

# Aire Affairs



**November 2023**



**Airienteers**

Orienteering in Airedale and Wharfedale

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



# Contents

EditO – Peter Jones .....	4
Chair Affairs – Liz Carter.....	5
AIRE Juniors – Lindsey King (Coach).....	6
Junior Coaching.....	6
Junior Team – Volunteering.....	7
Junior Talent .....	7
Compasses for Juniors .....	8
AIRE Achievements .....	10
Sopot and Gdansk City Races – 1st – 3rd September – Gerry Symes.....	11
When map symbols are not what they seem... a lesson in reading the legend - David Bowman.....	15
British Middle Distance Championships at Danefield Saturday 27 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 – Chris Burden .....	18
Wrose Brow Night Score Event.....	19
It’s all about Route Choice – Rob King .....	20
Interrail.....	20
Kungsleden.....	21





**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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Cover photo: Tony Carlyle at the Euromeeting public race in Stirling. (Picture by Wendy Carlyle)



Conistone South – ready for orienteers



## EditO – Peter Jones

A warm welcome to new members :-

- Keir Roscoe
- Tim Stevenson
- Ronan and Eamon Hanley

Thanks to Liz, Lindsey, Gerry, David, Chris and Rob for their contributions. We will no longer be using a commercial printer to print any copies so AIRE Affairs will now only be available online or via email, except where a printed copy has been specially requested. This actually gives a bit more freedom around the layout and the number of pages. Also, any maps should now be more readable (and I am of the opinion that orienteers generally like maps).

Since the August issue we have held Coaching Sessions, 3 Saturday Introductory Events, 6 Wednesday Evening Events, the Town and Country Weekend, and the British Schools Orienteering Championships. For the Town and Country Weekend there were 2 first-time planners, Chris Gibbins and James Woodham. I'd like to make special mention of James, for planning his first full event at age 16. I was involved in some of the preparations for Conistone South and I know some of the difficulties that he faced, like not getting access to some of the best parts of the area.

I've included an 'AIRE Achievements' section which lists results from major events, leagues and representative events, particularly if they haven't been mentioned elsewhere. If you think I've missed anything significant, please let me know.

### **Compass Sport Cup heat – save the date**

As Steve has highlighted on the AIRE website, our heat against other YHOA and NEOA clubs will be on 18<sup>th</sup> February, staged by EBOR at Gilling, near Helmsley.

Steve will add more details when they're available, and create the usual sign up spreadsheet.

If we get to the final (and with a good turnout we have every chance), it will be reasonably local for once; due to be held on 20 October in Lancashire.





## Chair Affairs – Liz Carter

I hope this edition finds you all well and coping with the dark nights. This is not my most favourite time of year when the clocks go back and sunshine is scarce. At least it means that some of you have had to dust off your head torches and get out for some winter night O'ing. Yes there are some hardy souls who do so and enjoy it as they keep turning up. I have to confess that this year I have not done so much but I do have a reasonable excuse - I am not in the country at the moment. Hopefully I will get out after Christmas.

The other thing I am going to try and do a bit more of is mountain bike O'ing. A friend of mine did an event at Sicklinghall the other week using Maprun and really enjoyed it. She used to orienteer with me back in the day, doesn't anymore now but does get out on her bike regularly and was tempted by this event.



The new year is a time for resolutions. Hopefully our weekend in January will see you getting out to our Saturday night event at Meanwood and the Sunday one at Adel. We also have some big events coming up this year so please remember to renew your British Orienteering and AIRE membership soon.

Happy O'ing

Liz.



## AIRE Juniors – Lindsey King (Coach)

### Junior Coaching

I continue to offer coaching exercises for juniors and novices at most of the Saturday introductory events. We have a number of juniors who are or will be moving on from Yellow to Orange standard courses. Becoming more familiar with using a compass for orientation and taking accurate bearings into controls from line features is key to a smooth transition. See my other article about compasses for juniors.

Some juniors are a little resistant to using a compass even though using one at each decision point on a course to orientate themselves to avoid turning the wrong way may have saved them considerable time. In open parks there are often enough features to orientate a map easily but in a forest there may be few obvious features and 180 or 90 degree errors at junctions are easy to make.

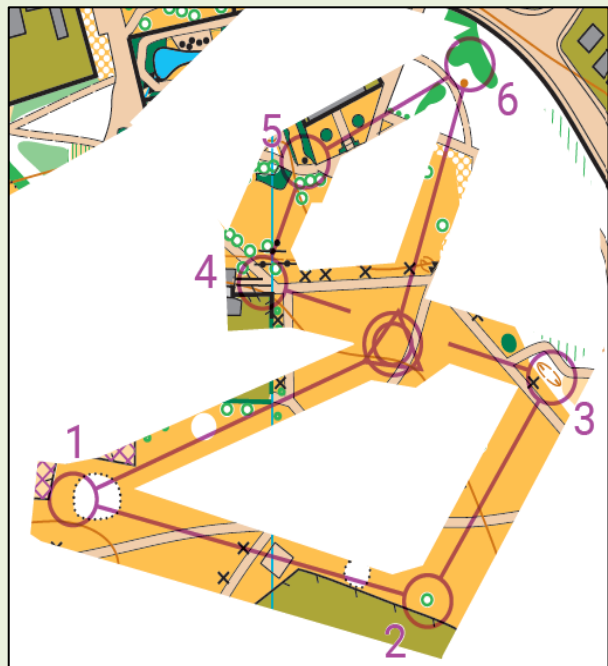
At Horsforth Hall in September I used corridor exercises to limit navigation by obvious features. Orienteers are then more dependent on taking a bearing by compass to find the control. It is a good way of making a simple area more difficult. I also offered a photo O for younger juniors to help them to learn map symbols and line courses to encourage accurate map reading.

At Potternewton Park in November I worked on compass technique again. We used compasses to orientate the map to the north lines on the map and then using the straight edge of the thumb compass to show the direction to follow. I then encouraged the runners to look up to find a feature in the direction of travel. Running towards that feature enables faster progress. Once we were close to the control we needed to slow down to find the kite.

I also introduced the idea of identifying an attack point. This is a point close to the control which can be found more easily and speedily before slowing down to find the control from that point. There were only a few members at Potternewton which gave me time to spend with individuals which I hope will help them at future competitions.

Coming up: coaching at intro event Lister Park Bradford - 9th December 1-3pm

See [www.aire.org.uk/events/lister-23-12-09](http://www.aire.org.uk/events/lister-23-12-09) for details.







## Junior Team – Volunteering

AIRE juniors now have their own tent for activities and events purchased with the money raised through selling cakes and preloved kit.

The tent was christened at Conistone in September by an enthusiastic group of juniors. I forgot to take a photo so this is one from last year but you get the idea!

We ran a cake stall, kit stall, a maze and a mini course for toddlers in the carpark field. It was a super sunny day and we made another £141 for our Junior fund. Luckily, we were all packed away before the thunderstorm arrived.



The Conistone event was planned by James Woodham M16 and a number of juniors and parents helped in crucial roles at this event.

We used the tent again at the British Schools Orienteering Championships at Temple Newsam where Aire juniors looked after the Maze that we offered as a fun extra activity. Lots of juniors had a go at the Maze. I am sorry the printer ran out of charge so we don't have a full list of results, that was my fault. Thank you everyone including parents for taking down the Maze and tent after the event!

Katie and Ewen are now junior editors for Aire Affairs

As you can see Juniors with support of their parents are giving lots of time to help the Club

Gold Stars everyone!

## Junior Talent

Emily Gibbins W18 was selected for Gothenburg Camp in the summer and ran for England at the Junior Home Internationals, and she is now studying at Durham University

Jake Powell M18 has been doing less orienteering during his A levels to concentrate on gaining a place at Sheffield University studying medicine – and he has been successful!

Katie Buckley W16 has had a successful autumn including running for England at the Junior Home Internationals and for Yorkshire & Humberside at Junior Interregional Champs. She also participated in the Deeside Summer Camp. Her performances have earned her selection to Talent Squad North where she will have the opportunity to develop her skills and fitness further with the training that the squad offers.

Ewen Wilkinson M16, Henry Stitson M16, James Woodham M16 and Katie Buckley W16 have had the opportunity to attend the Annual JROS weekend at Hawkshead this month.



At the British School Championships on 20 November, 21 AIRE junior members were running for their schools and excelled in competition with juniors from around the country:

- Sebastian Carr 3rd and Alfie Alcock in the Year 5 boys – This was a fantastic result for Sebastian as both these boys are only year 3!
- Alethea Carr 1st and Penny Pinker-Hull 3rd in Year 6 girls
- Charlie Alcock 1st , Kier Roscoe 3rd and George Ricketts 13th in Year 6 boys
- Charlotte Beavers 2nd in year 8 girls
- Bethan Buckley 3rd in year 9 girls
- Joseph Mason 12th and Ross Carson Year 9 boys
- Joseph Dawson 2nd Year 10 boys
- Katie Buckley 2nd in Year 11 girls
- Ewen Wilkinson 3<sup>rd</sup>, Henry Stitson 5<sup>th</sup>, Ben Mehra 9<sup>th</sup>, Harry Warman 15th and Jack Beavers Year 11 boys
- James Woodham 6th and Edwin van Lopik 10th Year 12
- Tom Threlfall 1st Year 13 Boys

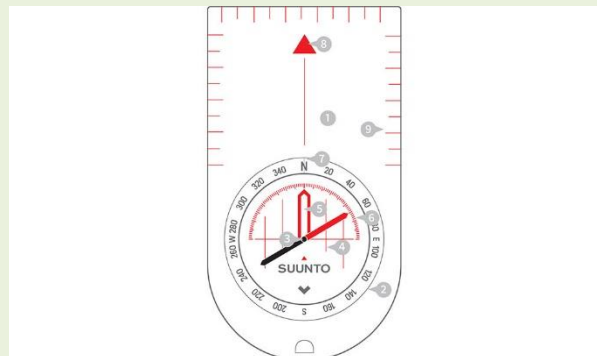
Guiseley Primary school won the Primary School team competition and Bradford Grammar School were 3rd Large Secondary School. North Halifax Grammar, Ermysteds Skipton, Beckfoot High and Baildon C of E Primary were represented by these Aire members.



## Compasses for Juniors

I have a collection of compasses that belong to the club which we can lend out to Juniors or novices while you decide what type of compass you want to buy for yourself.

After seeing many juniors and novices trying to use a base plate compass (any type that looks like this) I would recommend that they are avoided. They are the most common type available in outdoor shops but they are difficult for little hands to use when they are already holding a map. Also when hung around the neck on a cord they cannot be held horizontal and there is also a risk of injury if the cord gets caught on a branch or a fence.







I would recommend a very simple wrist compass for very young juniors and from age 6-7 a basic thumb compass (See pictures below). These are held or worn on the same hand as the map and mean that the map can be much more easily orientated to the compass north lines without juggling a compass and map in different hands. Map orientation is all that is required to begin with and the technique used with a thumb compass leads smoothly onto taking bearings when juniors and novice adults reach orange standard.

Ask me if you would like to borrow a compass for a trial. [lindseyking49@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lindseyking49@hotmail.co.uk) They are available to buy from <https://www.compasspoint-online.co.uk/>

Tip: make a safety wrist strap for your dibber and your compass to help prevent losing them if they slip off your thumb. You can buy thin elastic very cheaply and cut and knot it to your size.





## AIRE Achievements

### **Congratulations to :-**

All juniors whose achievements Lindsey has listed under Junior Talent.

### **And to :-**

Class winners at the YHOA Championships at Conistone South in September –

- W12 Penny Pinker-Hull
- W14 Bethan Buckley
- W16 Katie Buckley
- W21 Alice Leake
- W40 Anne Murgatroyd
- W45 Catherine Dawson
- W80+ Judith Powell
- M10 Joby Pinker-Hull
- M14 Ross Carson
- M16 Ewen Wilkinson
- M21 Sam Wood
- M45 Leon Ricketts
- M50 Adrian Hall
- M70 Richard Wilson

Laura King, who ran for GB at Eurometing in Scotland in October

Leon Foster – 1<sup>st</sup> in Men's Open in the UK Urban League for 2023

Class winners in the Yorkshire Urban League for 2023 –

- Anne Murgatroyd – Women's Veteran (40-50)
- Leon Foster – Men's Open
- Gerry Symes – Men's Hyper-Veterans (75+)



## Sopot and Gdansk City Races – 1st – 3rd September – Gerry Symes

### Preview:

**Sopot**, about 12 km north of Gdansk, is an upmarket seaside resort boasting the longest wooden pier in Europe. Last year it hosted one of the rounds in the World Triathlon Championship. It offers numerous parks and open areas plus a modern shopping complex to challenge the urban orienteer.

The Friday sprint was in one of these parks plus the very sandy beach. The Saturday race was the official CRET European League Race starting in the west of the town and working its way through the shopping centre and either side of the main thoroughfare (Monte Cassino) and plaza finishing with controls on the famous pier.

**Gdansk (formerly Danzig)** was the venue for the Sunday race. Used for the CRET race last year the narrow streets, numerous small parks and courtyards in the old town are a planner's delight. Although over 90% of the centre was destroyed during the Second World War it has been successfully rebuilt



in the old style with many tall ornate buildings in the Dutch Style as befits one of the foremost Baltic ports in the Hanseatic League.

### The Races:

**Friday evening** was the Sprint Race mostly using a long rectangular park with some controls on the beach. The Hypervet course was 2.2 km with 15 controls on a 1:4000 scale map– all very straightforward but fast – apart from the controls on the beach which were quite hard going. One blip was that one of the controls in front of the Grand Sofitel Hotel was removed by the manager who wasn't informed of the event. We were lucky in that by the time we ran the organisers were aware of it so we had no need to visit it but on the other courses the leg just had to be voided.





1 -- 09 -- 2023  
 scale: 1:4000  
 eq. 2.5 m  
 course setter:  
 Michał Olejnik

Stage 1  
 Sopot Seaside

Partners

Sopot   
 MIECZYSLAW STRUK  
 MARSZALK  
 WOJEWODZTWA POMORSKIEGO

GARMIN   
 POLSKI ZWIĄZEK  
 ORIENTACJI SPORTOWEJ PZOS

trojmiasto.pl

Hipervet M

Sopot City Race E1  
 Hipervet M 2,2 km

	60 m			
				△
1	66	HI	X	Q
2	53	□		^
3	72	△		○
4	82	⊙		○
5	81	△		○
6	80	▨		∇
7	69	↘		
8	71	↗		○
9	74			^
10	52	△		○
11	57	■		^
12	62	HI	X	○
13	70	⊗		○
14	64	⊙		○
15	100	△		○

50 m

Sopot City Race  
 Orienteering in THE heart  
 of Sopot

Saturday morning was the main European League Race. Our course was 4.7 km, 16 controls on a 1;5000 map. The planning was very good – often us veterans get the feeling our course has just been tagged on but this one presented a few challenges and route choices. It didn't help that we started about midday and the temperature was in the high 20s – this, of course brought the crowds out and did affect route choice as the course progressed to the busy areas along the front. The final two controls were just running along the pier but an area had been coned off for the orienteers. Glad





that our course didn't go right along the 511 metres of the pier – just to run back – not a lot of navigation required!



Sunday morning went back to Old Gdansk. The Hypervet course was 3.4km, 14 controls at 1:4000. Started on the banks of the Vistula then into the old town – the light pink areas on the map are either construction sites or rows of tables outside the cafes – best to be avoided! The midday start





again meant that the tourist areas were crowded especially along the riverfront as construction works made it very narrow. It was also very hot again.



Overall I had a successful weekend – was third in the sprint and second in both the City races so I made the podium for the CRET Race – this second place ensured I will finish second in the league as I’ve now completed the required 5 races. Also came second overall over the three races and won a nicely produced wooden plinth featuring Krzywy Domek - - the famous Crazy House in Sopot.



I can recommend these City Races – not only do you get to visit nice cities but you also get to visit off the beaten track places that the tourists don’t get to see.





## When map symbols are not what they seem... a lesson in reading the legend - David Bowman

Rivelin Valley, Sheffield, 1st October 2023. I should have known it was going to be tough when I read the description of the terrain: "At its best in winter and early spring; later in the year the vegetation can make going heavy in places". So October was probably not the best time of year for a race here... Then there was the advertised climb: 350m on a Brown course of 5.9km. And finally, the rain. As I searched for control 1, it started to pour. By the time I slithered down another muddy slope to control 6, my glasses were so fogged up that I abandoned them and stashed them in my leggings.

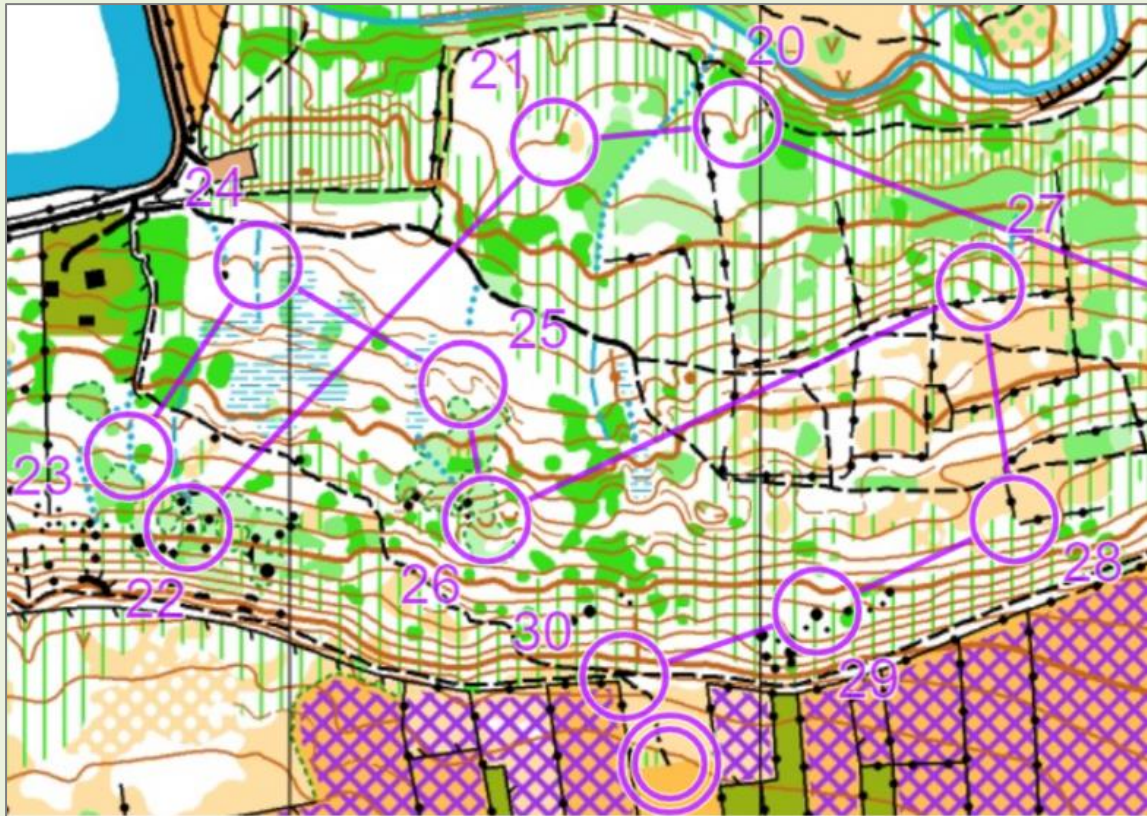
So I ran the rest of the soggy course with limited distance vision, but at least I had clear eyes to read the map...or so I thought. After a fair amount of path running and another long descent almost as far as the River Rivelin itself, it was time for a final couple of loops through the steep, marshy forest before scrambling up to the finish field.

Control 22 was tricky to find among dense trees and boulders, but 23, 24 & 25 were easier. Then came a short leg of about 200m to #26. "Keep going!", I told myself. "South-east a little to the linear marsh, then follow it uphill to arrive at the western-most depression. Easy!"

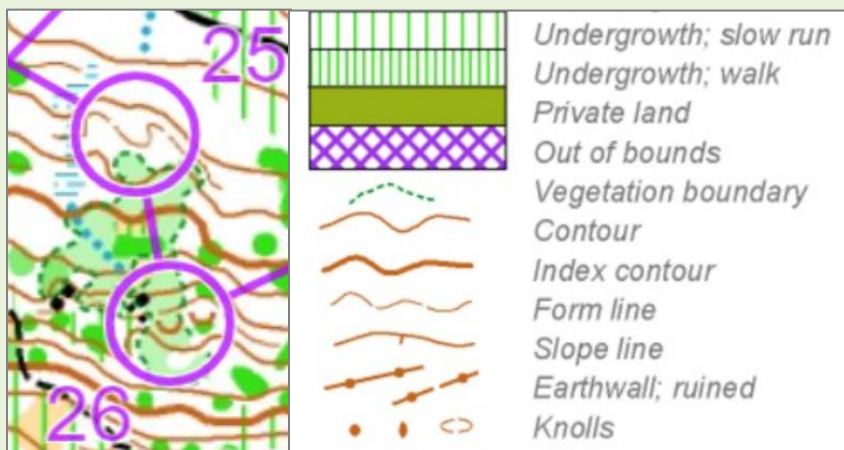
I followed what after the heavy rain was more like a flowing stream, but no depression came into sight. More runners joined the search, scouring the hillside for the control. I relocated back to 25 to try again, but still no control. Eventually I saw some movement in thick trees to the west, went to investigate and found several runners converging on the control flag. Bingo! My split time



for that 200m: a shameful 12 minutes and 25 seconds... Out of 29 finishers on the Brown course, the average split for control 26 was nearly 6 minutes. So how did so many of us get it so wrong?



At download, I could be heard muttering how control 26 was probably in the wrong place. Then as the rain and my frustration subsided, I took a closer look at my crumpled map and spotted a symbol I had never seen before – a green dashed line. What? My eyes flicked to the map legend and there it was, clearly stated – vegetation boundary.



Now, I don't know about you, but in my nearly 40 years of doing this fantastic sport of ours, I've always known a veg boundary to be a black dotted line. So what was mapper Dave Peel doing here, drawing these funny little green dashes?





Next stop when I got home and dry, the IOF International Specification for Orienteering Maps (Revision 5, September 2022), where I was astonished to read this:

	<p><b>416 Distinct vegetation boundary (L)</b>          A vegetation boundary within the forest, or a distinct forest edge.          Only one of the vegetation boundary symbols (black dotted line or dashed green line) can be used on a map. For areas with a lot of rock features, it is recommended to use the green dashed line for vegetation boundaries.</p>				
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>min.</td> <td>length</td> </tr> <tr> <td>area</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	min.	length	area		
min.	length				
area					

So Dave had followed the ISOM to the letter on the rocky slopes of Rivelin. And meanwhile, in the dim light of the rainy forest, I had read it as a blue dotted line and tried to follow a stream that never existed on the map. I can see why IOF offer this alternative symbol – as you can see on this extract from another Dave Peel map (Wharncliffe, 2022), too many black dots on a map can get confusing...



**Lessons from this experience?**

For runners: Always read the map carefully and if something looks unfamiliar, read the legend. Don't keep assuming you're right and the map is wrong. Relocate early, don't keep wandering around the same area hoping the control will appear.

For officials: If a map contains a less-used symbol, mention it in the final details and / or point it out on sample maps in the start lanes. Never obscure a map legend with control descriptions.

Have you ever confused map symbols like this? Mistaken a line of tag-less crags for a track, maybe? Share your tale of woe in the next issue!





## British Middle Distance Championships at Danefield Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – Chris Burden

Aire are staging these Championships this year. This will be the club's last Major event for a while. It's a great chance to again showcase the club's strength. The event will be staged in conjunction with the Northern Championships on 28<sup>th</sup> April at Kilnsey, which Claro are leading on.

Please put the 27<sup>th</sup> in your diary. We will need a lot of volunteers on the day, so this appeal goes to all club members. If you can offer your services - and please do - contact the Organiser, Chris Burden, as early as possible.



Everybody should still be able to have a run, if we get enough volunteers, which we usually do. When you offer your services, please indicate whether or not you wish to run.

In particular, I'd like to hear from anyone who would be prepared to organise a string course. We have the very pleasant small beech wood at the east end of Danefield at our disposal. It is close to Assembly and adjacent to the route everyone takes from assembly and to the start. In addition, it would be great if someone could volunteer to arrange a maze course in the assembly area.

For the Northern Championships, we will be helping Claro before and after the event with transporting and setting up the stiles.

I have identified Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April as being the best date for moving the stiles into position. It's one of the few weekends which does not coincide with a Major orienteering event. This is becoming too challenging a job for the over 65s, who have been doing it most recently. They can form a separate team in the week before the event, Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> or Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup>, (and after) to erect and secure the stiles (and take them down after the event).

For moving the stiles, we need a younger demographic – hence the choice of a weekend day to move them. I've said under 65s below, but ideally this should be folks 55 and under. We will need the same demographic to move them downhill after the event. This will have to be on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May, which unfortunately conflicts with Day 1 of the Manchester Urban Weekend, for those who enjoy their urban events.



In summary we require: -

Saturday 6 April: Under 65s for shifting stiles.

Monday 22 or Tuesday 23 April: Over 65s (and under) for fixing stiles.

Saturday 27 April: Everybody for Danefield.

Sunday 28 (after the event) or Monday 29 April: Over 65s (and under) for lowering stiles.

Saturday 4 May: Under 65s for shifting stiles.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Chris Burden (chris.burdenAT btinternet.com)

## Wrose Brow Night Score Event

The first night score event of the autumn series, planned and organised by Megan and Richard Robinson, and won by Dave Murgatroyd who cleared all 30 controls in 52m30s.

My approach was to go clockwise round all the controls at the bottom of the hill, then up the hill, then pick up any I still had time for.

Somehow I managed to miss out no.24 - and I'm sure that hill has got longer and steeper in the last couple of years!





## It's all about Route Choice – Rob King

### Interrail

With a daughter now resident in Uppsala, Sweden, for the foreseeable and the allure of airports and air travel pretty well faded, what's to be done? Well, it's really just a matter of route choice.

After an unmissable Lakeland JK, Easter Monday finds me washing O-kit whilst sitting on a 2 Month Global Interrail Pass which is about to expire in 7 hours.

We had purchased these a year earlier when Interrail held a 50% flash sale to celebrate its 50th anniversary. With up to 11 months in which to activate your pass it seemed a no-brainer. Lindsey had used hers to travel through France and Switzerland to meet Laura who was running in World Cup races near Davos. Unfortunately, 'life', ie elderly parent care, thwarted my plans to join them.

With permission for a 48hr 'late start' c/o the friendly crew at Interrail, it was just a 6-minute walk to the start - Ilkley station's platform 1. Whilst taking a pretty safe route to the first control (Brussels c/o Eurostar), I set to planning later legs. Stockholm, as an attack point for Uppsala, was pretty obvious but which way round the Baltic?

Armed with a phone and an OMM-style daysack, I sought minimal climb. So the next 3 weeks took me across the North European plain spending three days exploring each of my seven control circles; Brussels, Berlin, Warsaw, Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn and Stockholm.

This was no athletic endeavour but a quest to seek out some thought-provoking history and tastebud-tickling cuisine. Highlights included Belgium's Royal Museum for Central Afrika, Berlin's stunning Jewish Museum, a Chopin recital in Warsaw plus museums ranging from Marie Curie to the Katyn Massacre. I was last in Warsaw in 1982 surrounded by Solidarność protests, martial law and the whiff of tear gas. How things have changed.

Eastwards. Sorely tempted to alight at Białystok to explore one of Europe's last virgin forests, Białowieża, but remind myself – this is an Urban event.

Delight in the contours, forested hillsides and pine smells in Vilnius. Even more so with their crayfish soup. Careful not to run off the east side of my map, the next leg is to Riga. Accommodations have included hostel, AirBnB, space-pods and now a great garret flat high up amongst the pantiled rooves of the old town. Travelling outside high season means a bed can be booked online just a few hours before I actually need it. Coupled with the immediate flexibility of the Interrail Pass, this makes for pretty stress-free travel.

Each of these Baltic capitals features its Museum of The Occupations, be it by Swedes, Poles, Tsarist Russians, Nazis or Soviets. A sobering contrast to any hang-ups we still have over 1066. And we think WWII ended in '45. Not so here. To an Eastern Orthodox cathedral and a MASSIVE food market in Riga's former Zeppelin hangars.





Pleasantly surprised not to trip over any stag dos in Tallinn but I do find a submarine commissioned during Estonia's brief spell of freedom in the 1920s and 30s and made by Vickers-Armstrong in ... Barrow-in-Furness.

Enough! Courses are soon to close so it's a quick night ferry to Stockholm and a rendezvous with Lindsey and Laura in Uppsala which is enjoying its first hint of Spring. Some days later we return by night train to Hamburg, an overnight ferry from Rotterdam, then a bus into town for a wedding anniversary breakfast ... in Hull. That's living!

## Kungsleden



Less spontaneous this one for it's been on my agenda for 50 years. I first dreamt of walking 'Kungsleden', a long-distance path in Sweden's far north, when I was just 14 having been inspired by images in an American brochure for Camp Trails rucksacks. I know, I know, you may have had other dreams but mine was an all boys school and girls weren't on the curriculum.

Founded early in the 20th century, 'The King's Way' has since been extended and now spans 460km from Hemavan in the south to Abisko, a halt on the iron ore railway between Kiruna in Sweden and the ice-free Atlantic port of Narvik.



So, crank-up the Interrail app with another digital Senior pass, this time for 10 days travel within 2 months. Shoulder a significantly bigger pack and head to Ilkley Station. Platform 2 this time. Northern, LNER, Eurostar, ICE and SJ trains – all with plenty of time to read. My preparations include re-reading, ‘Expedition Hygiene’ by one Bruce Woodley. Exquisite prose but a tad short on detail. Plus, Cormac McCarthy’s ‘The Road’, which, for those in the know, made me resolve NOT to complain about my rations nor any company on the ensuing walk.

A quick night in Brussels then a leisurely 7hrs in Hamburg catching up with an old friend, supping beers and enjoying a Portuguese fish restaurant before my sleeper train to Stockholm. Ten hours in Uppsala with Laura, including some serious calorie-loading; Swedish ‘fika’, beers and my last supper at a great Eritrean restaurant. Jettison some kit and head for the north-bound night sleeper to Umeå. Why is it so much easier to meet and talk to strangers on trains than planes? Finally, a 5<sup>1/2</sup> hour bus journey to Hemavan and ... start walking.

Kungsleden is not technically difficult. The route is designed to traverse long glacial valleys and high ‘fjäll’ plateaux. Though a simple, single trod, it is well marked, has narrow but frequent boardwalks over marshy ground and footbridges over all significant rivers. However, it is very long and very remote. Apart from the termini, the trail crosses only one through-road between Sweden and Norway, plus two other road-heads. Two thirds lie within the Arctic Circle and phone signal is a tad iffy.

Of the five stages, the northernmost is the oldest and most frequented by far. Here, the mountain-scapes are most dramatic and the open country a relief for tree-bound Swedes. Of the ‘through-hikers’, the vast majority walk north to south. My plan was to walk with the sun behind me and into the oncoming onset of an Arctic autumn. Plus, that railroad would serve as a tidy catching feature.

Some do it quicker but why hurry? ‘Allow over four weeks’ is the advice so as to accommodate being grounded by bad weather or mishap. The Swedish Tourist Federation (STF) maintains much of the infrastructure and there are warden huts after (almost) all the 28 sections should you wish to travel light. However, these are quite pricey over 4 weeks and if you’re carrying a tent, surely you want to use it?

Sweden’s Allemansrätten gives everyone the right to roam, forage and camp pretty much anywhere. Like many on the trail, I like the freedom to pitch in lonely settings, usually high up with great vistas especially at dawn and dusk. Still, with the hiking season coming to a close, it was reassuring to know there was a warden and emergency satellite phone should a situation arise.

Provisioning was tricky to plan. In theory, basic expedition food can be purchased at the STF huts. These are supplied once a year in winter by snowmobile. However, with huts closing mid-September, stock was at risk of depletion. I probably carried an excess of food the first two weeks since the only two communities Kungsleden passes, Ammarnäs and Jakkvik, each had a good supermarket. For the second more mountainous fortnight, I was glad of every crumb I carried. I met one couple, staying in huts and travelling light, but facing an evening meal and breakfast of just ... Haribos!



Near the five road crossings STF runs the more sophisticated Fjällstations with such earthly delights as showers, WiFi and excellent, though usually booked-out, restaurants. A Swedish breakfast spread at Kvikkjokk and an evening meal at STF's famed Saltoluokta restaurant both went down memorably well.

The terrain was a joy. Glaciated open valleys such as Syterskalet and the 30km long Tjäktavagge. Light and airy old-growth birch forests with occasional juniper. Some pine and spruce, more dense and dark. Open fjäll plateau with much lichen, creeping mountain birch, dwarf willow scrub, plus crow-, blue- and lingon- berries. Like a bear, I tried to eat my own bodyweight of blueberries each day. Lakes, lochans, marshes, pools, waterfalls, rapids and so much unbounded space. But for regular family groups of reindeer, the wildlife was infrequently observed with highlights being merlin and capercaillie.

I love the solitude but equally enjoy the contacts. Heading into traffic, I met about 25 south-bound hikers each day. Some pairs, many solo and almost all up for a chat. Mainly Dutch and Belgian, then Swedes, Germans and many young Czechs.

The trail traverses part of five National Parks; Vindelfjällen, Pieljekaise, Sarek, Stora Sjöfallets and Abisko. I used a very tidy 1:50,000 scale, Tyvek map atlas by Calazo. This kept the weight down and saved wrestling paper maps in the wind. If you read the Swedish small print you realised the contour interval switches from 10m to 25m on entering the higher mountains to the north. This definitely caught a few Dutch hikers out.

There are five major lakes to cross. Nowadays, only two are self-rowed (500m and 1km) with commercial motorboat operators servicing the much longer and more exposed crossings. STF provide three rowboats per crossing, of which at least one boat must be left on each shore. This means if you take the single boat across, you must then tow another boat back to where you started before making your third and final crossing. Hah, I got lucky.

STF removing these boats when they close the huts in mid-September is what effectively ends the trail hiking season. With deep snows and frozen waters in February-March, the winter Kungsleden trail then opens to skiers and dogsleds.

Walking 15-25km a day meant I was comfortably ahead of schedule to afford a side diversion or two. Best was camping atop Skierrfe (1183m), in helluva-wind but with distant views of Sarek's peaks adorned with the first snowfall and the stunning vista over the Låjtavrre glacial delta.

I wasn't hell-bent on climbing Kebnekaise, which at 2096m is Sweden's highest peak. Certainly, the popular route up from Kebnekaise Fjällstation would come as a shock after three weeks of peaceful 'me time'. But the chance to camp high in the lonely Sinnivággi valley and take a lesser route up from the west had appeal.

Having barely worn a waterproof in the first fortnight the weather was definitely turning wintry. Spectacular, eerie mountain scenery draped in mists. The route was hard going; 90% was shattered rock with only an occasional token of a cairn and having to concentrate on 'imagining the path'. To





be honest, wearing everything I had wasn't enough. The last few hundred meters of ascent were pretty uncomfortable. Strong winds, spindrift on the face, wind-chilled mitts, ice building on the rock and thick clag. Now on the main track we instinctively paired-up and watched out for one another. My buddy was a shivering Israeli (whose parents, incidentally, had recently moved from Israel to a random village in Finland – 'for a less stressful life'. It was 12th September). This must be the highest mountain I haven't climbed, for the last meters of ascent are a polished, permanent ice-cap and since the view, even at its base, was of diddly-squat and we had neither spikes nor crampons, we opted for a relieved retreat.

By now the earlier greens of the vegetation had morphed to yellows, golds and bronzes with some reds and deep scarlets. With the cooler weather it paid to up the pace and hike a little further each day. My last two days featured a gradual descent; through broad open valleys, rapid braided rivers, glacial-blue lakes, the gold of the ever-thinning birch groves and brooding glaciers high up above.

Perfect timing, for my last three nights included awaking to a snow-covered tent, then the still silence of minus six degrees and finally within earshot of the iron ore train's hooter. At 4am!

27 consecutive nights wild camping, about 500km trodden and 7.5kg lighter. Maybe one for Trip Advisor? A couple of days in Luleå on the Gulf of Bothnia then slow trains to Uppsala meeting Lindsey, Laura and Freddie for another fortnight of sea kayaking amongst the Stockholm archipelago and walking coastal trails. Finally, the easy night sleeper to Hamburg and an evening in Brussels where I could enjoy my beer, seafood and chocolate – with 7.5kg of credit.







