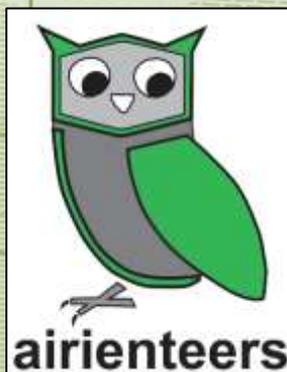




# Aire Affairs



January 2020



**Airienteers**

Orienteering in Airedale and Wharfedale

[www.aire.org.uk](http://www.aire.org.uk)



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**AIRE AFFAIRS** is the Club’s official magazine and is available on our website [www.aire.org.uk](http://www.aire.org.uk) and via e-mail/paper format to all members and interested parties.

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The cover photo shows Club Junior Coach Lindsey King with enthusiastic AIRE juniors and parents on a recent training day in Middleton Woods.



## Edit O – Wendy Carlyle

Happy New Year Everyone! Tony and I have spent a considerable portion of the last three wonderful months in the US with Becky, Rob and our grandchild Euan, born 27<sup>th</sup> September in Boston! Because of this, several things have been pushed on to the back boiler, including Aire Affairs, so it's an extra special thank you to those folks who have sent me articles for this issue, otherwise it would have been a very thin affair!



Apart from supporting the JIRCs back in September my only orienteering has been the Shipley Glen event when I took two of my Harden Hobbler pals around the orange course, so it's no wonder I feel adrift. We are booked in to the JK and British this year so the next issue will hopefully be a bumper one before we head back to the US again. We'll be planting more trees to offset our carbon footprints!

More good grandparent news! Many congratulations to Rose Burden and Colm Golden (and to grandparents Helen and Chris) on the birth of Noah, on 28<sup>th</sup> December, in Berlin. Woo hoo!

### AA Archives

Continuing the theme of babies, in the September 1994 issue we welcomed Beth Woodley to the world! A small but enthusiastic contingent of Airienteers attend the Scottish Six Days in Speyside and Airienteer families took over a sizeable portion of Grizedale Forest Campsite for the Lakes 5-Days. Jeff Mason reported that GB were to host the World Orienteering Championships in 1999 and put out a plea for older juniors to come forward to run the night legs at the Peter Palmer's event in Birmingham.

The Club held a training event based at Wastwater Youth Hostel. Ruth and Joyce told us all how not to win the Capricorn (apparently spending a long evening in the pub and leaving the entry form in the vicinity of the dog are to be recommended! Ed.) Tom Shelley described his first JIRCs at which YHOA swept the board and he finished in second place on the individual day. Tom Van Rossum reported on his orienteering summer: the Capricorn, Lakes 5-Days and the White Rose Weekend. As he was just eleven years old, he partnered with Dad Henk on the Trim course at the Capricorn and fell in a bog just 50 metres out! Tom secured first place at the White Rose at Levisham Moor, as did our new Mum Becky, both on 11A!



## Chair Affairs – David Williams

Happy New Year to all.

Firstly, I have to say I think 2019 is going to be a difficult year to beat for the club. The celebration of the 50th Anniversary, successful organisation of the British Champs Weekend and 42 other Local and Regional events as well as top performances giving AIRE 6 British Individual Champions and the Men's Relay Champions. It's going to be a tall order but isn't this what we love about sport, rising to the challenges, setting our personal goals and enjoying ourselves while doing it.



As I write this we are only a few days into the year and the club has already had two events blessed with good January weather and great attendances. The New Year's Day Score had the largest turnout for many years with 84 runs with circa 100 competitors and the Regional at Bramley and Hawksworth had 261 runs with well over 270 competitors the largest turnout for this early January event in eight years. That included 18 people, mostly adult novices, running the Red/Long Orange course and 15 juniors age 10 or under doing the White with another 17 on Yellow. Together they represented one in six of the competitors on the day.

We are continuing to see a strong inflow of new members; 13 new seniors and 7 new juniors recently. So a warm welcome if you are one of those new members. The Club has a number of coaches who are more than happy to be contacted to help new (and indeed existing) members learn about the sport and improve. For Seniors, David Alcock and for Juniors, Lindsey King are the first points of contact and their details are on the Contacts Page on the website.

We are looking to maintain our full programme of events this year with over 40 Local and regional events. As ever we need as wide a range of members as possible to volunteer to take on roles. One of the roles we always find hard to fill is that of Event Organiser, especially for Regional level events. I think part of the issue is a lot of people who may think about taking it on aren't sure exactly what's entailed /required. So to demystify the role and give people the confidence to take it on we are putting on an Organisers Course on 9<sup>th</sup> March at Adel Memorial Club where one of our regular Organisers Liz Davies will give a guide to what's involved.

The club is lucky to have members who can give courses leading to qualifications. One of the other roles needed at any Regional or larger event is First Aider and we will be announcing an orienteering focused course on this to be run by Will Patterson shortly.



One area we are definitely going to see improvement on in 2020 is Club identity. Jack Cooper received orders for 26 Jackets and 20 tops. The club are also providing O tops to five of our Junior members who have either become members of or have been invited to attend YHOA junior squad. If you didn't get your order in and become a bit jealous of your well turned out clubmates let Jack know as we will be able to put in smaller follow up orders.



clubmates let Jack know as we will be able to put in smaller follow up orders.

Which reminds me I am still bringing to events the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary buffs if you haven't claimed yours yet please do and that includes our new members.

(Alice and Sarah modelling their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Buffs. Ed.)

## Junior Coaching – Lindsey King

Mud and rain didn't stop seven juniors and parents having fun orienteering in Middleton Woods Ilkley in November! In the coaching session we practised planning routes from one control to another, matching map symbols to names and finished with the popular peg relay race and biscuits.

The following week another fifteen juniors came in much better weather to try some yellow and orange butterfly mini courses. Again the focus was on planning how to get from one control to another and how to find and use attack points. The session was valuable training for the British Schools Championships and the local events at Brimham Rocks and Shipley Glen.

We tried out the new Aire thumb compasses that we have purchased through a successful grant application from Leeds.

At the end we discovered that some juniors may still need to practise orienteering more speedily but all were experts at demolishing a tin of Rice Krispie cakes in two minutes!





## Results- well done AIRE juniors!

- Jake Powell M16 for coming 4<sup>th</sup> overall in the Aire Autumn Night League 2019
- Emily Gibbins 1<sup>st</sup> on Light Green at Bramley Fall
- Joseph Dawson 1st on orange at Shipley Glen and Bramley
- Megan Robinson for completing 2 orange courses by yourself at Shipley Glen (4<sup>th</sup>) and Bramley Fall and for achieving your Navigational Challenge - 3 stars.
- James Woodham for coming 3rd on Orange course at Shipley Glen and for achieving Racing Challenge Bronze Award - 3 stars
- Douglas Tiffany for completing green course at Shipley Glen
- Jack Beevers and Lucy Hayes for completing an orange course at Bramley
- Beth Broadest and Griffiths Family for completing the white course at Bramley Fall
- Charlie & Alfie Alcock for participating in white courses at Shipley Glen and Bramley Fall
- Edward Green and George and India Taylor for completing orange course at Bramley Fall
- Jake Powell, Emily Gibbins, Oliver & Lucy Hayes, Kate Parkinson, Gatenby family and Alcocks for getting up early on New Year's Day and running the score event on Ilkley Moor!

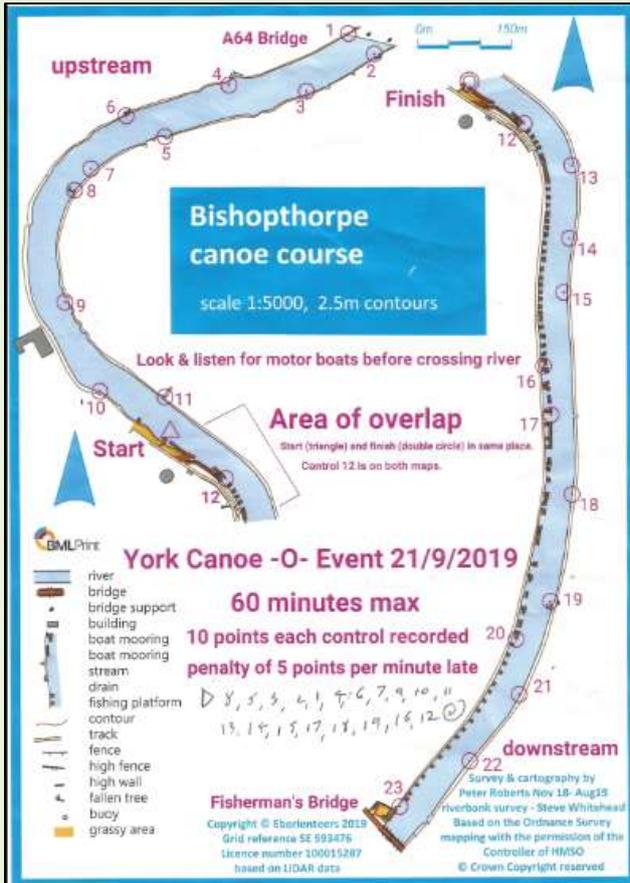
Apologies if I have missed anyone's names in results – Lindsey King - Coach



## Canoe O on the River Ouse at York – Margaret Parker

A beautiful day on the last Saturday in September saw this unusual O event on the River Ouse jointly organised by EBOR and York Canoe Club.

Assembly, start and launch spot were on the river bank just south of the Archbishop's Palace at Bishopthorpe. After an initial briefing explaining the arrangements some thirty kayaks, canoes and paddleboards launched and lined up ready for the klaxon to signal the mass start. It took the format of a 60 minute score event with 23 controls hung on features on the river



bank between the A64 bypass bridge and the old railway bridge (now the cycle track crossing) some 2km downstream at Naburn.

In an attempt to avoid bunching each boat was given a different first control to visit and after that most people seemed to pick a route up one bank and down the other, to avoid crossing the river itself too often.

It was a really good, fun event just making sure that map, control card and chinagraph pencil (to record the control sites visited) were firmly attached to the boat. After the presentation the onsite café was a useful stop for lunch and drinks.

The winner found all 23 controls in 38 minutes. We secured 19 controls in 52 minutes. Inevitably we now think we could have squeezed in a couple of controls without incurring time penalties.

It is hoped that this might become an annual event and continue to raise funds for a disabled sports charity.

The results show that there were 25 boats on the water and the event raised £120 for Humbledon Outdoor Activities Association in Sunderland.

The accompanying picture shows our boat and Christine Roberts (EBOR). It was World Wide Spin In Public Day so after dealing with registration she did just that!





## Planning a Regional Event: What's involved and thoughts on what makes the best event – Tim Patterson

The Aire Bramley and Hawksworth Regional event took place on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January. From a look back at the records, it was our best attended event for over seven years so a big thanks to all who came along. In this article I'm going to talk about what it took to plan the courses and the event layout and what I think helps make the best event -

**Area:** I started planning for the event back in September. I've planned around a dozen events of this size before, and always try to bring something new to the event for the competitors. As I live locally, I know Bramley very well – as indeed I'm sure a lot of other members do as it is an area we use regularly. My initial thoughts were it is a very small area to plan longer courses in, and were there any ways of extending it? I contacted Chris Burden about linking the near-by Hawksworth Woods area to the Bramley map, using the new Kirkstall Forge development to give a large competition area. In true fashion, Chris replied that it would be very difficult to create a new map in the timescales. He then replied again the next day saying there would also be difficulties getting permissions to use the extended area. Finally he replied again one day later saying permissions had been approved and attached a working copy of a new map he'd already created!

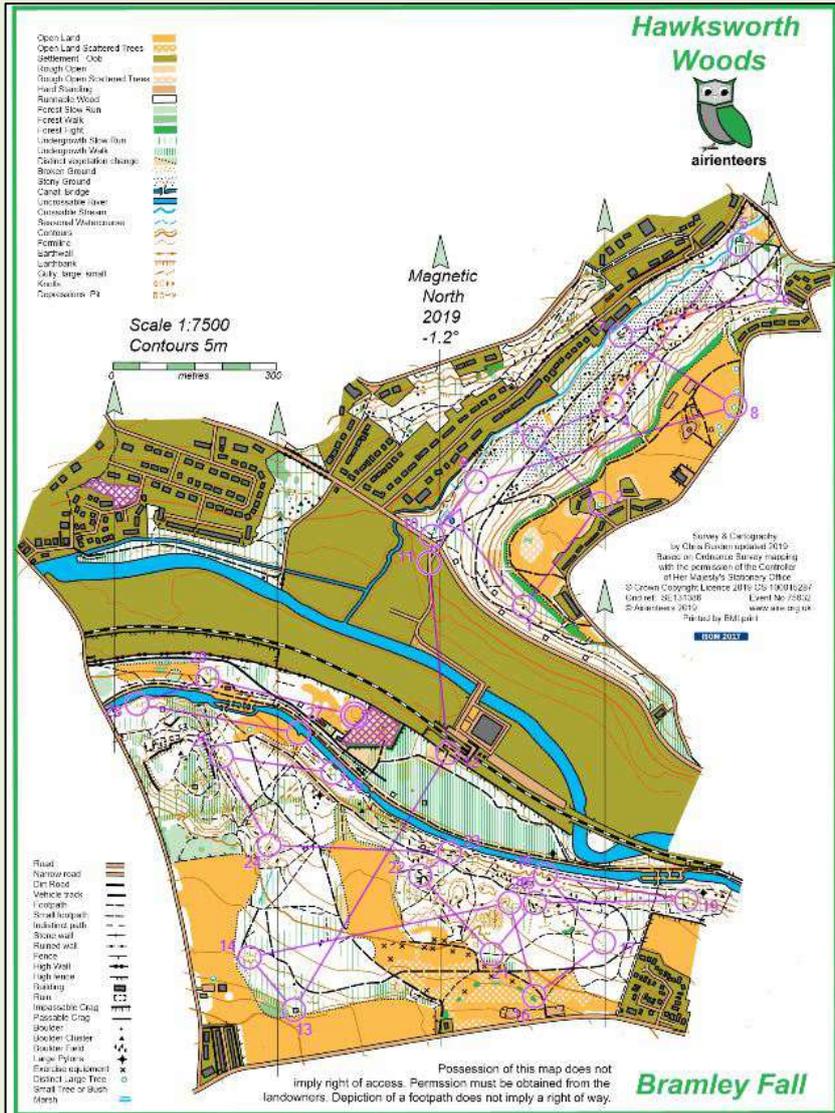
The new Kirkstall Forge Development gave the opportunity to use their car park, rather than parking along the access road to the scout hut, and also the option of putting registration next to the station. In the end the car parking was used – which I think improved everyone's experience of the event, but registration stayed in the Scout Hut as this had electric power and a roof in case it rained. Using the Scout Hut meant a walk was involved, but I'd be interested to know people's overall view on this, as one major advantage I found was it gave much more opportunity to bump into friends and other competitors along the way.

A final feature of the area was Butler's Café. In total, around 100 people used this during the morning for coffees and cakes, and from what I saw there were always several groups sat either catching up or discussing courses. When I go to events such as Park Runs, they always specify which café runners will be going to afterwards (given the Café culture is something the whole nation has taken to these days), so perhaps we should try and identify one for future events as well?

**Courses:** The event was colour coded, with White up to Brown, and including a Long Orange. I specifically focused on the Long Orange, as this is the course aimed at Adults who want to improve their map reading and navigation, and I expected (rightly as it turned out) that this event would attract a number of such competitors. My aim for the Long Orange was



to keep route choice to a minimum, to include plenty of long straight running legs, but to use a variety of control sites to keep it interesting and give the opportunity for learning. I had in mind that the ideal competitor would be someone used to running 5km but new to orienteering. The control sites were as varied as tree-stumps, boulders, depressions and knolls. The winning time was 33 minutes, with most people taking 40-50 minutes – too long for a junior but I would class as a good morning’s workout for an adult. The long term measure of success for this course will be how many competitors come along to the next event and move up to a Green or Blue course.



It is generally accepted that the hardest courses to plan are the longest and the shortest. For the Brown, I tried to pick five or six ‘strong’ legs - ones with lots of options for route choice, several decision points and hopefully a tricky control location at the end of it. Once I had these in place, the rest of the course legs try to stick to the same principles, but will necessarily have compromises involved.

On the Brown, these included controls to set up the strong legs, such as adding control 27, which in itself is a very easy leg, but then gives a route choice to get to 28 up the hill to avoid the undergrowth, or the shorter option round

by the canal but straight through the brambles. #6, #14 + #21 are other examples of this. From the RouteGadget traces, people took a variety of routes away from all of these controls, which I take as a mark of success of the course. Other compromises are adding controls such as #8 and #16, which are technically easy but add distance to the course. Unfortunately in a small area like this, this is unavoidable, but does bring up a point that everyone’s perspective on a course is different. Two of the reviews I received for the



course were a negative, 'It had too many dog-legs' and a positive, 'It had lots of changes of direction' – two sides of the same coin and proves you'll never please everybody.

The main 'Show Piece' leg of the course was 12-13, where the runners were faced with a long leg from the bottom of the woods to the top, but with the canal blocking their path and a right-or-left decision to take on which is the shortest route. In fact the Blue and the Green has similar legs, as I thought it worth maximising this feature of the area. The quickest route on the brown was to the west, then follow the main path through the woods to the east of control 24 and attack #13 from the boulder on the path bend. I actually bothered to spend the time running this leg a few times in a few different ways to check this! The majority of competitors seem to have taken this, but not everyone. What I'd be interested to know is how many people enjoyed this leg as a challenge and want legs like this on other courses I plan?

Finally, I was lucky enough to have the time on the day to run the Yellow course with my nine year old nephew and see for myself how the short courses worked. The difficulty with these is always making them easy enough, without being a straight line procession from the start to the finish. The short courses usually dictate where the start can be located, and for this event it necessitated having two starts for the event, as otherwise the correct course distances would not have been possible, and this put extra pressure on the volunteers. My nephew successfully made it round his 1.8km yellow from the near start and managed to cover a decent variety of controls and changes of direction in the process. At the end of it (only his 2<sup>nd</sup> ever event) he said he enjoyed himself and wants to keep coming!

Overall, the feedback I had was it was a very enjoyable and successful event. I managed to talk to quite a few people on the day, but always like to get more feedback. Do other competitors feel the same way and would a post-event forum to share comments be something to develop?

## **JUNIORS and FAMILIES - ORIENTEERING OPPORTUNITIES**

### **2020 – Lindsey King**

#### **Local events**

- **18 Jan Sat** pm CLARO schools league event Killinghall Moor **HG3 2NZ**
- **25 Jan Sat** AIRE night event Middleton Woods Ilkley- head torch required
- **16 Feb Sun** AIRE Harden Moor Bingley/Keighley
- **14 March Sat** afternoon CLARO schools league event **Knaresborough HG5 9EG**
- **15 March Sun -Important event for all AIRE members** - orange standard upwards - Halifax area- You can score points for AIRE in interclub competition. Watch out for



website, twitter/facebook messages about entries for this event. There should also be white & yellow courses for younger children to participate.

- **29 March Sun** Guiscliff Pateley Bridge CLARO
- **March to June** Monthly Saturday afternoon events for newcomers, families and junior coaching.
- **Wednesday evenings** score/sprint events- for experienced older juniors and adults (street events - adults need to accompany juniors) Head torches needed for winter events.

More details of these events & lots of other events on AIRE & CLARO websites: -

<https://www.aire.org.uk/>

<http://www.claro-orienteering.org.uk>

### More adventurous

It would be brilliant to have lots of AIRE juniors participating in the following events during 2020 so book dates in your diaries now: -

- **10 -13 April** Easter weekend near Whitby - annual JK orienteering festival - A really big 4 day event with around 3000 competitors. All adults and juniors can enter. It is more expensive than local events. There are shops and cafes in the event arena. Clubs have tents and banners where you can meet. If you don't have all weekend to devote to it then I suggest you enter Saturday &/or Sunday events AND let me know if you would like to participate in an **orienteering relay race** with 2 other juniors on Mon 13th April.  
<https://www.thejk.org.uk/>
- **3 May Sunday junior inter club competition** at Harrogate -We need as many juniors entering as possible to try to WIN for AIRE! (NB bank holiday has moved to Friday 8th)  
<http://www.claro-orienteering.org.uk/wp/hookstone-woods-3rd-may-2020>
- **5 -6 Sept** Junior relay event Keswick Cumbria. I would love to take a junior AIRE team to this fun relay. All meet up night before for tea/social/sleep then relay starts early Sunday morning with legs in the dark and through to the light. Race ends at breakfast time. I know it's the first weekend of new school year but you can be home to finish home work/sleep by lunchtime Sunday!

(Photo below shows juniors ready for the off on Relay Day at JK2019. AIRE juniors, this could be you in 2020! Ed.)



(And now Steve has more information about how you can get involved in those larger events this year – Ed.)

## **AIRE TEAM EVENTS IN 2020 – Steve Webb**

As Club Captain I'm looking for people to represent AIRE in team events. For newcomers to AIRE it's great to run for the Club against our local and national rivals and a good chance to get to meet clubmates. I've summarised below the events we plan to enter. When I have more entry details I'll put together a spreadsheet where you can sign up to run so I can put teams together.

### **COMPASSSPORT CUP SUNDAY 15 MARCH**

CSC is the national interclub championship and our qualifying round match will be hosted by EPOC. Originally the venue was shown as Ogden Water but in the last week I've heard that it has been switched to Fixby and Bradley, a wooded area near Huddersfield. Last year we had just under fifty club members travel to Shap for the CSC match and I'm looking for a bigger turnout this time as the race is so close to home.

Please put the date in the diary and help swell our numbers; we need runners to score points across all the age classes (especially juniors) to maximise our chance of getting through to the final at Sutton Park later in the year. At present we don't have entry details and the draw has not been announced so we don't know who our competition will be – but I suspect it will be a very well attended event.



## BRITISH RELAY CHAMPIONSHIPS SUNDAY 22 MARCH

The British weekend is very early this year, so just a week after the CSC match we'll be looking to put out some strong 3 person teams in the relays to be held on brand new terrain at Hollycombe Steam Museum on the Hampshire/Sussex/Surrey border. In 2019 AIRE memorably won the Men's Open title with Dane, Joe and Ali and was second in the Women's Open with Alice, Evie and Bryony so we have some work to do to try and deliver some more medals.



As well as the M/W Open classes there are Junior classes and M/W40, 50, 60 etc classes available.

## JK RELAY MONDAY 13 APRIL

The JK is hosted by NEOA this year and the relay on Easter Monday will be at Hutton Mulgrave and Skelder near Whitby. Each team needs three people, there are Open, Junior and Veteran classes but there is a bit more flexibility than the British when it comes to putting the teams together.



## BRITISH SPRINT RELAY CHAMPIONSHIPS SATURDAY 20 JUNE



Last year was the first time we'd entered teams in this event; held at Bradford University as part of the brilliant "British in Yorkshire" weekend. I recall that everybody who ran seemed to really enjoy the exciting racing, with plenty always happening in the changeover/spectator area. This year the sprint relay is paired with the British Sprint Champs rather than with the Long course Champs, and the



venue is Skelmersdale. If the format is the same as last year the Open relay is for a team of 4 (2F, 2M) and the other classes have a team of 3 (either 2F, 1M or 1F, 2M).

### **HARVESTER TROPHY OVERNIGHT RELAY SUNDAY 28 JUNE**

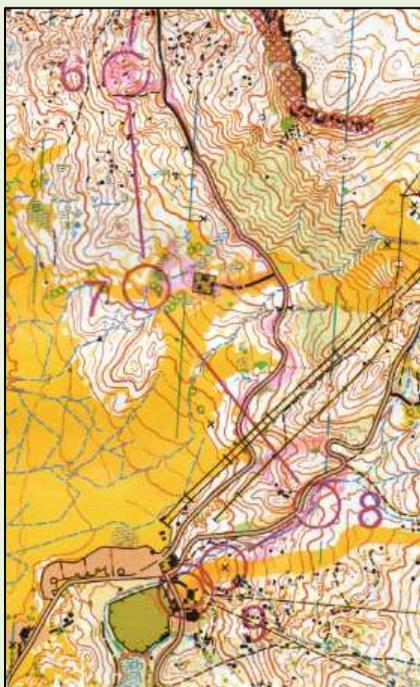
This is a great event, but I don't think we've done it for a few years. It's a 7 person relay (there is a 5 person class as well) which starts at night and runs through to the morning. Given the popularity of the Yorkshire Night League and the Autumn and Winter Wednesday night series I'd have thought we should be able to assemble enough night orienteering enthusiasts get a couple of teams to the Harvester. This year the event will be at Drumlanrig Castle in Dumfries and Galloway, seat of the Duke of Buccleuth which should be an excellent venue.

So, some excellent team events coming up; I hope this has whetted your appetite and you'll be running in an AIRE team this season.

## **O'ing in Italy – Take Two – Liz Davies**

Pete and I have enjoyed our last two summer holidays O'ing in Italy and think we might extend it in the future to do a bit of a tour. The main thing that characterised this year were the thunderstorms which were pretty widespread everywhere. When you do your activities in high mountain regions it does make you think and sometimes you need to alter your plans. However, when O'ing you are at the mercy of the storm, if and when it hits, as you have no control over the terrain or the time you run. More of that later.

We arrived at our campsite in Cortina tired and a bit stressed to say the least. Our travel plans went a bit awry with a big hold up in Innsbruck then when I rang the campsite to say we would



be late they said they didn't have a booking for us! Fortunately, when we arrived at about 8.15pm they squeezed us into a lovely spot and we found ourselves in the middle of lots of competitors of the Lavaredo Mountain Challenge – a four day mountain ultra-running challenge. Some serious runners around looking very skinny. The weather was a real challenge for them as it took place during the heatwave and temperatures were in the 30s.

Our first event was in Auronzo. It was an urban in blazing hot sunshine – one of the hottest days of the holiday. I enjoyed it but finished feeling completely parched. The next four days were a mix of weather with a thunderstorm featuring each day. Day 2 started off ok but soon the rain started, and it turned out to be quite biblical. We started out on a sunny ski slope with loads of people milling around

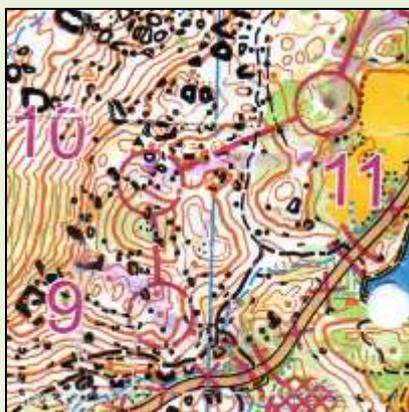


in the sunshine happily leaving our belongings out in the open. I had just got to #6 when the rain started, by the time I got to #7, which was 300m away, I was completely drenched it was so heavy. It had also turned into hailstones about ½ to 1 cm in diameter (no exaggeration) and I had to keep sheltering from them they hurt my head so much. I was almost ready to give up but out came my stubborn streak and I'd only got two controls to go so I decided that it was not much greater distance to do them. However, although the navigation was not difficult, the last three controls took me about 14 minutes each simply due to having to stop and shelter from the hail. When I finally ran down to the finish there was no one around – a bit like the 'Marie Celeste' – apart from the guys in the download shelter. As I ran in I got a cheer of "Bravo", "Molto Bene" from them.

Day 3 was better, much nicer weather, pretty location near Lake Misurina. Day 4 a disaster again, torrential rain and when I got totally lost at #4 in the middle of the deluge I jacked it in. Day 5 quite enjoyable, good terrain and I didn't get lost! All good terrain and even in the woods there were no brambles!

We then had a few days walking etc before setting off to the next event in Fiera De Primiero.

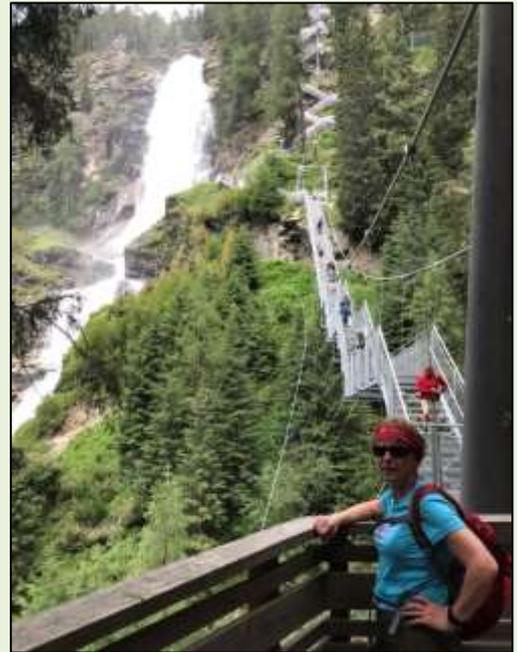
Day one was high at Passo Valles. I really enjoyed this and would have had a reasonable time if I hadn't had to stop for a comfort break (as they say) as I didn't have time to queue for the loo beforehand. We were late due to me assuming where we were going rather than checking it on the details and the map. It was complex but open terrain and my navigation was pretty good. This meant that I set off on day 2 – in the same area – feeling quite good. Hit #1 and #2 fine then it all went completely wrong. I set off for #3, a 300m leg, and at the halfway point knew exactly where I was then followed another competitor and completely lost it. Although it was open it was quite difficult terrain to relocate on – lots of hummocks and re-entrants. I should have gone back to the previous control and I would have saved time but didn't. After about 30 minutes wandering round like a headless chicken I decided to pack it in and feeling quite grumpy set off for the finish. Pete saw me very close to his 4<sup>th</sup> control but not realising I had got lost didn't say anything to me.



Day 3 was in very different terrain. Wooded and lots of complex contours. You were not sure if you were looking for hills or holes – as Pete found out when he kept trying to go around a hill that was a hole. From #9, a short leg to #10 he took a bearing and ignored it as he thought he had to go around a hill. The only hills were NW of #9 which he twice ran around and couldn't work out why he couldn't find #10. Finally, absolutely sticking to the bearing and checking the map more carefully he realised it was a deep hole not a hill! Control found he then carried on more successfully.



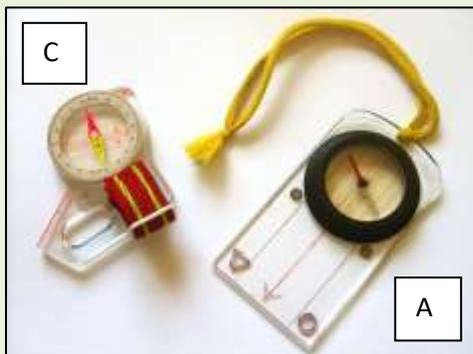
The weather didn't really look to change much so we decided afterwards to move location north and went to the Otzal valley in Austria. Spent a week there mainly climbing but found time to visit Otzi the Iceman whose body was found in a glacier in 1991. It was first thought to be a climber who had died but then it was found to be a mummified body. Otzi lived around 3300BC and they were able to build up a real picture about him and how he lived due to the artefacts they found. Well worth a trip if you are in the area. As was the Stubenfall – the highest waterfall in the Tyrol valley. There is a nice via ferrata going to the top which avoided the metal stairway that you could take. It was pretty breathtaking, both the waterfall and the metal stairway. At this point in the photo we had got halfway down.



## COMPASSES - WHICH DIRECTION? – Lindsey King

Whether you are an adult or junior member **borrowing a club compass** may help you decide which to purchase.

**Juniors** -Simple base plate compasses (A) are cheap to buy but they are not the easiest type of compass for learning orienteering. Children's small hands struggle to hold more than one thing at once and manipulate them at the same time. They can be confused by the detail on a compass dial. Carrying the compass on a strap round the neck means it is hard to hold it horizontal at waist height and there is the risk of catching the strap and causing an injury.



Using a very plain small compass strapped to the wrist with elastic is a much better option for children at white/yellow standard (B). Young juniors can orientate their map much more quickly and concentrate on finding the right route rather than steadying a compass. The club is due to receive some of these compasses for juniors to borrow before you buy.



## Thumb Compass (C) & Base Plate (A)

Once a junior is moving on to orange courses, the club has some thumb compasses (C) for juniors to try out before you buy. This enables bearing to be taken more accurately as courses head off line routes into the terrain.

**Adults** - Many adults start by using a base plate compass (A) and move on to a thumb compass later (C) for faster orientation/navigation. The techniques for using each are different. If you would like to try a thumb compass before buying one then you can borrow a Silva Begin Wrist Compass (B) club compass. This will help you decide whether to upgrade to a smarter base plate or go for a thumb compass.



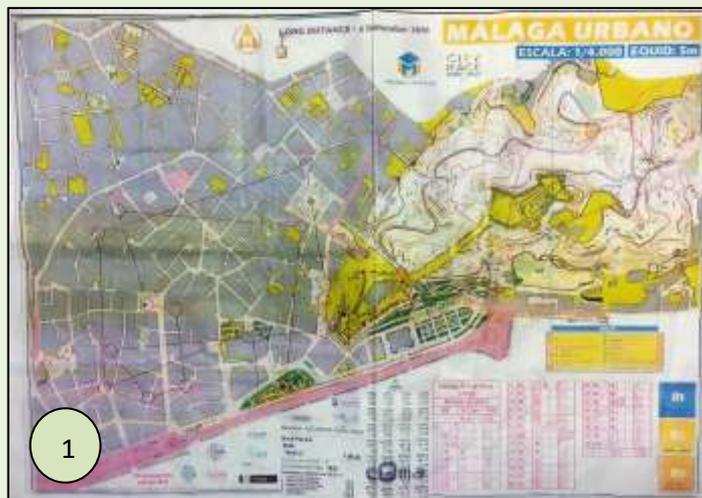
The two main orienteering suppliers Ultrasport and Compasspoint have stalls at larger events and can be found online at: -

<https://www.compasspoint-online.co.uk/>

[ian@ultrasport.co.uk](mailto:ian@ultrasport.co.uk) – website being updated

## Winter orienteering in Gran Canaria – or “How to escape from the beach” – David Bowman

I have been fortunate to orienteer in two warm-weather locations in the last few months. The first was during a long weekend in Malaga in November, where there were no organised races, but I did as I always do when I’m heading to a new city: go to World of O ([www.maps.worldofo.com](http://www.maps.worldofo.com)) and download maps of previous races. And so it was that I did a fun sprint race around the beach and marina of La Malagueta (passers-by are really perplexed when you’re the only person running around looking for invisible controls) and then a long race in the city. It was a great combination of crags and contours in the pine-forested slopes around the Moorish castle of Gibralfaro, then into the labyrinthine alleyways and squares of the old town (see image 1). What a lovely way to explore the hidden corners of a city! Malaga was packed with people, though, for the switching on of the Christmas lights, so I had to take extra care on blind corners...

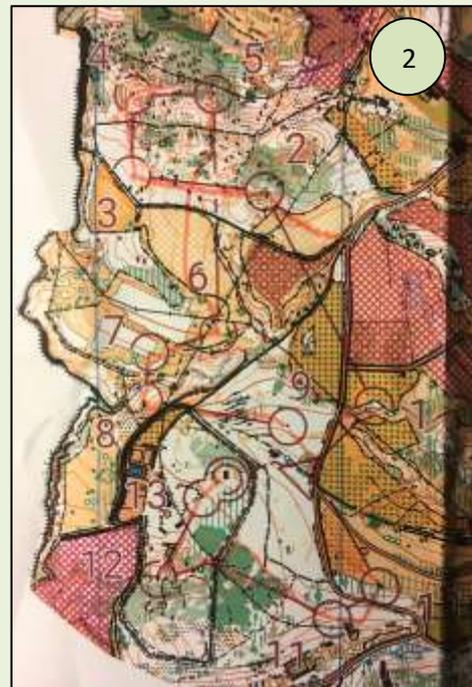




The second occasion was during a post-Christmas family holiday in Gran Canaria. My wife Marion turned 50 in December and part of her birthday celebrations took place in the capital Las Palmas. She and the girls were quite content to spend a week over New Year, swimming and snorkelling off Las Canteras, an amazing long stretch of sand in the heart of the city, then enjoying tapas and sangria as the sun went down. However, I had spotted in Compass Sport that the local orienteering club were putting on a series of races at the same time – the now annual Gran Canaria Orienteering Meeting or GCOM. Entering all 4 stages might have been a bit anti-social, so I settled on the two forest races, based at the same location, and casually asked the rest of the family if they fancied a trip to the mountains – “Yes, why not?” they replied.

The start list revealed about 250 competitors (25% juniors) from 20 countries – a lot of Finns, Swedes, Norwegians and Spanish from the mainland, and a scattering from the rest of Europe. Only 7 entrants from the UK, of which the Bowmans were 4. My M45 category was the next largest behind M21, so competition was going to be fierce. We had no hire car, so on the middle-distance day I went alone to suss out how to get to the event: 2 buses and a lift from Ray & Christine Collins (SLOT) brought me to Llanos de la Pez, a forest recreation centre at c. 1700m altitude, just below the highest point of the island – Pico de las Nieves. The event centre was spread over several wooden buildings among the trees: a big registration / download hall with surprise facilities (more of that later), showers, toilets and cabins where some orienteers were staying.

The middle-distance race (3.6k + 70m) was pretty easy with rather unimaginative planning and many control flags visible from a distance (see image 2). The terrain was a mixture of gorgeous open Canarian pine forest with a soft carpet of needles, patches of thick undergrowth and open fields. I made no significant errors, but it was a matter of reading the rather busy map and keeping speed up in the heat (25C by midday). Controls 2 to 5 were the most fun. I was fairly happy with my 7<sup>th</sup> out of 26 (4 minutes down on the Norwegian winner), but I was cautious on rocks and slopes: I had fallen off my bike on black ice before Christmas and injured my ribs, so I didn't want to fall again, but I was wearing trainers (no space in luggage for dobs) which were slippery on the pine needles.





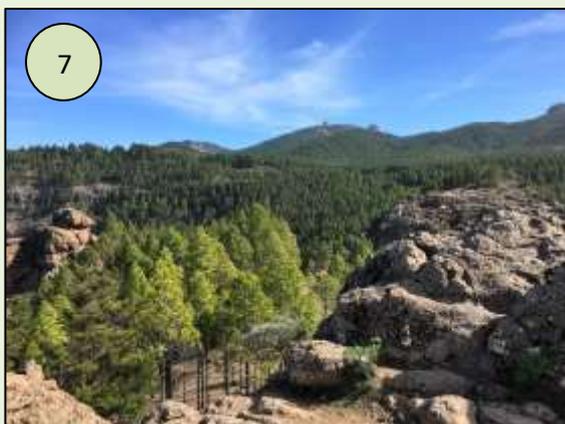
Before dropping me off at the bus stop, the Collins took me on a drive through the mountains to get a view of the famous volcanic outcrop, Roque Nublo, and the valleys around Tejada (see image 3). There had been some rain in November, but stream valleys and reservoirs were now very dry in the winter heat.



The next day was long distance with the same start and finish, and the rest of the family joined me. We were too many to catch a lift, so we took a short taxi ride from the final bus stop. Marion, Amy & Joanna had entered Open B (3.4k + 80m), but I had 7.5k + 280m, so I chose to run with a Camelbak which I was grateful for. There was a nice international atmosphere as we assembled at the start (see images 4 & 5), although the start shelter was hardly needed! The girls trotted round their course – Joanna took photos, Marion did some bouldering, Amy beat them both despite not using her compass... Meanwhile, I had to figure out how to get to my control 1 – just one of several long legs on my map (see image 6).

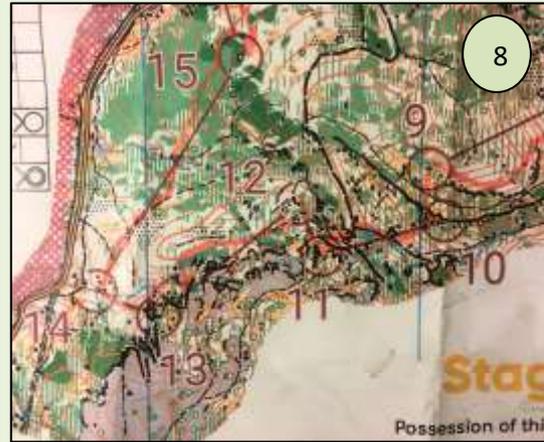


Unlike the previous day, this race was really mentally and physically tough – well planned, with lots of route choice and a real challenge to locate the flags within the control circle. In places there was a lot more undergrowth (2-3, 14-15); in others, the forest was wonderfully open (6-7, 8-9). I struggled to interpret the hills on 4-5, so I took the easier but longer road route – would you have gone straighter? I nearly ran off the map on 8-9 as I reached a saddle halfway and was tempted to drop down into the wrong valley. Then towards the end, just as tiredness was setting in and my ribs were beginning to hurt, came the most technical rock section (see images 7 & 8).





We could have benefitted from a 1:5000 scale for this part, as the huge rock outcrops were difficult to read, and I was glad to see Scandinavian runners also struggling to find the right boulders. But what a buzz when that red and white flag appeared at the right place!



After 1h43m I reached the finish and ended up in 9<sup>th</sup> place (see image 9).

My Camelbak was empty, and I was ready for the free refreshments at the finish (isotonic drinks, fruit, energy bars). Spanish pop music was already blaring out of the speakers and the commentator was inviting us in broken English to “three messages” next to download. This turned out to be “free massages”, which Amy soon made good use of (see image 10). Showered and changed, we decided to hike the 10km back

downhill to the bus along pleasant forest trails and through remote farms. It took most of the rest of the day to get back to Las Palmas, but it had been worth it.

Overall, I loved the excuse to head to the mountains for a couple of days. It was a pleasure to be running in the warm sunshine, without getting my feet wet, and to experience (on the long-distance race, at least) the full technical variety of the Canarian forests. The host club went out of their way to make us feel welcome and helped us with transport options. The little extras at the end made it feel like a real holiday treat. I would recommend anyone who, like me, gets restless on the beach, to try to combine a family holiday with some warm weather orienteering.



If you have orienteering adventures to share, please consider writing a report for the next issue of Aire Affairs. Ed.