

PLANNER'S COMMENTS

Alan Leakey

Well I must confess to more nerves before this event than anything else I have ever planned or organised. So the sense of relief and/or achievement when it was all over was enormous (although, after a 5am start, going off to Proms In The Park afterwards to celebrate was probably a step too far). Anyway, I've lots to say in these notes so please bear with me.

An essential part of urban orienteering, whatever the distance, is route choice so I tried to work that into as many legs as possible. Sometimes the difference in distance between the choices was small but I figured that the more decisions you had to make the more the pressure would build. Having said that then it is also important that the orienteering isn't effectively all over once the route choice has been made, so I tried to ensure that the fastest routes were the more complex ones. Obviously the Barbican offered the greatest challenges but I tried not to overuse it, given that we will go back in the future. It was also a deliberate decision to go there late on in most courses so that your brain was already in danger of overload. Judging by the number of comments that I received about the challenges of the courses it seems like this strategy paid off and most people made mistakes somewhere along the line. Just about everyone I spoke to relished those challenges which just shows what Urban events can bring to our sport, especially at a time of year when the bracken is high.

I consciously set out to increase the winning times on the longer courses by about 25% to give a 50 minute winning time, with similar increases down the courses. This was partly to maximise the experience and partly because the area can take it. It looks like I overcooked it a bit on the shorter courses although there are some extenuating circumstances to take into consideration. For information, at first study it looks like the running distance this year was close to 50% greater than the straight line, up from 35% or so last year. I would be interested in any feedback from people on any of the courses on this or any other topic (email address at the end of this article).

Thanks...

To the Controller, Steve McKinley, for firm but clear direction, a pleasure to work with as ever

To my control hangers and collectors. A rather different task than usual when all controls had to be put secured to immovable objects using metal cables and then cut off with bolt cutters at the end of the event!

And of course, to the Mapper, Ollie O'Brien, for yet another outstanding map.

Vandalised and non working controls...

Despite the use of metal cables and straps to chain controls down we did have one control where the SI box was stolen (106 in Lincolns Inn Fields) This required the culprit to break the metal strap threaded through the dibber hole in the box! However, the banner and clipper were left intact so competitors were able to punch their map and continue without any significant problem (presumably they didn't look shiny enough). We sent out a replacement SI box by high speed bicycle but strangely enough we ended up with two #106 SI boxes at the end of the day and we have no idea how 😊

In addition a number of people reported failed boxes. In all cases when we checked the box it was found to be working okay. My suspicion is that in many cases the boxes had got twisted round and people were dibbing from the back of the box, which is less responsive. I repositioned a couple of boxes but none were replaced. In all cases, if people punched their maps then they have been reinstated.

Moving Control Sites...

On the Tuesday evening before the event the Controller and I found two completely unexpected sets of building work with corresponding blocked passageways and one completely inaccessible control site. As

a result the mapper had to make last minute changes and we had to move two control sites. The first of these was the building work in the Temple on the way from control 119 to 109. The mapping of the out of bounds and the siting of the control was fine, however my changes to the course resulted in OCAD reinserting solid lines going to 119 and 109, a fact that I somehow managed to miss at midnight on Tuesday (with the maps due to be printed at 9am on Wednesday). As a result I failed to cut the lines leading into 119, which caused problems for some people on courses 2M and 3, for which I apologise. The second problem was around control 133, in the elevated centre of the roundabout in the south west corner of the Barbican area. Since the original site was now completely inaccessible we moved the control site to the foot of the stairs, which was accurate but did leave some ambiguity about access that I did not see at the time and would not have been there if we had been able to keep the original control site. However the map was accurate.

Out of Bounds and 'Uncrossable' boundaries...

The Controller had warned me that there was a danger of people crossing the Out of Bounds dual carriageway immediately to the north of control 122 so I put a warning note in the start lanes and the two of us went to police this area at the start of the event. Rather more people than I expected made the mistake of running down the side road towards the dual carriageway, perhaps put off by the earlier crane works. Of course there was no issue with that and most turned around and went and found the correct route. But several decided to ignore the purple OOB and risk the traffic, with a view to climbing over the central barrier, sliding down the concrete slope and then heading for the control. We called them back and subsequently had to have the area patrolled for the duration for the event. It is impossible to believe that anyone there didn't know exactly what they were doing. Maybe, we should have just stood on the far side and just taken the numbers of survivors?

The other issue was near control 131 in the Barbican, part of the London Wall. It is clear that a number of people went through a gate signed as Private Property in what was marked as an uncrossable wall/fence and then a second such gate on the way to one of several controls to the east, thus gaining some advantage over fellow competitors. Plus some used the reverse of this route to recover from a poor route choice to 131. During planning I had already moved this control to ensure that it was not next to this boundary and so that crossing it would require a drastic change in direction after exiting the control to come to it. It is reasonable to suppose that the member of the public who harangued a number of runners in the area of the control about private gardens had been angered by these transgressors. So we have a number of runners who crossed a boundary mapped as 'Uncrossable' to gain an advantage and who also caused problems for other competitors and potentially the event as a whole. We do not have the names or numbers of any competitors who took this short cut, but if you care to look at the results I sure that you will see some people with amazingly fast times on the leg exiting this control...

Cranes and things...

There are always a couple of road closures in the City over a weekend as heavy items of equipment are installed or removed and this one was no exception. The problem is that the link between a road closure announcement and what actually happens on the ground can be rather tenuous. Thus we had one planned closure where nothing happened on the ground at all. Another, north of Fleet Street, where there was a crane present, which blocked off more than we expected. And a third, which wasn't on our list at all, where a crane blocked the road between controls 1 and 2 on the longer courses and was encountered by a lot of runners. We hope that you weren't put off too much by these, although I know some of you had to make some rapid detours, they are unfortunately a fact of life in such an environment.

Underpasses...

It is clear that many people do not really understand the mapping of Underpasses and Subways under the ISSOM standards, which is why we put a special explanation in the final details. It is probably the weakest part of the standards but I can't personally think of any better way to map them. So it really pays everyone to take time to learn - look at the examples on your copy of the map

And finally...

It is the nature of these kind of notes to focus on problems and issues but I am pleased to say that most people seemed to really enjoy the event and the challenges that we set. I certainly got an enormous buzz from listening to finishers comparing their routes and discovering options that they had missed during the race. I look forward to seeing you all next year, when we aim to be even bigger and better – make sure to tell your friends what they missed!

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