

## Planner's Comments

This has been a crazy, full-on 12 months of preparation for me. Having just sold our business after 24 years (an hotel in Cheltenham), I felt I would now have the time to take on the role of planner of the individual courses for both of the days. Then Pat, the organiser, asked me if I would also make "a few updates" to the map, so I agreed to do this too, thinking it would really mainly involve checking the vegetation. However, I soon realised that much more work was needed to get the area up to my usual mapping standards. With the help of LiDAR, 32 survey days of 8 or 9 hours plus an equal number of full days sat on the computer at home, the totally revised map took shape. The worst areas of bracken were carefully mapped, which we knew would be important for an event at the end of September. Every single one of the myriad of ditches was re-surveyed using a combination of LiDAR, GPS and compass. I hope this made navigation through these areas more reliable than previously? In addition to the mapping and planning, as our club's fixture secretary, the access permissions also fall to me, so yes, a great deal of effort! Hence, it is a great relief and very satisfying for me that everything went so well and to hear plenty of favourable comments.

Planning was somewhat restricted by the three extensive areas made out-of-bounds to us by Forestry England. These included 2 areas recently designated as wetland areas, plus a large area on top of the hill at Staple Edge which is infected by *Phytophthora*, meaning huge swathes need to be felled there. The long, narrow OOB block running from north to south was the most difficult restriction I faced, as this meant all Day1 longer courses having to cross it via the one allowed path and all shorter courses being squeezed into a small space to the north of this area.

From the start, I tried to identify some good, longer route-choice legs. I am very pleased to see on Routegadget that people have taken a good selection of options, which was my hope! One of these route choices on Day1 was along the fisherman's path beside the lake. I spoke to the fishing club about this and they decided to close the lake to fishermen until 2pm that day, which was extremely nice and helpful of them.

Late on Friday, as we were putting out the last of the controls for the first day, Charles (controller) and I discovered the very recent forestry work that had created a number of new open areas, lined with difficult to pass hedges of brushings. Unfortunately, we had several controls in that area, used by many courses on both days (the only area of overlap between the days!) We pondered what to do about this and following Charles suggestion, I quickly sketched out the extent of these clearings and hedges using the GPS strapped to my cap (which I managed to lose in all the panic), so that we could make a better decision. Should we void some legs or make taped routes through or provide a correction map in the start lanes or just provide an overview map at the Start to show the affected area? It was Charles who came up with the idea of providing a small insert map to be given to all competitors on the affected Day 1 courses. I was quite sceptical about whether we could achieve this in such a short time, but that was eventually what we went for. We left the forest at 8.20pm, well after darkness had fallen, drove the 45 minutes home, ate some dinner, then I called our club map printing officer, Ian Phillips, who readily agreed to do the work. I spent time to update the map file with the corrections I had surveyed, sent this to Ian for him to print, cut up and staple to the main map. This took him half the night and then he was up again very early in the morning to be in charge of the starts. What a superstar! I did hear feedback that some people felt this was overkill and unnecessary, but I think without it, there would have been an awful lot of confusion in that area. We felt that the Day2 courses were less badly affected by these changes, so decided not to keep Ian up for a second night in a row and went for the start lane map corrections instead.

Planning the Day2 Caddisfly individual courses was a novel experience for me, as I was provided with about 40 ready-made control sites from Paul's VHI Relay courses. I added path controls for the

junior courses and a few extra, far-flung controls to give the longer courses enough length and then decided how to join up all these control sites to make good courses. Again, I tried to design some good route choice legs, and again Routegadget points to these working out okay.

Throughout the whole process, my controller, Charles, has provided a gentle, guiding hand to keep me going in the right direction. I had never planned such a prestigious and important event before, so his experience and calmness was essential for me. He helped me get the course lengths about right. He suggested various small tweaks here and there to make the courses fair and to keep controls away from the more vague or brackeny "bingo" areas. He even helped me put out/wake up controls on the Saturday morning, which was way beyond the call of duty! To agree to take on two consecutive days over a large area, with the competition covering various individual championships, a relay and a chasing start was truly admirable. Thank you Charles.

Charles commented afterwards on the good spirit in our club between all of the many helpers. He is absolutely right and I am proud of our club for all pulling together and putting on such a successful weekend. To sit and watch the enormous complexities of the VHI Relay and the Chasing Start running so smoothly simultaneously on Sunday was really something quite special.

Overall, I have thoroughly enjoyed this experience, although I think I have learned not to agree to take on quite so much next time!

Greg Best