

## Lockdown Orienteering Or how I was attacked by a yeti

Well, I didn't think I would be seeing a race number this Easter. But here is one with my name on it:



At the beginning of April I saw that an enterprising soul was running a virtual orienteering event over the Easter weekend and I entered more or less on the spot. It seems that I wasn't the only one who was missing my orienteering: there were just over 500 entries from 30 countries. Some of them seemed to have a bit of an orienteering pedigree but I was not intimidated. (Thierry Gueorgi-who? Dunno, can't be that great, he never seems to have featured in Keyne-O.)

When entering, there was very little information about the format of the event but within a few days we started to get some hints of some online orienteering tools that we would be using and which might be of interest to everyone out there.

### Day One:

Arriving at the event, it all looked good. It was a beautiful sunny day, great weather for orienteering. There was no issue with parking, I had actually walked to assembly which was conveniently situated on the couch in the living room, with the start adjacent. No porta potties here: a choice of three flushing toilets. As I like an early start, I thought I was going to be one of the first starters but didn't take into account that there were competitors from New Zealand and China who had started hours ago. All set for four days of fierce competition, starting with a day dedicated to sprints.

First event was the Route Choice Game (routechoicegame.com) which was 20 different route choices where we had to choose the shortest route around sprint-style map extracts in as quick a time as possible (an example here, which also basically says that I am brilliant, in Finnish). Off to a flying start of 38<sup>th</sup> place out of 431 finishers. I suspect that I have peaked too soon.



Off to the second event: Sprint Course Routechoice. The warm-up given was a fiendishly difficult map of Venice (left) so I was not optimistic. For this we used a website called Running Wild. You get a map with a course on it and you have to choose the fastest legal route between controls. In the example map, the blue line is where I have started drawing my route and the little green PacMan follows you around. I completely forgot that I was supposed to be choosing the shortest route and chose what I thought was the best route (fewer corners, nice straight streets, etc). Oops, but I suspect I wasn't the only one who did the same. Only 150<sup>th</sup> here out of 437.

Both of the events so far had been on free-to-use websites but each day was to have a final optional stage on Catching Features, which requires a subscription. We had all been given a discount code for Catching Features, so I had already signed up.

Catching Features is a computer simulated orienteering game which has a number of built-in courses and different areas and has the facility to create courses to use for competitions.

Today used the map and courses from JK 2016 at Swansea University. On flat and downhill sections you move incredibly quickly so it is very easy to overshoot and relocating is beyond



difficult. We had a choice of two courses: long and difficult or shorter and easier. I managed to complete the long and difficult about mid-field (yay me).

And so the end of day 1. Final position for the day was 61 out of 410 in the adult category. If these had been real events, I would have had some great ranking points. Time for sleep to rest up for day 2.

## **Day Two:**

Day two was another sunny day for the middle distance events. First event was a Control Description Game, using Simon Errington's Maprunner website. This had three parts: identify a text description for a given symbol, identify the symbol for a text description, and match text and symbols. I sailed through the first two parts with perfect scores, then in the third part I mixed up a pit and gully (dyslexia caused by speed) and then face-planted into a virtual ditch, mixing up the ditch and small gully symbols, again trying to be too fast. Good result though: 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 415.

Event 2 was Photo Memory orienteering at which I was totally rubbish. My excuse is that the photo files were large, so in the time that it took to download four photos, I had already forgotten the map. However, to use the phrase often heard last year in the SMOC tent at the Scottish 6 Days: I wasn't last! But it was 375<sup>th</sup> place, so pretty close to last.

The third event was an orienteering quiz, answering questions about orienteering as fast as possible. Using the Internet during the quiz was allowed but that took time, so was it better to guess fast or look for the correct answers? Middle of the pack in 195<sup>th</sup> place, with two wrong, so it looks like it was better to spend the time to get the correct answers.

Last event for the day was the optional Catching Features race on a JK 2015 Middle map. After playing the game, I would say that there are two choices on how to navigate in Catching Features: traditional style orienteering, or running on a bearing so that your avatar runs straight over cliffs, through bushes and across lakes. There were three options and I started the long race but had to abandon it when I got my foot stuck in a rock after I had run straight over a cliff and couldn't get my avatar free (slight glitch in the Matrix). It seems there could be a flaw in the tactic of running straight on a bearing, right over everything. I then managed to finish the shorter difficult race quite easily and so was spared the ignominy of having to do the short, easy race or being a DNF. I was 4<sup>th</sup> on my course and 186<sup>th</sup> overall as 182 managed to finish the long course.

Overall, I am now 94<sup>th</sup> of 390 who have completed all the stages so far.

### **Day Three:**

Really tired now on the third day of competition after seven events! Some of the events have been taking a lot of brain power. This does not bode well for the Long Distance day.

First event today: Spot the Difference. There are 12 different pairs of maps, one the original and the other which has some differences. Some are quite easy to spot the change but others have so much detail that it is impossible and it seems like a lot of people end up guessing the last two maps. Finished in the middle of the pack.

There are only two mandatory events today, and the second is an urban event: Streetview orienteering. The map is of a sprint urban event in Chester and at each control we had to go into Google Streetview and answer a question like a telephone number that can be seen, or fill in the missing word from a sign. The first question was actually at the start, which foxed a few people as they had headed straight to the first control, and it did sometimes take more than one "drop in" to Streetview to get the right angle. This caused some controversy as one shop had three different names from Streetview pictures taken at different times! I found this was one of the easier events and it was very enjoyable.

Finally, there was another optional Catching Features round from JK 2016 at Kilnsey. After getting stuck in a rock yesterday, I was a bit reluctant to do a longer course, especially as people were reporting that it was taking them over an hour in real-time to complete the course. What if I got  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way round and then got stuck again? I decided to do the short course seeing as this event was optional and I managed to get round really quickly.

At the end of day three, I am lying about the same as at the end of day 2: 95<sup>th</sup>.

### **Day Four:**

Onto the last day and a brand-new challenge for me: Trail-O. As I have never done a Trail-O event before, I spent a lot of time going through the practice rounds twice,



really studying the solution on my second try. This seems to have paid off because I make no mistakes during the actual event, although I was not fast. But previous events have shown me that it is better to be a bit slower and make no mistakes. This was my best event of the whole weekend, finishing 12!

The final event of the day for most of us was another Catching Features round. This was on Swedish-type terrain with an interesting maze element. We would do two controls in the maze, go out for a loop in the forest, back to the maze, and out into the forest again. This was the best terrain of all the Catching Features stages and I managed to get round without any issues.

For most, that was now the end of the weekend and my final placing was a respectable 103 out of 346. For the top 12 overall, there was a final Catching Features stage which was streamed live which was a fun (and exciting) way to end the competition.

There is already a second weekend planned for 24 – 26 April which will be a sprint weekend. Two-time World Sprint Champion Emil Wingstedt and World Champs 2022 planner Graeme Ackland will each plan a stage.

And that yeti...

