

Sandwell Valley Country Park Orienteering Event June 19 2016

Organiser's Report.

A week or two before the event I did wonder if we would have sufficient volunteers to cover all bases as many club members were away on holiday or couldn't attend. Then there were a few additional surprises such as the upgrading of the status of the event to make it part of the West Midlands League Competition and the need to find a controller from a different club. (At the eleventh hour, In spite of many other commitments, Richard Lewis of Wrekin helped us out – Thanks Richard!) Then heavy rain arrived mid-week with flash flooding in Birmingham and Smethwick, closing schools and part of a local hospital.....

Happily, however, June 19 arrived with a glimmer of sunshine and a handful of HOC volunteers who, as well as doing the jobs to which they had been assigned actually volunteered to do other tasks because they could see they still had to be done. Thanks to them the event ran smoothly and almost without a hitch.

Unfortunately the labelled key we had been given for the disabled toilet would not open the door but happily, one of our long-standing members, Carole Sparke, had her own key which facilitates access to all disabled 'loos' in parks and public places so this potential problem was overcome.

Other small 'blips' – some people who parked at the far end of the car park followed streamers which led to the Finish rather than the Start. Thanks to Julia Wilkinson who brought this to my notice, I was able to tie an extra 'To the Start' notice to an available tree near the loo to help anyone else who might otherwise have gone in the wrong direction. Alison Yeates helped avert another crisis when the feather flag pole dropped from its prominent position at the entrance to the Car Park and threatened to scratch a passing car. Happily Andy Hemsted leaped to the rescue so any damage was avoided. To all these people I give grateful thanks.

Several participants told me how much they had enjoyed their courses and of course, we have Peter Langmaid to thank for all the time and thought he gave to course planning. Ashley Ford waxed lyrical about romping through the wild lupins, a pleasant change from nettles and blackberries (though I have to admit

there were a few of those – apologies to Alex Mitchell who was hindered by these) and Beryl Pay was delighted that she finished her course since she told us ‘it is a while since I did 3.5 km’. (Well done, Beryl!) The last finisher also was thrilled to have finished the green course, since he and his family were only introduced to orienteering last week at Arrow Valley Country Park. He now wants to have a go on his own to see how successful he can be without spending time encouraging his family to keep up. (I feel that they too need a ‘pat on the back’ for finishing a course of that level.)

So thanks to all participants for their support and encouragement. It was great to see so many people happy with their orienteering. You made my job so easy I might even offer to organise another event (once I’ve recovered my breath!)

Penny Hemsted

Planner’s comments

Phew! When I volunteered to plan this event it was merely a Level D. Then it got promoted to C, then promoted again to WML. Meanwhile, as HOC Equipment Officer the job of coordinating SI kit for the British Long and Relay Championships took up much of my spare time, so planning only really started once BOC was over. Luckily the venue is fairly close to home and usually has ice-cream vans on site to provide a reward for each visit. I was really impressed by the flora on the east side of the park, in particular the wildflower meadow south of the start.

The layout of the park, with the motorway cutting through and the fields to the north-west, limits the options for planning. With a base at the Swan Pool car park, it was basically either clockwise or anticlockwise round the Pool and on from there.

I picked the start location as it was sheltered and safely out of the way of cyclists and horse riders. The ground was firm and dry before Thursday night’s torrential rain. But the sooner you get your feet wet the less you worry about avoiding the puddles later on!

The woods to the north of the finish provide the only remotely technical terrain in the area and were too good not to use for the more technically difficult courses, despite the mountain bike tracks and the difficulty mapping them (I understand that showing them OOB is a condition of the landowner). Mapper Alison was there and we discussed some possible alternative representations which might make things clearer.

Finally, thanks to Andy H and Richard for stepping in at such short notice to control. Also to Alison, Barbara, Marian, Andy W, Ian + newbie (didn’t get the name) and Adrian for collecting controls.

Peter Langmaid