

Shire Oak WEE 5th Jan 2012

This is the 5th of the Walsall series of maps to be properly used for Orienteering. All the areas are bit small and partly urban but surprisingly tricky.

The area was quarried for sand and gravel from the early 1930's and later for tank training. It finally closed as a quarry in 1978 and in 1992 the owners, presumably in exchange for permission to build on part of the site, carried out landscape improvements and gave the site to Walsall council.

Under a Borough wide policy invasive birch is being removed to open up the heath-land. I was surprised to find 3 of the Countryside Services guys chain sawing and chipping all day on the day of the event. Control 21 which was in a medium green wood the day before was suddenly in the rough open!

Although I have set up 37 permanent controls, 24 of which are on path junctions, which are ideal for juniors and novices, I used an extra 6 controls to make it tougher for the night O fraternity!

The course was very convoluted, to get a decent distance and to avoid 2nd maps. The area is however technically tricky and the average leg length of 175m I think required to keep fully in contact with the map.

Although the 2008 Peel map was pretty good, I have spent quite a bit of time trying to improve the depiction of the contour features and green screens, but it's still a bit work in progress. The permanent courses are still not fully available as I was trying to finalise the map, but felling may continue for some time!

There was a problem with the start SI not being synchronised properly with the rest so the first leg and the whole course actually took the competitors the same 2-3 minutes longer. As I tend to specialise in semi-urban events I again used the old SI units which wouldn't matter if we had stolen, but I haven't lost one yet! 111 however may well take early retirement!

My thanks to Barry H for providing the tent, which had to be lashed to his car to avoid it blowing down, Peter for his SI/computer expertise and John E, Chris M, Dave W and Ian G for control collecting.

Barry McGowan