

LEADING THE WAY – WCOC CLUB DEVELOPMENT

Report by Roger Jackson



West Cumberland Orienteering Club (WCOC) is on the western fringe of the Lake District and really is quite isolated. We have been aware from the very early years that we were going to have to provide our own entertainment if we were to have a successful and active club. Geographical location forced us to come to that conclusion, but actually it is a good motivation for all clubs. Create your own activities and events and you will satisfy your membership!

So, in the mid eighties we decided we would have a regular Thursday evening event, with just a couple of courses, and very straightforward organisation that would involve one person per event. This has evolved into a year round set of events, involving night, summer evening, fell races and short/park sprints. With no break you move from one series to the next.

The philosophy of the night series is that, with eighteen events, if you plan one, then you get another seventeen for your efforts. A great deal! The list of venues to be used for the series is handed around the 'regulars' and it is soon complete, with everyone choosing where to plan.

All events are electronic (SI), and have been since 1999. Many innovations in the equipment has meant things are lighter and easier to deploy at the event. Planners now use OCAD10CS to prepare their courses, sending the files for printing to the club printer, thus speeding up the process considerably. Post event the download unit is read into the event software and the results sent for publication on the web and the newspapers.

The summer series has another eighteen events, and here is the opportunity for new planners to have a go, with usually two or three new people having a go each year. The events are low key and informal, so it is the perfect opportunity to learn the skills involved. Many new planners have already competed in a summer series so are quite familiar with the system.

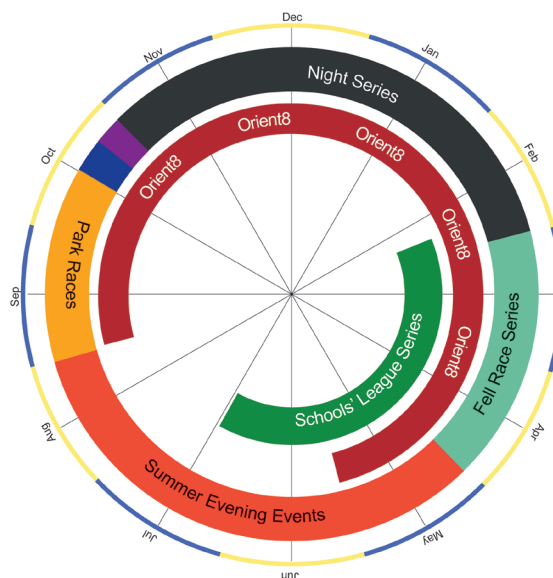
The annual set of fifty events is not really a great burden on the club. They are kept simple and informal, with various bits of support provided to remove the onerous tasks. Our Safety Officer provides a risk assessment for each event and the map printing and results production is done centrally.

The large number of events needs a large number of areas to use. We probably have more than sixty different maps, but most of those are small and not very technical. But that doesn't matter, because somewhere like Allonby (opposite), will support a sprint race, and be used, maybe, every other year. GoogleEarth aerial photographs have also made the production of these maps relatively easy and we manage to bring a couple of new areas into use each year.

Expenses from the organisers are minimal, and the entry fees are low (£2/£1), so the major expense usually ends up as the British Orienteering levy! A surplus of about £2000 is usually realised, which then helps to fund the bus to go to the CompassSport Cup! An active club will always end up with their accounts in the black.

The last couple of years has seen the development of the Orient8 fitness and skills sessions, based at a local school sports hall on a Tuesday evening. These have proved very popular and have given new members the opportunity to learn many skills, and to enjoy the very social and 'fun' atmosphere. The club has a dozen coaches, and these sessions allow them to develop their skills and to become licensed. An hour's worth of circuits is followed by a thirty minute session working on a specific 'O' skill in small groups.

The main source of our new membership has definitely been through the school's initiative, which was started back in 1998. With 'Awards for All' grants, every school ground in West Cumbria was mapped. About 70% of them are used regularly by teachers with their own pupils, with involvement depending on one or more members of staff. The annual school league involves about thirty primary schools attending eight events and then a final. Secondary schools have their own set of four events and then the final. In total about five hundred pupils take part each year, with about 200 competing at each primary event.



The events are always electronic, and are quite straightforward to stage, just involving three parallel White/Yellow courses, around large school grounds or easy parkland or woods. A team of five/six adults are involved, usually for a few hours.

The five hundred competitors that compete in the league are a vast resource for the club. Each year the top competitors are identified and personally invited to attend the summer series and the park races, both of which have novice/easy courses. They are also invited along to the Orient8 sessions which start in September. This route has seen a significant



WCOC competitors line up at the start of the Carlisle Urban Race



Prizewinners display their collection of trophies. L-R Katrina Hemingway, Charlotte Watson, Helen Winskill, Sam Pagett and Alice Rea

and steady influx of new members into the club and parents use the opportunity to get involved as well.

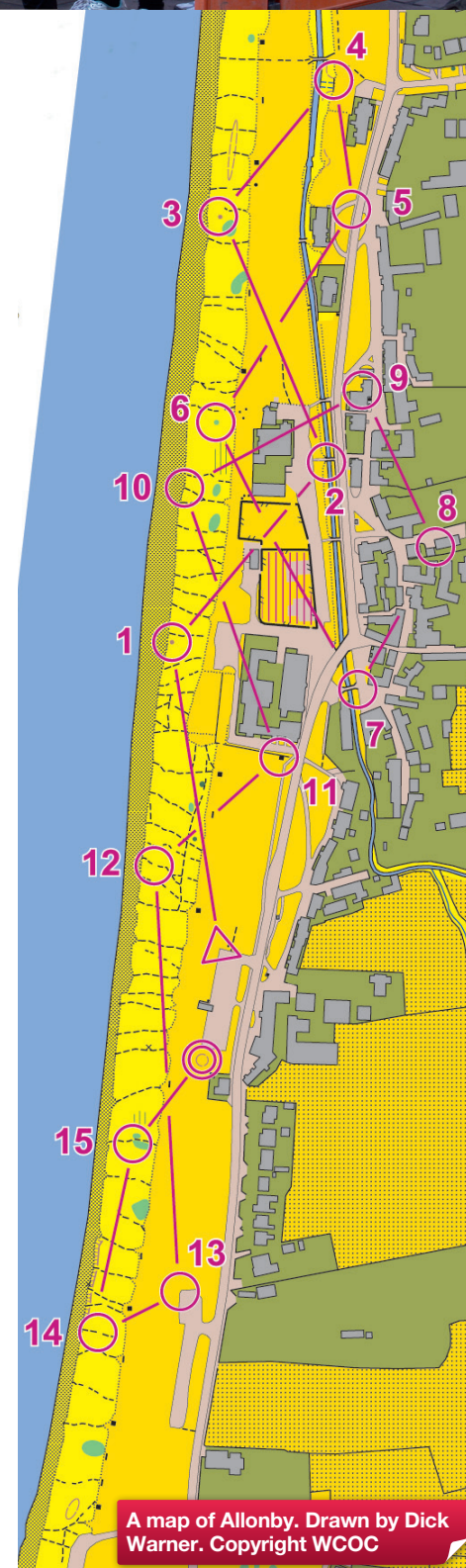
We also co-operate with the local clubs in Cumbria, Lakeland, BorderLiners, Barro and Warrior to run a series of 'District' colour coded events, called the Cumbrian Galoppen. This has been going for seventeen years and is very popular, providing the next level of competition for our new and existing membership.

The region are currently developing a Northwest Regional League of quality 'Regional' events, and these will provide a third level of competition for the membership. This structured system allows for development, particularly for the juniors, so that ultimately they will compete against the best in the country.

It is no accident that the club has a growing and very strong junior squad. It was recognised back in the mid 1990s that our club was hemorrhaging membership. So the school's initiative was started. It has been a large effort by a small team, but the results are there to see. We have a strong structure within the club, so the development can be sustained.

Clubmark was a very strong guide in binding the 'system', allowing the committee to focus on getting everything right. We have a strong committed group of people running the club and it is very much a team effort. Clubmark has allowed us to set goals which the team of volunteers just get on with. We are not at all short of people prepared to volunteer, we just need to develop an effective way of capturing that energy when and where it is needed.

WCOC have a successful development model, but it isn't the only one. Other clubs certainly have their own, some of which are extremely successful. But has your club?



A map of Allonby. Drawn by Dick Warner. Copyright WCOC



Some of the club night regulars celebrate the 100th club night

Southdowns' celebrate their 100th club night

Report by Neil Crickmore and Rob Lines // Photos by Alison Hooper and Robert Lines

On the 23rd November Southdowns Orienteers (SO) celebrated their 100th club night activity at their weekly meeting venue of Blatchington Mill School in Hove. Although SO is already a big club, there is a noticeable lack of members from the largest conurbation in the club's catchment area – the City of Brighton & Hove. In an attempt to address this, SO applied to become one of British Orienteering's first participation clubs. With advice from Steve Vernon and some financial support from British Orienteering, SEOA and the club itself, a venue was booked, publicity materials produced and on the 9th September 2008 the club night kicked off with a street score event on a specially prepared map centred on the school grounds.

So it was then that just over two years later the 100th club night was held and the celebrations were joined by British Orienteering employees Richard Barrett and Christine Robinson. To get the evening underway the participants were split into teams of 7 who raced each other in a 100 control score event. Each control was simply a plastic clothes peg but unlike in more traditional orienteering events, competitors were told to collect in each control as they found it. The team that had collected in the most controls won.

The second activity involved a ten-person relay race with laps of approximately 100 metres around the school gym. The map was drawn to full ISOM specification – albeit at a scale of 1:150 – but with the features being represented by normal school furniture. Thus benches became earth walls, crash mats were ponds, buckets masqueraded as pits and a trophy made an excellent statue. Finally the evening was rounded off by cake and drinks. The previous 99 club nights had seen a wide range of activities dreamt up by the club captain and other club members,

many of these are described in a series of articles that can be viewed on the Development section of the British Orienteering website.

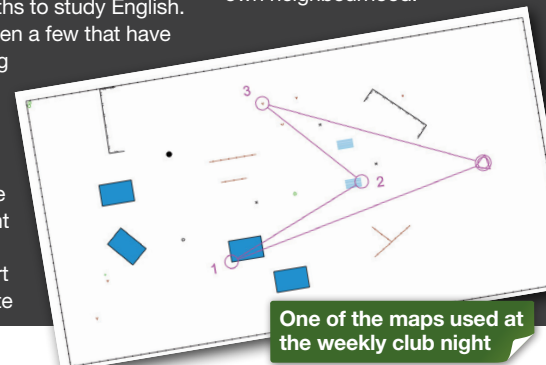
Most weeks are dominated by some form of physical activity; these usually involve map and terrain interpretation exercises although a staple activity has become a 20 minute circuit session followed by a round-robin team competition of basketball, indoor hockey, ultimate Frisbee etc. At the outset, the idea was to attract adults who were already interested in running but wanted to try something different in an informal manner. To that end it was decided to brand the club night as Southdowns Adventure Running Club (SARC) and both the dedicated website and publicity material concentrated on this concept of adventure running as opposed to just orienteering. Although most activities involved maps, they were designed to more resemble hashes or adventure races than traditional orienteering.

So has the weekly club night achieved the ultimate objective of increasing participation within the Brighton and Hove area? If success were to be gauged by a large increase in new club members then the answer is probably no, the regular Saturday morning park and forest events remain much better in attracting new orienteers. Club night has transiently attracted quite a few new participants who turn up for a few months and then disappear quietly. Included in this group are foreign students who have orienteered at home and are here for a few months to study English. There have been a few that have caught the bug and have moved onto mainstream orienteering and even gone on to represent the club at CompassSport Cup and Yvette

Coaching forms a big part of the club night

Baker Trophy events, but not that many. However club night has proved to be successful in a number of other less tangible ways. A great camaraderie has built up between the regular members and these regulars have ended up becoming much more involved in the running of other club activities such as the Brighton City Race, the Devil's Dyke Trail Challenge, the Sussex Sprint Series and the Night League.

Many new skills have been acquired and passed on, in particular the use of OCAD to draw street and school maps and even to redraw existing maps in a manner inspired by Picasso's cubism period or in the style of Harry Beck's London Underground map. The Club night has allowed the inexperienced to plan very basic courses and the experienced to try something different and has also allowed coaches to try out new exercises. Whilst the initial objective was to attract adults there has actually been a healthy increase in junior attendance driven to no small extent, it seems, by the attraction of hurling various shaped balls around the school hall prior to the more formal activities starting. Being based at the same venue and easily reached by public transport, has certainly proved attractive to some local participants although a number of "away days" have been held to allow some of the regulars to organise specific activities in their own neighbourhood.



One of the maps used at the weekly club night