

World Cup 1 – Ostfold Norway 27th- 31st April 2023

Joe Woodley

In December I moved from Sheffield to Ulverston. At first, I thought I had made a terrible mistake. For two weeks it rained constantly, the days were short and dark and all my shoes were wet. I had soon exhausted my supply of dry kit and there was no end in sight. I longed for the drier climes of Sheffield, nestled on the easterly flanks of the Peak District and firmly in the rain shadow. Thankfully my early worries would soon dissipate with the start of the famous LOC turkey races. The weather improved and a wonderful winter of orienteering began. Each week the LOC night league brought with it a new and challenging area. At each event I chose a technique to focus on, from compass to attack point to exit direction or route planning and scored myself for each control. In the first 9 weeks of 2023 I found 219 controls, though not always particularly quickly or from the correct direction. This represented the most consistent start to a season I have ever had in terms of orienteering quality and quantity. By the time the JK came around I felt confident in the Lakeland forests and importantly I knew what a Martin Bagness map would look like in the terrain. As the first GB selection race of the year, the JK was a big goal.

With amazing weather and many foreign competitors for what felt like the first time since COVID, the JK really did feel like a festival of orienteering. I struggled with the high speeds required in the high visibility forest in the middle distance and had an 'off day' physically. Thankfully a decent navigational performance kept me in the mix, 11th place but only about 3 minutes behind the leaders. My long race was far better and I enjoyed the complex and physically demanding slopes of Bigland. 4th place on the day was good enough to drag me up to a 5th place overall finish. Shortly after the JK I got the news that I had been selected to represent Great Britain at the first world cup races of the year, to be held in Ostfold Norway. I only had two weeks between selection and racing which was not ideal preparation, especially as I spent most of that time on a climbing holiday in Greece. Having reined in my ice cream and mythos consumption, I was excited to race internationally again.

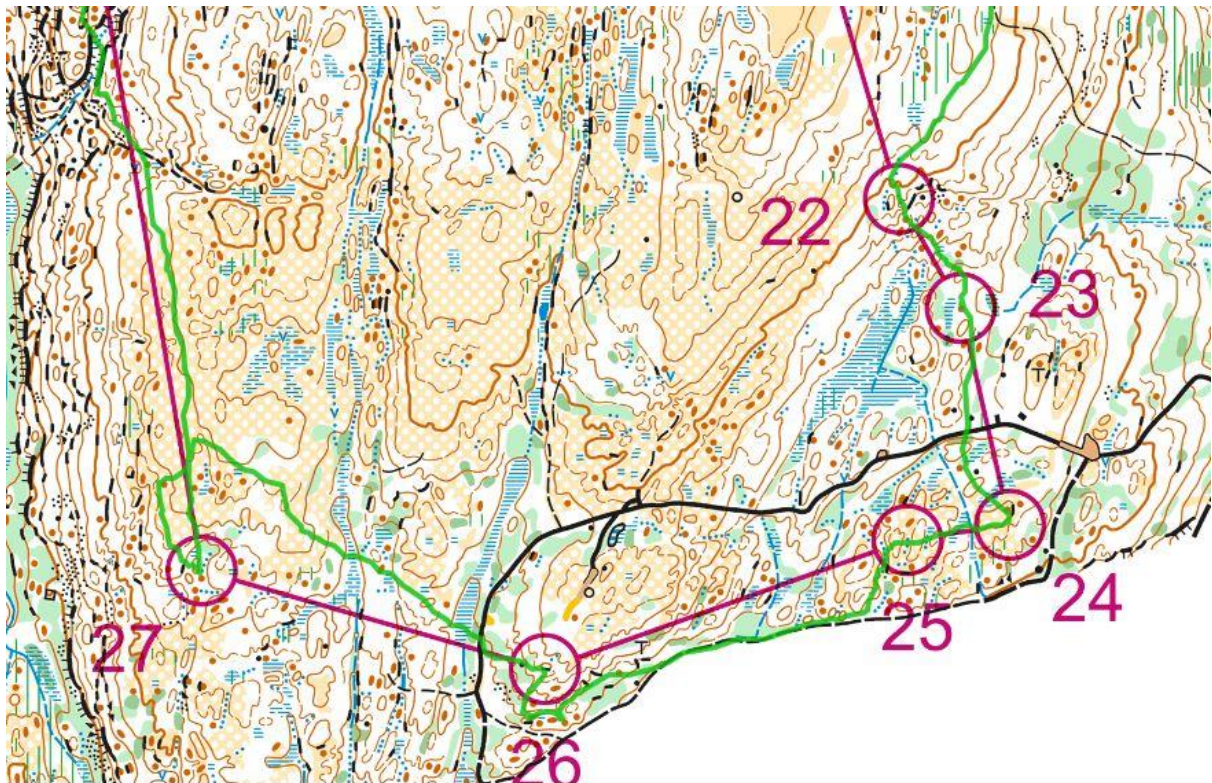
On arrival in Norway, I met up with Ralph Street and Niamh Hunter in Oslo and on our way south we stopped to train. There had been torrential rain and snow before our arrival and the forest was covered in about 6 inches of freezing water. Despite frozen toes the training was a lot of fun and it was good to begin to understand the terrain. We met up with the rest of the British team at our accommodation in Fredrikstad. We had one more day to prepare before the long race and spent it running on the model area.

International races have seeded start lists based on world ranking points and without lots of recent international racing I was starting quite early. Whilst I would be making tracks in the forest, I would not have to endure 5 hours in quarantine. Quarantine is a feature of all the biggest international races and requires athletes to enter before the first runners start and the TV coverage begins. No phones or communication devices are allowed in quarantine and this ensures a fair race. The first race was a 15km long distance. I had a good start and was mistake free until the final 20 minutes at which point fatigue began to creep in and I made a few big mistakes. I finished in 90th/122 and was the 5th Brit. Frustratingly I had been ahead of teammates Ali Thomas and Ben Mitchell until my mistakes in the final part of the race saw me fall behind. I think I was prepared for a 90-minute-long distance in the UK but on the international scene if the winning time is 95 minutes, I can expect to run closer to 2 hours. We had a rest day after the long and celebrated Ali's birthday with stacks of homemade waffles and Norwegian Brunost, a sweet brown cheese that goes great with Jam.

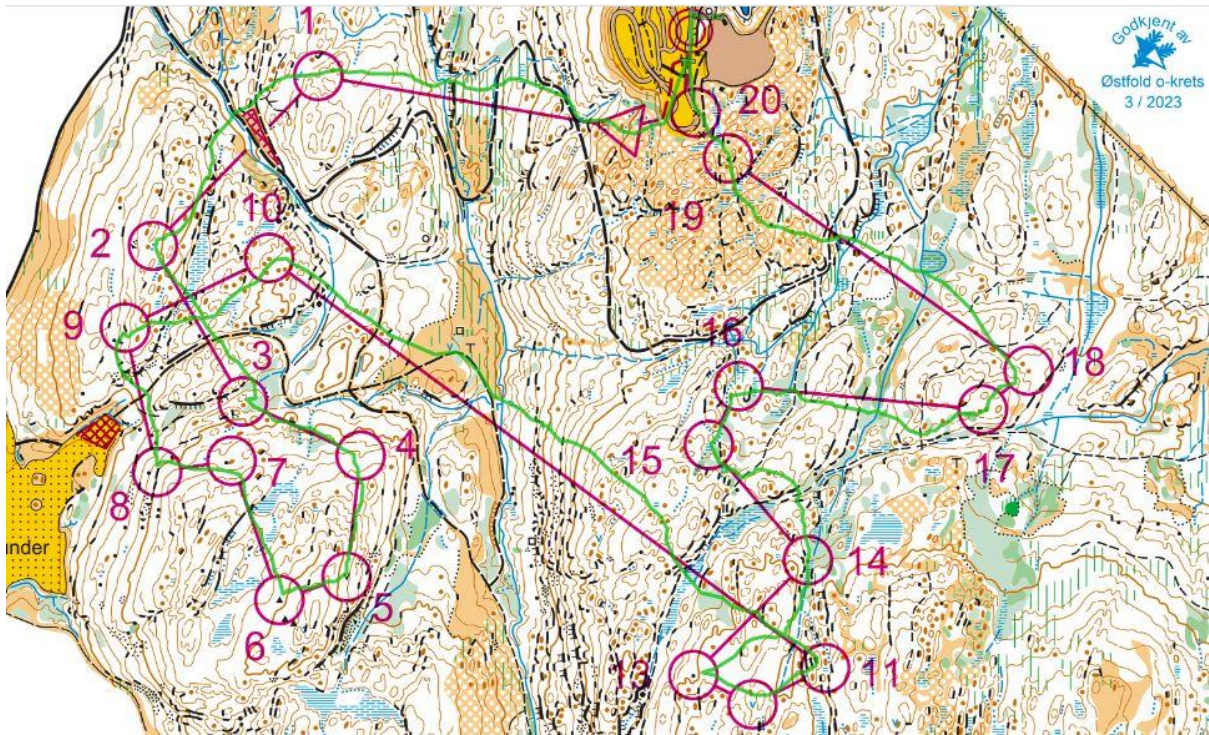
The middle race followed and I had a great run with almost no navigational errors. I finished 83rd/127 and was the 3rd Brit behind Ralph Street and Josh Dudley who both live in Scandinavia. Our final race

was the relay. I was running last leg for the British second team with Chris Smithard going first and Ali Thomas second. I enjoyed my run and caught and passed one other team. It was a brilliant week and I really enjoyed the fun and relaxed atmosphere amongst the GB team. The quality of the field at the world cup races is super high as demonstrated by my results after two decent races. I know that I need to work on my fitness if I want to close the gap to the best runners and I am super motivated to do so. Living in the lake district has certainly reminded me how great orienteering can be when you're not wading through waist deep brambles on areas you have run on countless times. I am excited to keep training and improving and hope to represent LOC and Great Britain again soon! Thank you to LOC, the NWOA and Sheffield University for their support.

Below I have attached some map extracts and my GPS trace.



Fatigue sets in at the end of the long distance with mistakes at 26 and 27. Over the three races I struggled every time we entered the semi-open areas. The transition from white forest to semi-open was very vague and the scrubby bushes obscured the contour shapes in the terrain.



A close to perfect run in the middle distance. Poor direction leaving control 14 cost me about 30 seconds but thankfully I was able to correct my direction and didn't lose too much time.



The new GB kit and some lovely Norwegian forest!