

Planner's Comments

Nobody has given me a statuette but otherwise it's rather like an award ceremony, a lot of people to thank! Most of all Ros, who has put up with me spending all of my free time (and more time that wasn't really free) planning this event. My whole family has helped throughout, including two occasions when our car was snowed in over the Christmas break and we walked from home to tag control sites! With 101 controls it can't be a single-handed effort, so thanks for helping during planning, control hanging, checking and then finally collecting.

Thanks to David May for putting up with my rather last-minute planning, his attention to detail, and helping to get the sites, control descriptions and map correct. And, in addition to the normal duties of the Controller, hanging (rather than just checking) ten controls on Saturday, when I was running a bit late!

Thanks are particularly due to Roger Coe, Pat Macleod and the NGOC teams for their hard work setting up the start, finish and all the other facilities. I hadn't quite realised how difficult it would be to set up a start remote from roads, until I carried all the maps there on the morning of the event – sorry!

I'm pleased to say that no controls were stolen or vandalised overnight; all had been checked "dibbed" by my team (*including Pete Ward who checked the NE controls*) by 9:20am on Sunday to confirm they were working and all the SI boxes worked throughout. Thanks to John Fallows for the computing and his brilliant effort in getting the results on the internet early that evening, probably before many competitors had reached home!

During control collection it was noticeable that some minor paths were still hidden by snow, whilst new elephant tracks (*not always heading in the correct direction!*) were very evident. I'm convinced that the snowy conditions must have added significantly to the difficulty in some areas.

Control 79 (rocky pit) is an anomaly: it was hung quite high when checked on the morning of the event, but was low in the pit when collected.....

Routegadget is fascinating! I didn't expect anyone to run past the finish on their course, but Routegadget shows somebody did. And quite a few other routes I would not have thought of!

My advice to next year's Southern Champs planner? Don't bother with separate course 2 unless it's a selection race and you are likely to have a bigger W21 turnout - combine it with another course of similar length, as it's a lot of effort planning a course for only 5 runners (of 800 entries)! And let's start campaigning to do away with timed starts. A punching start would have much simplified matters for the start team and reduced hanging around in the cold for competitors. And who would be inconvenienced?

Most of all, thanks to those competitors who braved the weather to come and compete!

Paul Taunton (NGOC)

PS Dave H., please put me down to plan a summer evening street event in 2011.

Controller's Comments

I must start by adding my congratulations, to those of many others, to Roger and the rest of the NGOC team for rescuing the event at the eleventh hour from an inevitable cancellation. When we stood in the intended car park (the field where the Finish was) some 48 hours before the event, the field was actually relatively driveable as the ground was frozen underneath and the 5 – 10 cm of fresh snow gave good grip. But snow was forecast again for Sunday morning and it was clear that we simply couldn't risk a potentially slippery field. Hence Roger's brilliantly conceived plan B swung into action.

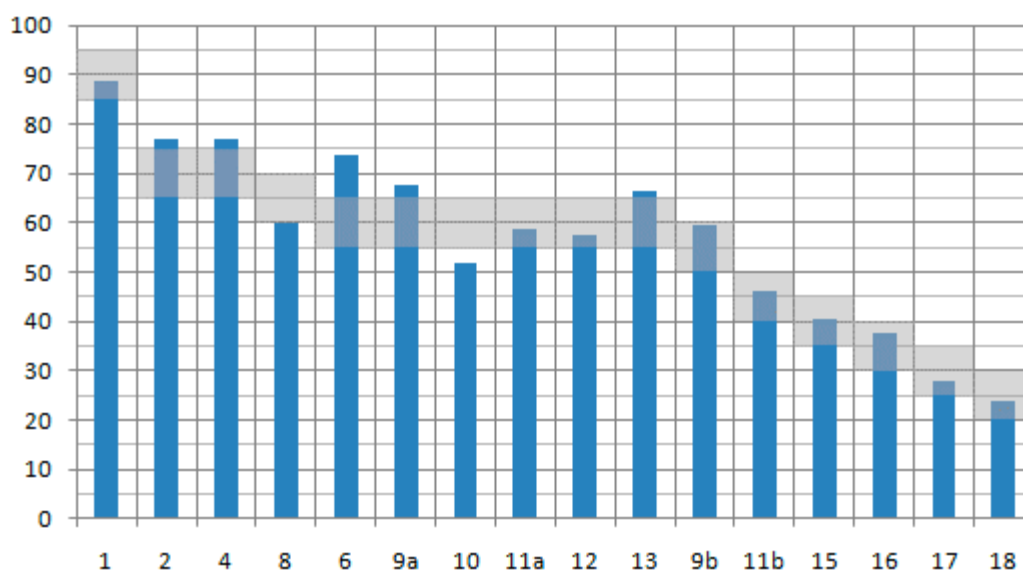
Lydney Park provided more challenges than I'd expected when I agreed to take on the controlling role. I'd run there in 2002 and 2004 and recalled it as hilly and technically challenging but remembered little of brambles or brashings ... unfortunately these had proliferated over the last few years and even the hard frosts of the past weeks had done little to ameliorate their effect. Does this mean that the terrain isn't level 1 standard anymore? I think the answer to this depends on who you ask – the elites I spoke to all thought their course provided a tough but fair challenge.

Other challenges related to access. The Estate is private and is used regularly for shooting. At other times, management of deer and birds takes priority and there were few occasions when the planner and controller could actually visit the terrain in safety! This, coupled with the length of time when the area was under snow, meant that visits for planning, controlling and map updating were crammed into a shorter time than was ideal.

Consequently, one or two aspects of the forest side of things fell short of the standards demanded at this level. In particular, I received some deserved flak at the Finish for control 79, a very small rocky pit visited by courses 1, 4, 5, 8 and 9, where I should have practised what I regularly preach and moved the flag to the edge. Control 108 also caused some debate, mostly because most were not familiar with the pictorial description used and were looking up for a bridge rather than down for a narrow passageway!

What about the course lengths? As advertised, we were planning to meet current winning times standards by using the updated course length ratios in the 2011 Competition Rules, which recommend longer courses for some of the older age classes. How well did we do? The chart below shows the best time on each of the courses designed for premier age classes, e.g. course 6 had four premier classes, W18E, W20E, W35L and W40L as well as M40S and M35S. Course 3 has no premier classes and is omitted. It also shows the range of expected winning times for those on each course (in grey):

premier course winning time



NB Courses 9 and 11 are split into “sub-courses” as they have classes (M16A and W16A) which have shorter expected winning times running on them. For example, M16A has an EWT of 50-60 minutes, whereas M55L/60L have an EWT of 55-65 minutes.

10 of the 16 courses have winning times within the planned bracket, one is shorter (a very fine run from Mike Murray on M65L did this!) and only course 6 (W18E/W20E/W35L/M35S/W40L/M40S) is significantly longer (8 minutes longer than the top end of the expected range), probably because some of the top runners were missing from the start list in these classes.

Overall, I am happy that the course lengths were about right ... at least for the top runners, as it is clear that the terrain proved to be very tough for those further down the lists and who took long times as a result. The recent weather and the consequently muddy and slippery conditions had much to do with this. Times would have been much quicker in the dry.

On a much more positive note, Paul proved to be a thoughtful planner who knew how to produce courses which matched standards expected at an Area Championships level. The long legs on many of the courses, in particular, produced much post-run debate and RouteGadget shows just how many variations were followed in practice. He thoroughly deserved the positive feedback noted in the car park afterwards.

There was much debate beforehand about the requirement to have offset litho printed maps for the event, especially as this would add over £1 to the cost of each entry. As it happened, we could do a direct

comparison of digital vs offset a few days before the event as we could look at Print5's digital proofs alongside the same maps printed using offset technology. Whilst the digital proofs looked usable, the clarity of the offset printing was astonishingly better, especially in the most detailed areas. This confirmed in my own mind that it is right to require offset maps at our top events, but we should also find a way of doing this more cheaply at the same time.

Finally, thank again to Roger, who was calmness personified when all around him seemed to be conspiring against the event in the days beforehand! The event would not have happened had a less experienced organiser been in charge.

David May (SLOW)

Organiser's Comments

I have deliberately left it until now before penning these comments as the last few days before the event passed in a blur, largely due to the need to flesh out and implement a Plan B that was never expected to be needed, and I wanted to wait until my mind settled down enough for my lasting impressions to form.

Overwhelmingly my impression is of how much support I got from the rest of the team – Paul, David, and Pat Macleod who as ever managed all the logistics, plus all the club helpers some of whose jobs and the time they spent doing them were not quite what they had originally expected. The weather on the day was actually on our side with no snow or rain and even some sunshine although this was clearly not the case elsewhere in the country as witnessed by the 114 non-starters. My biggest concern had been that heavy snowfall would lead to forced withdrawal of the buses, as has happened a few times in the Forest over the last two months, whilst competitors were out on their runs. Plan B did not cater for that – how many 4x4 trips does it take to rescue 700 competitors?

For Paul this was the first time he had planned a Level 1 event whilst it was the first time I had taken sole organisational responsibility at this level (as opposed to being a Day Organiser under an overall Co-ordinator). I think that we both felt that there were still some anomalies and inconsistencies in the current event structure that made our jobs more difficult and in particular more time consuming than they need be. It is certain that running an event at this level is not something to be embarked upon lightly by the otherwise employed. Having said that, it still provides a buzz when it all comes together. Never again, until the next time!

Roger Coe (NGOC)