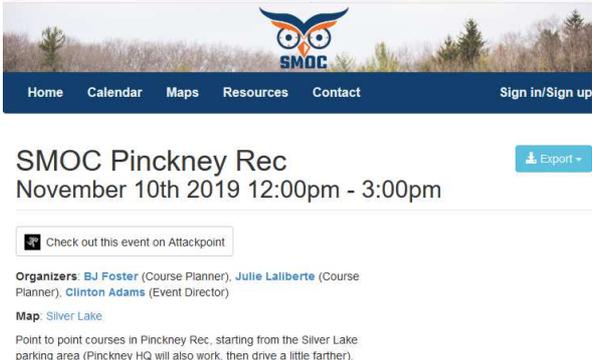


SMOC's Silver Lake Colour coded event

Ian Byrne finally makes an event run by the "other" SMOC

In the early days of the internet, before Google existed, we discovered that there was another SMOC – the Southern Michigan Orienteering Club. Keith Downing noted in a 2007 edition of SMOC Signals that their course timings seemed very long, and included an extract from a map that looked more like Scotland than the South Midlands. I was intrigued and thought "Maybe one day I'll find out for sure..."

Fast forward 12 years and at short notice I had to go to a meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, hosted by the US Environmental Protection Agency, providing I could get security clearance and a US visa. A trip to the US Embassy in London managed to convince them that I am not an international terrorist, despite the stranger visas in my passport, and with just 8 days to go I found an affordable Aer Lingus flight to Chicago – Detroit would be nearer but would cost almost three times as much. And at the back of my brain the word "SMOC" surfaced – do they even still exist? Well they do, and can be found on Facebook and at www.smoc-runs.com. Unbelievably, there's a nearby event on the Sunday following my Friday meeting (and my next meeting in Chicago isn't until Tuesday). A friendly exchange of messages told me how to sign up for an event, using their page on a Canadian orienteering site and gave some guidance on course lengths and those timings – their Green is more like a Short Blue and their Red is equivalent to our Brown: those colours are not used at US events.



The screenshot shows the SMOC website interface. At the top is a navigation bar with links for Home, Calendar, Maps, Resources, and Contact, along with a 'Sign in/Sign up' button. Below the navigation bar is a header image with the SMOC logo. The main content area displays the event title 'SMOC Pinckney Rec' and the date and time 'November 10th 2019 12:00pm - 3:00pm'. There is an 'Export' button. Below the event title, there is a link to 'Check out this event on Attackpoint'. The organizers listed are BJ Foster (Course Planner), Julie Laliberte (Course Planner), and Clinton Adams (Event Director). The map is identified as 'Silver Lake'. A note at the bottom states: 'Point to point courses in Pinckney Rec, starting from the Silver Lake parking area (Pinckney HQ will also work, then drive a little farther).'

The Silver Lake courses as described on the SMOC website:

- White: 2.3 km, beginner friendly, points on trails, takes 30-60 minutes to walk
- Yellow: 3.0 km, good if you've done a White before, or have some previous experience, or if compass and the map click, points off trails but visible from trails, more decisions than White, takes 60-120 minutes to walk
- Orange: 4.0 km, off trail points on larger features, takes 90 to 150 minutes to walk with a few mistakes
- Green: 5.7 km, off trail points on small features in complicated terrain, takes 120-180 minutes to walk with a few mistakes
- Red: 7.1 km, off trail points on small features in complicated terrain, takes 120-210 minutes to walk with a few mistakes

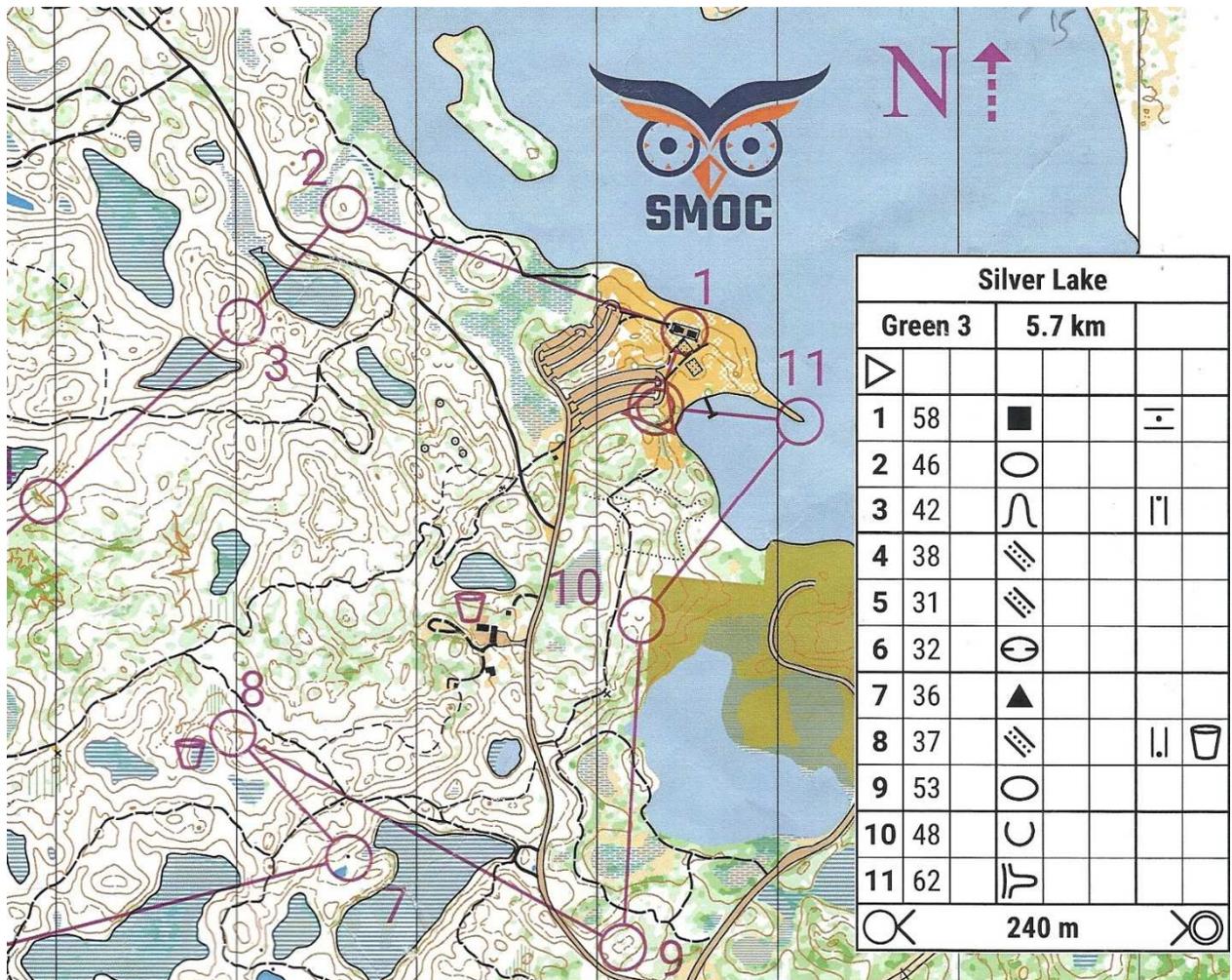


My case was filled with moon boots, in case of snow, but somehow I squeezed in a pair of freshly scrubbed and disinfected O-shoes, still damp from the deep clean after the November Classic. Although booking online was only opened a week before the event, I managed to do this before the Friday deadline and am all set on Sunday morning to find Pinckney Rec., a Michigan State Park about 15 miles Northwest of my hotel in Ann Arbor. Finding it wasn't all that easy; US secondary roads never have signposts and although I had a sketch plan from Google, I missed one turning where the map looked like the road went straight ahead, not knowing I had to fork right at the Fruit Stall. It was only when I knew I had driven too far and the road had degenerated to a gravel surface, with an unexpected lake on the left, that I realised something wasn't quite right and

retraced my route, finding a shortcut that took me to landmark I had previously identified on Google Streetview. If I can't find the event, this doesn't bode too well for my run...

However I did soon find the State Park, and paid my fee of \$9 to be allowed to use it for the day – if I were a Michigan resident, it would only cost me \$11 for a complete year. This had a large car park, with locked toilets, but an open pit toilet at the other end (don't ask...) But even better it had an orienteering event as expected. Starts run from 1200 to 300pm, but as the website warns courses can take up to 180 minutes to walk and courses close at 330pm, most runners start quite early.

They had my pre-registration, and use SI-dibbers, although insist on calling them "sticks". The start/finish was right next to registration, so it was simply a case of collecting the map, which was in a sealed plastic bag, and starting. I was a little confused about scale at first: it is 1:10,000 but doesn't say so on the map and those are quite long runs between controls. Control 1 was very easy – on a bench between the toilet blocks that I had already discovered before starting! 2 was straightforward but I completely messed up 3, approaching from the path to the Southeast, but then overshooting and eventually hitting the Western indistinct path. It looked as if the UK wasn't going to do all that well...



After control 3, I began to get the feel for the map. There are a lot of contours, and although large areas are marked white as runnable forest, they varied from open woodland to quite nasty undergrowth with rose-like thorns. It was surprising to see a water station on a relatively short course (those long times, again) and I was ever so slightly disappointed that it was just water, and not coffee + donuts.



Control 10 (above) was in one of the more pleasant areas of woodland, but control 11 – at the very tip of the promontory was perhaps a little unnecessary.

In the end I finished in 72:39, exactly 11 minutes behind the leader, Alex Izzo (who happens to be a Professor of Maths at Bowling Green State University – what is it about mathematicians and orienteering?). I was 3rd/15; the slowest six entrants – typically armed with several layers of clothing, boots and rucksacks all took well over two hours. And to my surprise I was fastest on three legs – something that almost never happens in the UK.

After we finished there were coffee and cookies/snacks available. I took the chance to chat to a number of club members; I wasn't the only international competitor – there was a family who had driven over from Windsor, Ontario; SMOC is actually their nearest club so they are regular attendees. Ken Lemieux, whom I beat into fourth place, kindly modelled his SMOC kit for me:





SMOC's colours are orange and navy blue, but they have an owl, not a lion!

We were lucky with the weather: it was dry and relatively mild at about 7°C. On the following day driving back to Chicago I had over 4 inches of snow, and the temperature stayed well below freezing. SMOC try to run their events whatever the weather; the advice for the 17 November event is that participants may not need snow shoes, but can still use cross country skis on the shorter courses. This is unseasonably cold; on the Tuesday Detroit posted its coldest November day for over a century.

I hope that we may have the opportunity to host a visitor from Southern Michigan at one of our events, now that they are more aware of us.

