

The La Sportiva Lake District Mountain Trial, Sunday 15th September 2019

Planners' Report

Three courses were provided:

Classic: 27.2 km 2100m ascent 10 controls

Medium: 19.0km 1500m ascent 8 controls

Short: 12.6 km 1190m ascent 7 controls

Bad Weather courses were available, but not used. These were:

Classic: 18.0 km 1350m ascent 6 controls

Medium: 12.6km 1170m ascent 4 controls

Short: 9.0 km 880m ascent 4 controls

All courses were planned using 15 control sites. The bad weather courses used existing control sites; they allowed for some low-level routes to be taken and missed out the rockiest of the terrain. Crucially they also avoided the potentially problematic crossing of the River Esk.

This year all of the map preparation was done by the planners using a combination of Purple Pen and OCAD to do the artwork on top of a high resolution (600dpi) image of the Harvey Map. Following comments made last year, the scale used for each of the course maps was the largest that would fit on an A3 sheet. This resulted in the Classic using 1:30000, Medium 1:25000 and Short 1:20000. Circle/number sizes were scaled proportionately, making them noticeably larger than previous years. We had some text (crag names etc.) removed from the map by Harveys so they did not obscure important detail. We also made some map corrections (missing ponds etc.) using a combination of editing the bitmap and adding new features on the OCAD overlay. As in previous years, the maps were printed by BML on Pretex waterproof paper, laminated on both sides.

Controls were put out during the week before the Trial, starting on the Tuesday, partly because one the planners was out of action due to injury and also to allow time for them to be checked by the controller (Mike Hind). At Lingmel col only the control marker (ie. no SI box) was placed in advance due to the potentially vulnerable nature of the site; the SI box was taken there by the marshal (Dave Fenwick) on the day. There were no problems with controls being stolen, moved or otherwise interfered with, though the decision not to leave the SI box at Lingmel col was probably a good one given that there was a charity walk in the vicinity on the day.

The Classic Course provided significant route choice on most legs with Routegadget indicating that a large number of different routes were taken (including some we had not even thought of). Post-race comments indicated that competitors found it tough, though both the winning time and average of the top 5 times lie very much in the middle range when compared to the last 10 years. Perhaps the rough/rocky terrain of the first three fifths of the course affected those further down the field disproportionately.

It was slightly disappointing that, as far as we could tell, no-one on the Short course set off along Mickleden before climbing up Grunting Gill to the first checkpoint. By our calculation this route would be faster than the route everyone took, heading up The Band and dropping or contouring into the control, though it does depend on how much an individual competitor is able to run on each of these options. Mickleden was also intended to be a viable route for the Medium course, before heading up Rossett Gill and through Hanging Knotts to Ore Gap, but as far as we are aware only one person did this (or a variant on this). This lack of variation on both the Short and Middle courses obviously wasn't helped by the fact competitors leaving the map issue were visible to those waiting to start. A surprising number of competitors headed off up the Band without even a glance at their map.

There were 2 manned controls with timeouts specified, one for just the Classic and Medium courses and the other for all 3 courses. At a later date we introduced a third manned control (with no timeout) as we were concerned about the vulnerability of the site on Lingmel col. Many thanks to the marshals who manned these.

There were a few comments about the technical difficulty of some controls – “small orienteering-style reentrants” (or words to that effect). Initially we had more controls on obvious hill tops but we felt these could be unfair because competitors tend to stop after dibbing, giving the site away to those approaching. Maybe this wouldn't really have mattered, but after consultation with the controller we moved some controls off the hill tops onto very close, but less visible, adjacent features. Despite doing all his pre-event checking on misty days Mike had no problems finding the sites which were marked only by a very small stone cairn, so we don't feel anything was unfairly difficult. Having said that, if/when we plan again, we'd probably aim to use fewer orienteering-style controls in order to stay closer to the tradition of the event where route choice is more important than technical navigation.

A number of competitors on the Classic got back to the finish after course closing time (17:00). The majority were just over time and were allowed to finish, with the last completed trial at 17.24. However, 3 competitors got back after 18.00, with the last one arriving at 18.45. The problem was exacerbated by communication problems (to be discussed elsewhere). In a selection of other recent years, a significant number of competitors on the Classic have finished, and not been timed out, between 17.00 and 18.00 (13 in 2014). There will presumably be a discussion on how to handle the implementation of the course closing time in a more satisfactory way. This discussion also needs to cover individual control site closing times: how should they be calculated, how strictly should they be imposed, should the control remain in place after its closing time as a safety feature, should non-manned controls have closing times...

Many thanks and congratulations to Dave Wolfendale for organising his first Trial. Thanks also to Mike Hind for his hands-off but helpful controlling and to everyone else involved in the staging of the Trial.