

## Mapping as a philosophy of life



### Yves Nager and his passion for orienteering maps

As nature and people merge in solitude, cartographer Yves Nager senses that his craft becomes art. Through the processes of distinguishing essential elements from non-essential elements and understanding the needs of the future users of his orienteering maps, Yves tries to convey something beyond orienteering itself.

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Yves Nager, a globetrotter who has traveled to 40 countries and currently lives on Kaua'i, Hawaii, grew up in the Bernese Oberland, Switzerland. Following his father's footsteps, Yves who proved to be a talented runner from early on was soon looking for a bigger challenge than street running - and came upon orienteering. When he first tried the sport of orienteering, his experience was so discouraging that he didn't want to continue.

He recalls, "In the fall of 1988, I was standing at the start line of a teenage orienteering competition with my brother. We had no idea what the symbols meant and how to read the map. The three kilometers took us more than ninety minutes instead of the fifteen we expected." Others would not have dared a second attempt after such an experience. Not so in the case of Yves Nager: The following spring he attended an orienteering course and discovered his fascination for orienteering maps.

### **Author of an orienteering map at the age of 15**

Looking back today, he speaks of four phases during which cartography shaped a large part of his philosophy of life. As soon as he finished the orienteering course, he began to draw maps of the neighborhood and the small forests near his family house. He explored the area with a blank sheet of paper, a pen, and a compass.

He received a subscription for Swiss orienteering maps as a gift and every delivery was a "highlight" to him. He reflects, "Apart from languages and history, geography was my favorite subject at school, and the school atlas with its many colorful maps was a treasure trove." His talent did not remain hidden in the orienteering club Hondrich and so at the young age of 15, he became a creator of his first official orienteering map from the forest of Hondrich.

Yves had a great mentor, Urs Jordi who taught him a lot about mapping in the terrain and Urs Steiner became another great role model for him. When one of the first version of OCAD came out, he also began drawing other map projects after he became part of the Bernese junior squad and receiving awards at the Bernese junior championships.

Yves Nager saw the second phase of his mapping career in the canton of Aargau in Switzerland. As he pursued further education, he focused less on the sports aspect of his life. However, one day in 2003, he caught the TV broadcasting of the Orienteering World Championship in sprint from Rapperswil while lying at home because of a summer flu which revived his interest and passion for orienteering.

Yves challenged himself to tackle large-scale projects such as Baldegg-Horn above Baden and the Steppberg map near Rheinfelden. He also worked on the Egg-Platten-Wehntal map for a national orienteering event. He worked for various clubs and did not ignore the emerging trend towards city orienteering by collaborating on the map of the city of Bülach for the OLK Rafzerfeld.

## **Mapping experiences in the forests of Colorado**

The third phase of his mapping journey took place between 2015 and 2019 in the USA in the forests of the state of Colorado. Yves Nager says, "When I hike with my partner Eunjung Choi, she discovers flowers and animals, while I usually think about how the terrain around me could be mapped."

Meanwhile he had left Switzerland after losing several family members including his father and going through personal challenges, he ended up in Hawaii to reset his life's direction. While living in Colorado, he discovered the Rocky Mountain Orienteering Club ([www.rmoc.org](http://www.rmoc.org)) in Denver. He contacted Doug Berling, the club's president and shared his mapping ideas. Doug took interest and the collaboration began on mapping some of the terrains in Colorado. The Tahosa map project in the turned out to be very special with a total of 9.5 square kilometers mapped covering the loneliest, most remote, almost pathless landscape at an altitude of up to 3000 meters above sea level.

Yves stayed in a small cabin throughout the project right in the center of the map without leaving the area, which was a unique arrangement. For other projects, he would return to home or place in the city off the map. During the Tahosa mapping project, encounters with animals in the wild, breathtaking, untouched landscapes and reflections in the many beautiful lakes gave him time to reflect his own inner landscape. This unique and special mapping experience in the remote forest gave him a tool for helping his clients as a life coach and author.

## **Rejuvenated by the energy of the forest**

He felt the rejuvenating power of the forest, as it is known as forest therapy in Japan and slowly gaining a foothold in Switzerland and Europe. Nager says, "That was probably the only way I was able to walk and hike up to nine hours a day for six consecutive days in the field. It was as if I had been bathed in the energy of the forest."

He has so far worked on three map projects in Colorado following his passion of creating art from nature in the form of a map. "I like to spend a lot of time designing a map. If there is no time pressure, I particularly pay attention to the contours of a map area because I appreciate doing orienteering on an easy-to-read map myself. I'm sure that helps to develop trust with the cartographer.", says Nager. He also regularly studies the works of his colleagues, and Yves mentions that he is so familiar with the mapping style of some of the well-known mappers that he could identify which mapper drew a particular map by looking at just a small section of a map.

## **Alpine landscapes in Switzerland**

In 2019, Yves Nager was again back in Switzerland and discovered the area of Valais for map projects which was the starting point of the fourth phase of his mapping journey. He started in the rocky area above Torgon and spent almost a month each in 2020 and 2021 in the area above the Col de Sanetsch through the collaboration with the OLG Valais. Nager says, "I explored an inspiring, very detailed and often impassable dream landscape above the tree line in a karst area that consists of two parts. In the upper part, there are many round bumps and glacial striations while in the lower area the cliffs are more angular and jagged. This unique, varied terrain will challenge the orienteers technically and also in terms of coordination."

The Sanetsch map will be used for the first time this summer 2022 at the Swiss-O-Days event (see also the article 'myths and reality' on page 7 of the magazine). Most recently, he completed his largest project to date which covers over 16 square kilometers around the Val de Morgins in the area where the SIMM (Swiss International Mountain Marathon) 2021 event was held.

Nager says mapping works like putting together a puzzle. When individual elements are well put together, he feels he experiences a flow state and the opposite can be true. If something is out of alignment, it takes time and efforts to correct different elements of a map. That's why Nager doesn't want to devote himself only to orienteering mapping but desires to continue to pass on the wisdom gained and lessons learned from his mapping experiences to others.

## **The dream of orienteering maps in Hawaii**

What's next? Yves Nager never lacks ideas. For example, he dreams of creating one orienteering map each of all six main Hawaiian Islands where he calls home now. He says, "Each island has beautiful and unique terrains. That would be a great undertaking for future orienteering journeys as the Hawaiian Islands are spectacularly beautiful. I would love to collaborate on Hawaiian mapping projects as such a project cannot be accomplished alone."

**Footnote:**

If you want to delve deeper into Yves Nager's mapping philosophy, read his book "Hawaiian Rebirth". It is available in bookstores and online as an e-book.

**Image:** Yves Nager at one of the many lakes while working on the most complex map in the Rocky Mountains, Tahosa High Adventure & Beaver Reservoir. Photo by Eunjung Choi (attribution)

**Quote:**

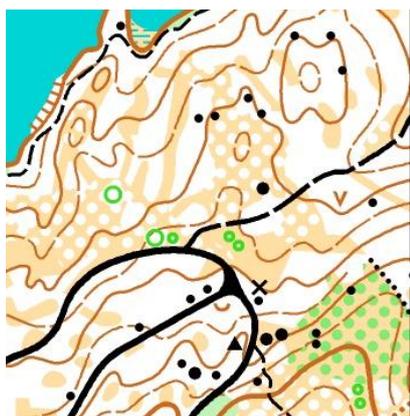
"I like to spend a lot of time designing a map."

**Map excerpts:**

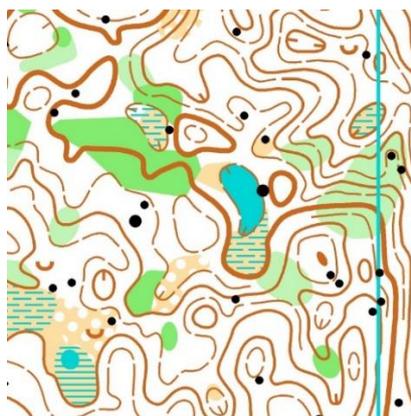
Excerpts from the three maps created by Yves Nager in the Rocky Mountains:

Frisco Peninsula, Tahosa, White Ranch

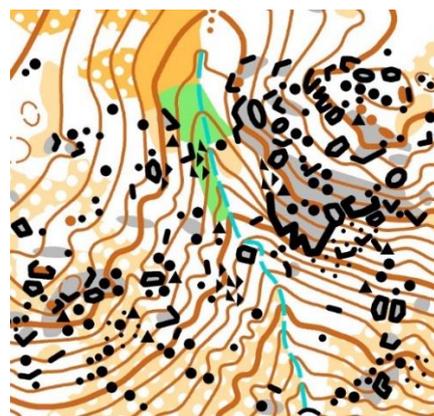
Masterpiece: The Tahosa High Adventure Base & Beaver Reservoir Map



Frisco Peninsula



Tahosa



White Ranch