

Hayhead and the Dingle WEE 8.12.16

I felt I had rather picked the wrong date for the event, mid week between a major HOC club event and the club champs.

Publicity hadn't gone too well and asking around at the previous weeks NSE I had only 2 persons likely to turn up.

The weather was also well below freezing and I felt loathe to spent hours putting controls out, and possibly collecting them in, for a couple of competitors.

However, by Monday morning before the event likely entrants had risen to 13 and the weather forecast sounded quite pleasant so I decided to go ahead.

I've never been too certain how the map came about.

It was drawn by Colin in 2006 presumably under a contract with the Walsall Sports and Leisure services. It included the remains of the original 30's grass runway airport together with surrounding woodland.

I believe in 2006 the area already had a bit of a reputation for men, and all the minor paths near the car park had to be shown as 'small path, not too be used'. Also I think the local ranger was concerned about branches falling on competitors and didn't want people in the mature woods.

The resultant permanent course was very dull being 15 controls all on the edge of the open areas.

When I decided to update and extend the area 3 years ago as I asked the manager of the on site Outdoor Activity Centre if they were interested in an update. He said not, that they did occasionally take a group orienteering to Sutton Park but did not use their map.

Over the last few years many hundreds of trees had be planted, many by me as a (sadly now abolished) Conservation volunteer.

I thought it was a suitable area for a night event, previously being used for a SEE.

Mapping had always been a problem. I had bought a 1:10000 OS map 30years ago which included my house and Walsall town centre for a street event, but it only covered the Western side of the Dingle limestone workings, and none at all of the Cuckoo's Nook wood.

The tree cover is very thick so Google gave limited help on the path network.

It was interesting to see Mike Baggott's GPS track from the night which showed that the boundary path in Cuckoo's Nook actually deviated from near the Western edge of thick vegetation by up to 50m and a couple of other areas are not quite right.

I will adjust for these before the next use of the area.

Alison also pointed out that the map was printed at 1:7500 whereas I had left the map symbols at 1:5000, which had made clarity particularly difficult for her, and she has advised me how to correct this.

When I re-arrived at 4.45pm to set up assembly I was surprised at the number of cars already in the car park, but most left after I set up the lighting, . There were

quite a number of cars during the evening who cruised round the car park and drove off.

When I sitting at the start I was puzzled by a strong light for a few minutes going vertically to the sky from a few fields away outside the mapped area. I did wonder if it was a laser beam pointed towards the Birmingham International flight path which is roughly overhead at this point.

About 20 minutes later a police helicopter came and circled overhead around me before flying back off in the same direction. I was a bit of a sitting duck sitting in the boot of my car, numberplate pointing skyward and the freshly charged HOC event light pointing along the ground. The police were probably also puzzled by various light moving through the woods.

I think most competitors enjoyed themselves and found it quite tricky.

It was quite a tight battle between Dave Williams and Ben Rauffet, with Andy Hemsted not far behind, pre injury.

Only 4 leading competitors visited what is really known as the Airport.

I perhaps shouldn't have used control site 18 which was one of the 'do not use' small footpaths fairly close to the car park.

I felt it better to gripple all controls, including the finish on the edge of the car park.. What I had thought at 18 was a heavy branch proved not be so I did attach it a bit too far into the bushes, not very visible. Sorry.

When I have been renewing plaques for the beacon way, nature trail and geology trail, I'm sure somebody was almost following me round levering them off.

Thanks to control collectors Kerstin, John Leeson, Andy Hemsted and particularly Dave Williams who collected 8 controls in the far area for whom we were getting concerned.

Barry McGowan