

Junior World Orienteering Champs - Emily Gibbins W20 AIRE

In my final year as a W20, I finally managed to secure selection for Junior World Orienteering Champs (JWOC) - following two consecutive years as a reserve and earning my first GB vest at the Junior European Championships in October last year.

JWOC - this year held in the Trentino region of Italy - consists of five races: three individual and two team relay events. The first two are sprint format, followed by three races in the forest.

I joined the team a few days before the official competition began in order to squeeze in some training. We visited several forests in the region with similar terrain to what we'd be racing in the following week. The first day of training didn't go quite to plan - while running between two controls, I managed to roll my ankle twice! Thankfully, a miraculous recovery followed, and my ankle was ready to race by the start of the competition.

Bring on the competition!

The week kicked off with my favourite discipline: the sprint events. First up was the mixed sprint relay, which began at 3:30 p.m. peak heat - during an Italian heatwave. Standing on the start line as the first leg runner was toasty, to say the least. Running in the second of three British teams, I was happy to come back as the first Brit in 13th place, handing over to my second-leg teammate out of more than 80 teams.

The course was split roughly 60/40 between an intricate Italian town (Levico Terme) and a nearby park. The town section was technical, while the park was particularly gruelling, with minimal shade and the full force of the afternoon sun. It was tough going, and many athletes were visibly struggling by the final controls.

The following day was the individual sprint in a previously unmapped town called Cembra. Its centre was even more complex than Levico Terme - the site of the mixed sprint relay the day before. Luckily, my start time was in the morning, so the temperature was a more manageable low 30s (compared to the mid-30s the day before). The town was filled with small streets, underpasses, and alleyways - some so dark I couldn't read the control numbers! Barriers had also been added across main streets to encourage use of the narrower routes. I made a few small route choice errors but was very happy to finish 37th out of over 160 competitors. A great day for GB overall as well, with James Hammond finishing 4th in the boys' competition and a couple of other top 20s !

On to the forest...

Next came the long-distance race: a brutal 8.0 km course with 400 m of elevation. Hot, hilly, and highly technical - it was safe to say I was absolutely exhausted by the finish. The terrain, belonging to the local club's renowned area, contained over 6,000 pits remaining from historic silver mining. Accurate bearings and solid attack points were essential to avoid what was dubbed "pit bingo" while trying to locate controls in densely pitted terrain.

After a much-needed rest day, we moved on to the middle-distance race in Laghestèl forest, just outside our base in Baselga di Pinè. Thankfully, this area had far fewer pits than the long-distance forest and offered fast, runnable terrain. With a winning time expected around 25 minutes for 3.7 km, it was a physically demanding course that really suited my running background - I thoroughly enjoyed it.

The final day brought the forest relay, held in the same forest as the middle. I was handed over to in 22nd and managed to maintain our team's position through to the finish, despite a slightly stressful sprint finish (which I'm proud to say I won!).

"All in all, it was a great week - also filled with plenty of pizza, pasta, ice cream, and lake swimming. Onwards to life as a senior!"

On the back of Emily's performance at JWOC and with my encouragement to go for senior selection she entered the Sprint Scotland races in August and has her first selection to the British senior team already before she reaches 21! She will represent GB in sprint races at the European Orienteering Championships in Belgium in September. Well done Emily!

Lindsey King