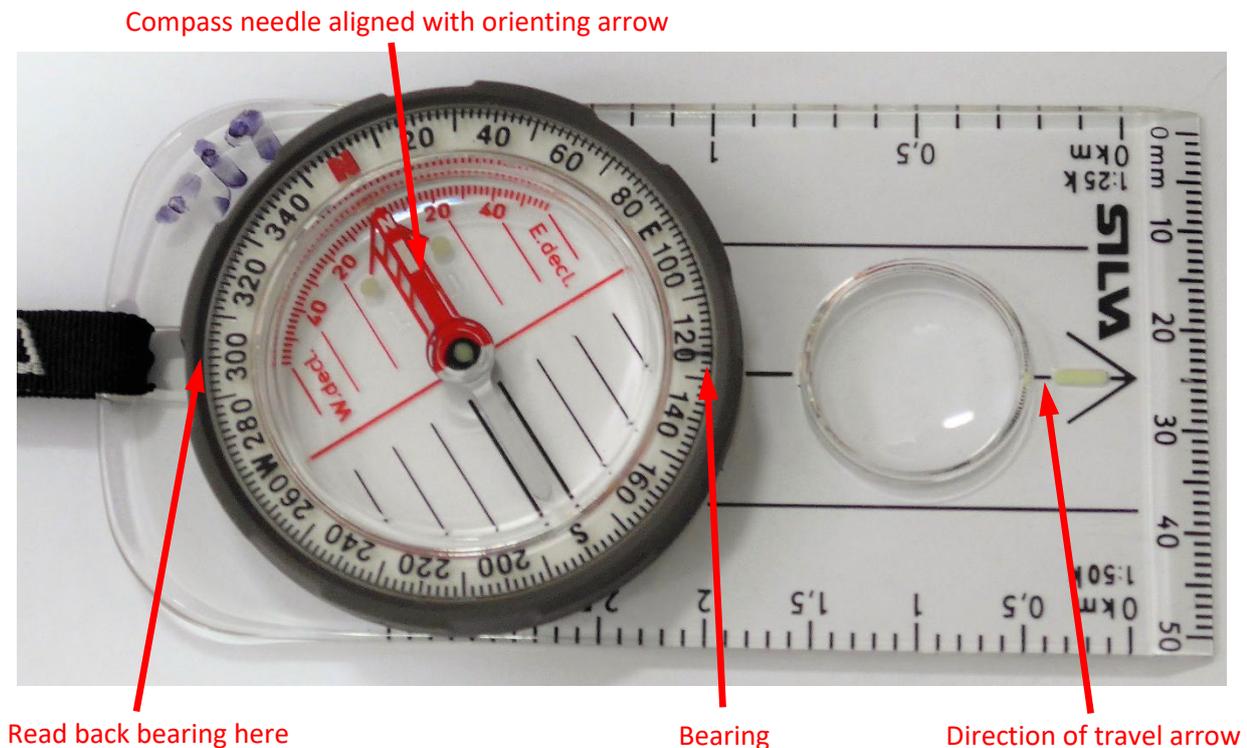


Are Back Bearings Obsolete?

A back bearing is exactly the opposite direction to the direction of travel arrow on your compass i.e. it's 180 degrees' difference. In this time of smartphone navigation apps, which tell you where you are, it would be rare to need to triangulate three back bearings to find your position. But if you're navigating with map and compass alone, when might simple back bearings be useful?



Here are three uses for back bearings:

1. To check you are still on course whilst walking on a bearing cross country.
E.g. If you are walking cross country from a visible feature, you can turn around and take a quick back bearing on the feature where you started. The back bearing should be 180 degrees different to your intended direction of travel.
2. To reverse your course, in order to return to where you started.
E.g. If you want to drop your pack and head off the track for a comfort stop, take a bearing first. Once feeling much relieved, use a back bearing to find your pack again. This avoids unfortunate headlines in the daily press: "Bushwalker Lost in the Mountains Equipped with Trowel and Toilet Paper Alone".
3. To check your position on a linear feature.
E.g. If you are walking along a track and want to quickly check your position on that track, take a simple back bearing on a known geographical feature off to one side. Plot that on your map: the intersection of the back bearing and the track will show roughly where you are.

Back bearings are useful at times. So why not add them to your navigation 'tool box' along with aiming off, attack points, handrails, catching features and other useful ideas.

More information on Navigation can be found in [The Bushwalking Manual](#).

Andrew Robinson, 18 April 2022