

Reflections on controlling a JK event – by Derek Allison

Having gained a lot of pleasure from volunteering, when I was asked in December to step in as a replacement controller for JK day 2 at Wass, despite the amount of work involved; I was happy to do so.

Most of the main decisions had been made, area, car parking, start, finish and Dennis the planner had produced 30 courses; all that was needed was to look after everything in the forest and the on the day controlling.

It was a 2 ¼+ hour drive to the forest, so most visits involved a minimum of 5 hours in the woods, long 10+ hour days.

During my initial visit in January to review the area, I spent a lot of time slipping around on muddy slopes following the very wet weather we had. The limestone rock was also slippery. Being positive, the area was varied. However, the west end was a particularly hideous bramble patch and I had great concerns over what we could offer the veteran competitors that was 'safe', without too much climb but interesting technically. One slight bonus was the number of deer; the whole forest had 'tracks' giving many good lines through the terrain.

Once I was familiar with the forest and the planner had started tagging controls in mid-January, I generally checked the freshly tagged controls within a few days. Some tapes had already been eaten by the deer. Some 'similar codes' were changed and a few similar looking features were changed.

When I reviewed the courses, although well planned using the area to its potential; I found that many courses had more than 10% climb; with the guidelines indicating 5% maximum. Many interesting legs diagonally crossing valleys had to be replaced with 'contouring legs' to get near the guide. The course lengths were based on the British Orienteering JK Event guidelines and last year's JK course lengths. At least one of the ratios in the Guidelines appeared 'wrong' and in the end I dictated the lengths/climbs to Dennis.

The map, produced by Dave Peel was good and the few changes requested in some control circles were quickly actioned by Dave despite him being heavily involved in Welsh 6 Day mapping.

Checking the sites descriptions, sizes, sides and which of a number is a big job for an event of 30 courses and 140 control sites, particularly when on the 1:15,000 maps the descriptions are different. We ended up with 3 different map files. I understand that day 3 had almost 200 controls?

Having started control site checking in the middle of January I quickly became aware that the printer's deadline of 13th February wasn't feasible. I rang and checked that

going away skiing for a week and sending them '10 days late' was acceptable. Dennis sent the 'final' map files during my skiing week and on my return I spent more than 10 hours checking, further cutting of circles, lines and moving numbers. A task that I was never really satisfied with. With convoluted course shapes; there were some places where 'seeing the next control' wasn't as obvious I'd liked despite moving the numbers to touch 'their' circle.

The completed map files were sent to the printer on the 25th February and the proofs arrived back on the 5th March, two minor changes were then made; a number '1' was moved on one course along with one crossing point on course 17, see later!

Due to problems with machines breaking at the printers, 2/3rds of the maps were delivered on 22nd March, just 4 days before the event, the other 1/3rd were delivered on the 23rd. All offset maps have to be counted and reviewed by the controller for 5 colours and I spent 10 hours checking maps on the Tuesday, and a further 3 hours on the Wednesday/Thursday. Weighing maps was an additional number check!

Following this check; I had concerns about the 'black printing' on courses 2, 14, 15 & 16. It was not 'solid', although boulders looked 'OK', the fine line rides near the west start were not as strong as I'd liked; this involved 4 courses and I didn't want to ask for all these to be reprinted at this late stage. If you had a 'grey map', I apologise, only two people mentioned it to me.

The other printing issue was course 17, the purple overprint was about 0.5mm SE of where it should have been on 100 of the 150 maps. I asked the printers to re print course 17, they did and they were delivered the following day; excellent!

The dry two weeks prior to the event was a real bonus, making the underfoot conditions the best they were in 3 months I'd been to Wass.

On the Thursday, I delivered all the maps to Yorkshire, checked the reprinted course 17 and went to Wass and checked 'one block' of 20 controls. On the 'glorious Friday', I checked the other 120 controls, taped routes and crossing points. I started at 10am and finished at 6.30pm, more than 8 hours of concentration, climbing up and down the steep slopes. On the Friday I did 20.6km and 1195m of climb checking controls, 2.5km and 200m climb on the Thursday. I think that this is really too much for an old fat bloke! We then discussed how the four of us were going 'split to wake up' 140 controls, I then slept from 9pm until 5am.

On the day, after waking everything up, checking the route to the start and giving the go ahead to start, I chatted to the road closure staff then ambled back to assembly and then checked the route back from the finish. After speaking to the early finishers on courses 29 & 30; I moved to the main finish and sat listening to finisher's comments. The vast majority of comments I heard were positive, many along the lines of 'it was much better than I'd expected or better than the last time I came'.

After everything I do, I reflect on what I'd do differently if the event was next weekend?

Firstly, I'd try to stick to the printing timetable, getting the maps 4 days before the event wasn't reasonable; having a skiing holiday at a crucial time was my 'fault'!

When I checked the 'recently moved and discussed over the phone' crossing point, just below control 112 on course 17, it was about 20m from where I had marked it. With a limited amount of blue/white tape I tried to make it more obvious. Learning point; don't allow late changes to make the organiser's job easier!

Crossing point across Wass Bank Road. I was never really happy about how we illustrated the crossing point on the map. The idea was that everyone would join and cross the road at the same point, run up the road then into the forest. Learning point, the way it was marked and the extensive taping didn't work and we should have either just used one crossing point symbol, southern one, or had a control there to force the issue. I think it was 20/30 seconds quicker to cut through the tapes, sorry.

White course. One track junction was 'tagged 3/4m along to lead' when the course took one track. We then changed the course along the other track and I failed to change the control's exact location. I will remember to recheck this 'micro siting' in the future.

The majority, but not all, winning times on most courses were in the correct range; although winning times in some classes were not.

I made 9 visits to the forest in total, spending more than 50 hours in the forest, more than 40 hours driving and more than 100 hours at a desk.

Next volunteering, the Start on day 3 at Kilnsey, then planner of the Tarn Hows Middle next Saturday!

Derek Allison

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