

PLANNERS' COMMENTS

Hampton Ridge and Islands Thorns (the easterly Inclosure) was never going to be a technical area, so the navigational challenges had to be set in other ways: for example turning a necessity into a virtue by exploiting the scarcity of distinct features and/or enticing competitors to focus more on running faster than staying in contact with the map. The area encompasses a wide range of New Forest terrain types, each of which can pose different orienteering challenges, including the inevitable marshes and mix of woodland and clearings. The oak and beech woods of Islands Thorn Inclosure provided such enjoyable fast terrain that it was just too good to avoid; sadly only the longer courses could make full use of it. But they are almost completely devoid of point features! Perhaps we should have considered adding artificial features, such as hides, as one competitor constructively suggested (but my days of trench-digging are well behind me, I hope). The control layout on the Bombing Range (arguably more Middle orienteering than Classic) provided good spectator sport for the Planner as it tested bearing accuracy between the 3-5 control flags that were clearly visible from any point; but mistakes here were more psychological than having a decisive effect on the overall result, which probably depended significantly on who could maintain concentration to be accurate on a rough compass bearing at speed, given the lack of features for relocation. Many people, including course winners, have some surprising split times – those who made mistakes early seemed to learn the important lessons more quickly than others.

Objectively the courses were an accurate length, based on an M21L winning time of 85-90 minutes (actual 88 – thank you Ed and Ben). The UK Cup courses could both have been 800m+ longer to have hit the recommended winning times of 60 and 50 minutes, but it was great to have such 2 top GB elite orienteers in Graham and Sarah decide to race – it would have been interesting to see if GG could have maintained 5 min/km for 18km on an elite Classic course.

My Oscar (as if) moment if I am allowed it: immense thanks to the SOC Forest Team who did the survey, cartography, patrolling during the event (a significant worry from previous events here, indeed one control set completely disappeared the afternoon before the event) and assisted with placement and collection of the 142 controls (memo to self: ensure that there is someone younger than you, who can deploy to and collect from the furthest-flung sites); to the Controller Arthur Vince, who prevented my more ambitious use of imagined features and gently kept us on the straight and narrow to realistic timelines. And not forgetting the impressive organization and mobilization of many SCOA helpers to make the day, indeed both days, go with a swing.

To end with a question: does anyone know how can one get OCAD to fit more than 3 age classes (e.g. Course 21 with 9!) into a standard Control Description sheet? We wrestled with this for a couple of weeks before reverting to just including the Course Number, which does not help those who may pick up the wrong map.

Charles Bromley Gardner (BAOC) (Planner Courses 1 – 12)