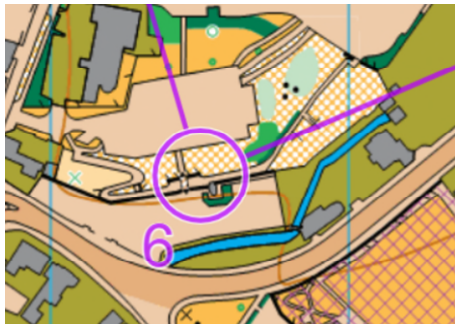


November Classic 2025

Ian Byrne

Many of the “big” orienteering events are considerably to the North of Milton Keynes, but there is one national event close to the south coast that regularly attracts a good turnout of SMOC members – the November Classic. This year it was held in, ahem, mid-October, which meant the weather was still relatively mild, but gave the added benefit (?) of there being more leaves on trees.

Like many events it runs on both days of the weekend, with the main event on the Sunday in the New Forest organised by Southampton Orienteering Club (SOC), preceded by a Saturday urban run by a neighbouring club – this year it was Southdown’s turn to run the urban in Chichester, a location last used for the Classic Weekend in 2019. The assembly was in a school sports hall with good facilities, and ample parking, but almost 20 minutes’ walk from the start through the competition area. Five SMOCies ran in Chichester on courses 3 to 5. Continuing a recent trend, the course 3 map was double side A3 at 1:4,000 covering most of the area inside the inner ring road.



The first four controls were straightforward, including a long dogleg across the railway, but control 6 was a classic urban control at two levels. Located on the south side of a railing, above a small passage through the city walls originally built by the Romans, it was easy to run past at the lower level as I, like most people, approached from the South. At least there was a well-worn track up the slope.

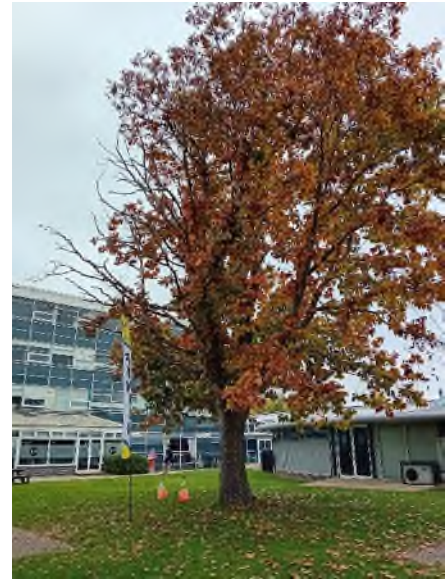
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The next decision was whether to follow the wider pedestrianised roads or the narrower passages through the city centre. Normally extra width is good, and my route allowed a good view of the Chichester market cross, but by midday, when I was running, Saturday shoppers were out in force, making it the wrong choice. In 2019, in torrential rain, I had failed to spot an uncrossable hedge separating a street of 1920s houses from a passageway. Driving down, I could visualise exactly where it had been on the map. This time, the leg 12 to 13 offered two slightly tricky routes.

I chose what I thought would be marginally the better – only to discover that it would require me to cross that uncrossable hedge! An alternative route was easily seen, but added 150m. All courses ended up with a sprint-like section around the edge of the school buildings, before the finish under a large tree. Afterwards, comparing notes with Dorien, he was pleased to have beaten me by one minute (and one second) – and the entire difference was accounted for by that annoying hedge.

On course 5, Rosie came in first on the ladies Hypervet – (congratulations!), though Ann also had a good run on Ultravet which used the same course, coming in 5 minutes ahead of Rosie.



Sunday brought a different challenge, the woods and “plains” of the Western New Forest, starting from the village of Burley. Parking was in a field, visited by a small drove of pigs, possibly picketing Wilf’s famous food van to demand he only serves veggie chilli in future, not bacon baps.

The November Classic itself attracted nine SMOC members. Lawrence posted a strong result, and on course 5 Siobhan

demonstrated that she can give the older men a run for their money. Mike was quite despondent at the end, saying he’d had a terrible run, which must have been a premonition that I would beat him (an exceptionally rare event) – albeit by just three seconds. Burley West has fewer enclosures (plantations) than many parts of the New Forest, allowing for navigation through open forests – although being October, some areas still had significant undergrowth. The plains were often high with bracken, or covered by clumps of gorse – my right leg still looks like a pin cushion spotted with blood. This encouraged me to stay on the paths, though the longer legged men took straighter lines between controls. Streams were generally jumpable, and ditches were dry, so there was no New Forest mud to scrape of my shoes at the end. Several of us found the final controls remarkably tricky.



Most of us were satisfied with our runs, and John almost caught Rosie. Because the event area was some distance from the assembly, I was unable to take photos of the actual forest before returning to Milton Keynes. If you have never done a large national event, the November Classic is a good one with which to start, as it is not overwhelming in scale and has fewer hills to climb than many of the more Northerly events.