

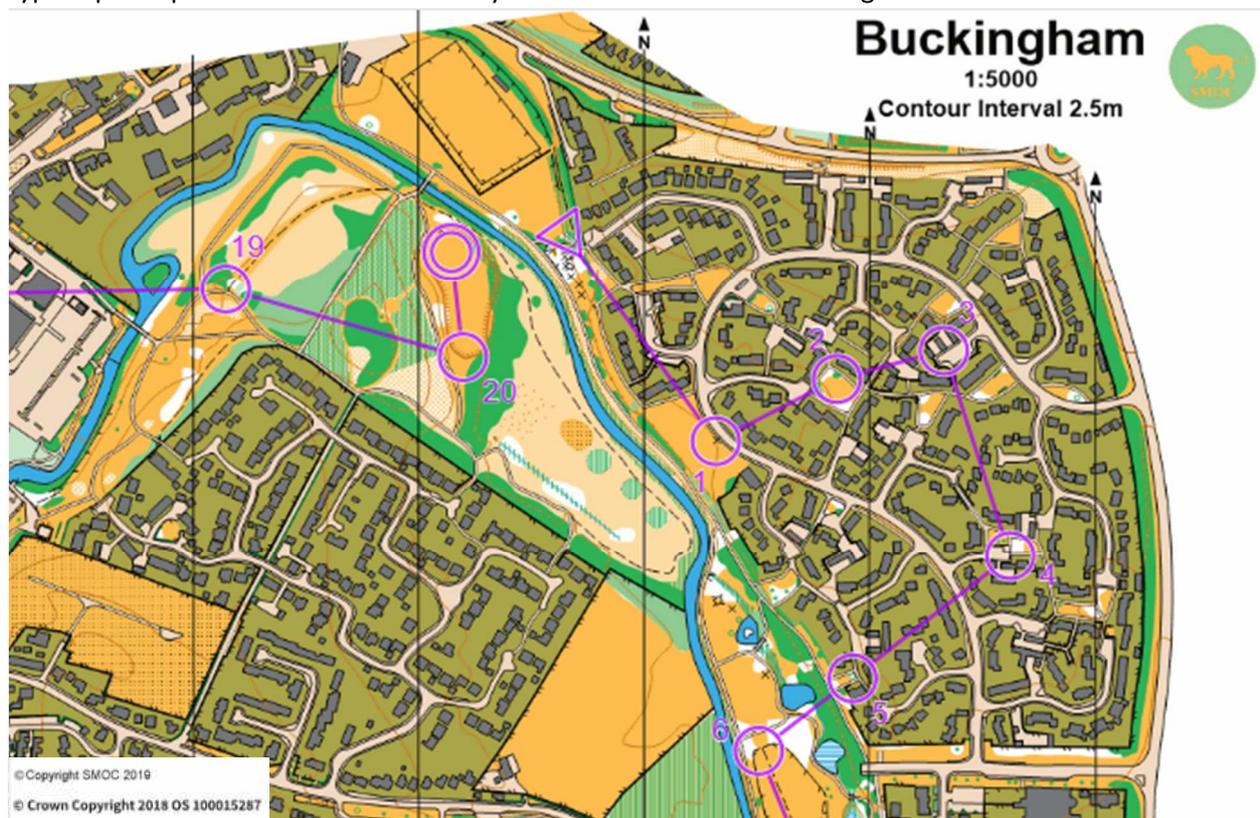
Strong SMOC showing in the UK Urban League

Which league is this?

At times it seems that there's a plethora of leagues – UK, regional and local, urban and general (forest), so it is hard to decide which ones if any to go for. Most leagues award points for every event and then take into account the best n results, where n depends to some extent on the number of possible events. In the two main urban orienteering leagues – UKUL (national) and SEOUL (Southern England, broadly covering the area South/East of the Fosse Way) – $n=7$ this year; UKUL had 20 possible events and SEOUL 19. It's not possible to do all the events as there are sometimes clashes, so this year the UK Urban League had an exciting finish with events held simultaneously in Liverpool and Bury St Edmunds in early October.

OK, it's the Urban League but what's an Urban?

Urban Orienteering events are generally in built-up areas – typically an historic town centre or a suburban housing estate with lots of alleys and cut-throughs. Many urbans include some parks and occasionally parts of a university campus or industrial estate, though the latter two are more commonly used on Sprint events. Urbans are longer than Sprints; although the stated distance appears to be shorter than similar classes in the forest, unless you are Superman and can fly over uncrossable walls or through buildings (without getting disqualified!), the running distance is usually at least 25% longer than the straight line distance. Most courses aim for a winning finishing time of around 40 minutes, though typical participants' times are more likely to be in the 50-60 minute range.



Part of Freya's excellent new map for the Buckingham Urban

Some seasoned forest orienteers regard urbans as being not quite the real thing, and the skills needed are slightly different – there's more focus on excellent map reading and making quick decisions – if you go the wrong way it's often better to stay on the wrong route rather than to try and correct it halfway. If you are brave, it's sometimes possible to run without a compass, but most orienteers keep one in case

they get disoriented (surprisingly easy) or need to plot a course diagonally across a park. The maps are also subtly different, drawn to ISSOM specification.

So what are the courses and how are they scored?



Urbans need a controller (Mike Bennett, left) and Organiser (Drew Vanbeck, right) at Buckingham

These differ from the normal colour-coded courses and typically there are 5 ranking courses number 1 to 5. Course 1 is for the Men Open, course 2 for Women Open and Veteran Men (M40-M50); course 3 for Supervet Men (M55-M60) and Veteran Women; course 4 for Ultravet Men (M65-70) and Supervet Women; and course 5 for Hypervet Men (M75+) and Ultravet/Hypervet Women. There are also Junior and Young Junior classes with their own courses.

Although events earn BOF ranking points in the normal way, the leagues have their own scoring system: in each age group the first finisher gets 100 points, second gets 96, third 93, fourth 91, fifth 90, sixth 89 and so on until the ninety-fourth person gets one point. After that, it's nothing... So a thinly attended event offers the best chance of a great score. And the London City Race will probably be your worst of the year... Scores are published on the Oxfordfusion website together with all the regional urban leagues.

Where were the events?

This year there were only two events in Scotland, and rather more in Southern England than sometimes, which gave SMOccies a better chance of reaching the seven required. (You are still ranked with fewer events, but it's hard to do well!) Indeed our own Buckingham Urban in August was selected as the 13th event of the year – the first time we've been in UKUL. Some of the events are accessible by train or bus from Milton Keynes. Apart from our home event, SMOC was well represented in London, Shrewsbury, Thame and Swindon. The furthest event was Edinburgh, which Sandra ran in January.



No prizes for guessing that the brutalist concrete marks the start of the London City Race in the Barbican

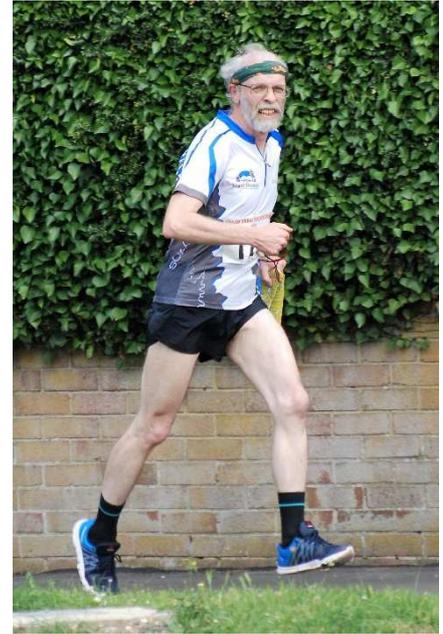
So how did SMOC fare?



Sandra running at Thornbury

Two club members managed to do at least 7 events – Ian Byrne (with 8) and Sandra Mather who reached an impressive 13 events: only one person in the entire league ran at more. Both performed well, with Ian coming in 13th out of 322 on MSV (although to be honest, 300 of those didn't complete 7 or more events), and Sandra a superb 6th out of 201 on WV.

Well done to Sandra!



Ian running at Epsom

Ann Harris showed that SMOC could shine in the Ultravets as well, finishing 20th out of 120 from her 5 events.

Although they did fewer events, the Askhams also made strong showings, with Freya 18th on W40 from just 4 events, and as the planner she had to miss out on Buckingham, and Milly came 7th out of 68 from 4 events on WJ.



Club Members review their runs at Buckingham



Ann (and Sandra) ran in Sheffield

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