

A weekend in the sand dunes of Southern Holland!



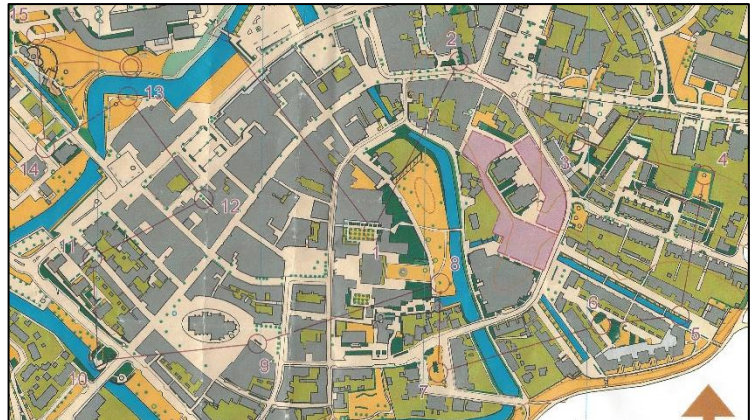
Each year my daughters and I like to try and find a European O weekend to do together. This year it was a little tougher than normal as Rachel had used up all her annual leave for her honeymoon earlier in the year, so we had to find something that could fit between a Friday night and Monday morning!

Memories of an epic in 2014 suggested the Veluwe 2 days – just an hour or so's drive from Amsterdam and with one day on open and forested sand dunes used in the past for the Dutch National Championships, it looked like it could be a good short weekend. With so many cheap flights on offer to Amsterdam, we all flew separately from different corners of the UK and met up in the arrivals hall at Schipol, arriving from Manchester, Birmingham, Southend and Southampton!

The weekend started on the Friday night with Day 0 - the organisers had added an urban night sprint relay to the event, giving us three events over the weekend.

Day 0 – Urban night sprint relay

Friday night saw us in the old town of Wageningen for a fast and furious night sprint relay. Each leg was 3.5km actual running distance and the leading teams were back in less than 15 minutes! We adopted a somewhat more sedate pace, with our leg times ranging from 23 minutes to 30 minutes. The area made for an interesting sprint race – quite a few alleyways to lose yourself in and the canal added to the route choice decisions on several of the legs.



Leg 1 on the night sprint relay

The planning was good and made the most of the area. The courses had been sliced and diced to give 9 different leg options and, with only 30 teams in the event, meant that you were running your own race most of the time.

Day 1 – Long distance in the sand dunes!

Saturday was the race we had been looking forward to – a classic race in the sand dunes – and it did not disappoint!

The terrain was a mix of wide open sand dunes and runnable forest areas with lots of contour detail. Nothing in Holland is very high but it goes up and down with a very high frequency!! Courses were well



View across the sand dunes mid race – lots of lost people!

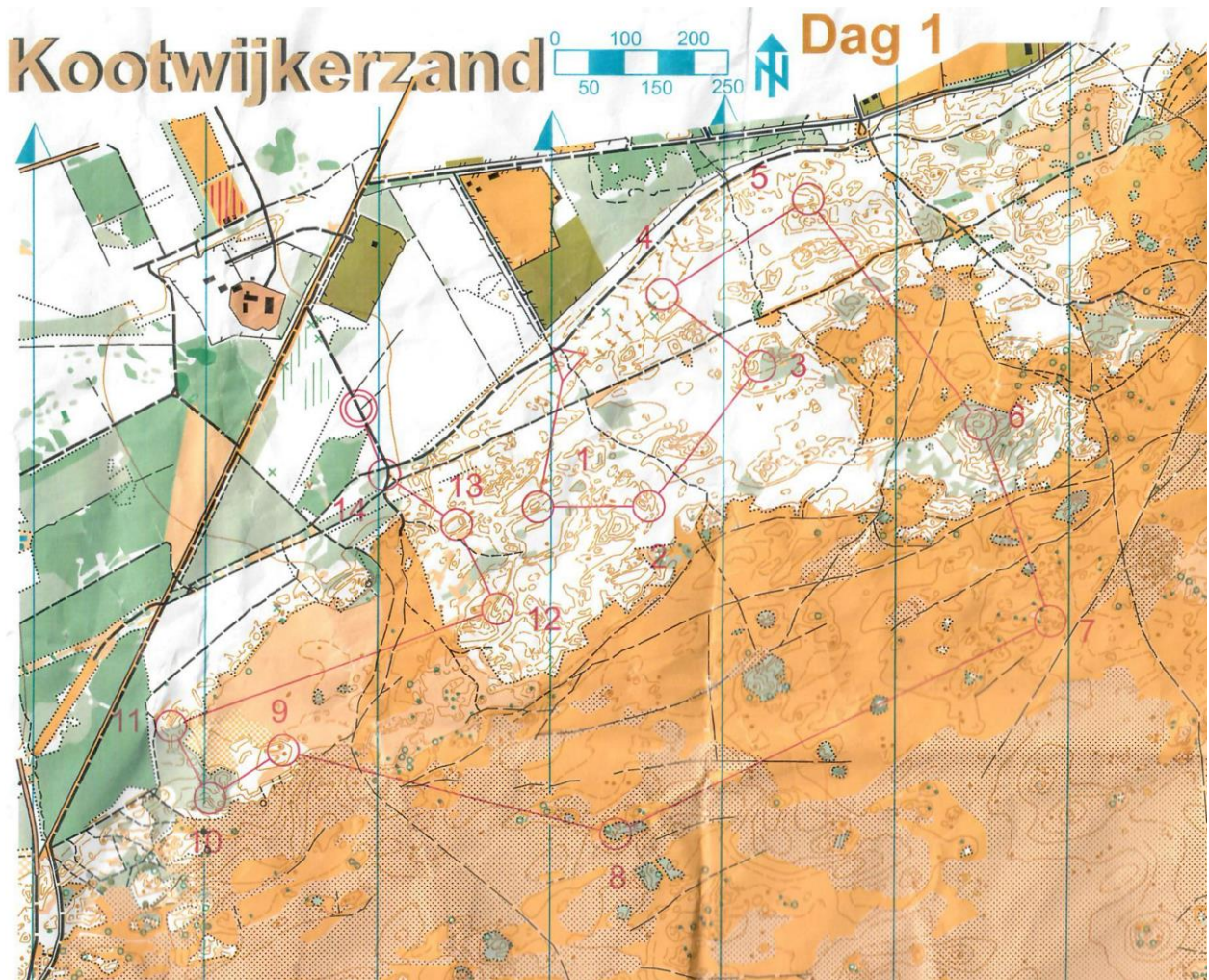
planned to ensure that the few line features on the map were of little use. The best route was almost always the straight line and there was lots of fine contour navigation to keep you on your toes!



Rachel trying not to get lost in the dunes

The area was a challenge for many people and there were lots of lost looking souls out on the courses and some long times posted on the results board.

Helen and I had some good runs (2nd and 4th respectively), with the area playing to our strengths of navigation over speed!



M70 Course

Day 2 – Middle distance

Sunday was a middle distance event on a forested (and bilberry bushed!!) sand dune area near Ede. There was quite a bit of contour detail, but with many paths and other line features, navigation was not too tricky and correspondingly times

were fast. Unfortunately courses were constrained by bans on running over snake habitat according to the planner!! We didn't have enough energy left in our legs to speed round the courses and so despite our good performances on day 1 ended up 'out of the medals'. Disappointing as the bespoke pottery plates that had made for the event prizes looked quite good!



Me – trying desperately to engage the brain on Day 2

The best thing about the day was the excellent café at the event centre, serving excellent *erwtensoep* – a traditional Dutch pea soup, with meat of course! Very welcome after a long run in the cold!

We headed back for the airport pretty quickly after the event, having opted for the afternoon rather than evening flights. Everything worked out well and we were back in our respective homes by 5:30, ready for another working week!

The event is run every year and makes a cheap and easy weekend orienteering break – we would certainly recommend it and will probably be back again! In 2018, the event is moving slightly further north (if that is possible whilst still remaining in Holland!) and being organised by OLV Minor. They are promising 3 days (even though it's the Veluwe 2 days again!) of fast orienteering with challenging detailed contour terrain. The Saturday is a world ranking event, so is likely to be popular and there is often a small (300) entry limit for this event. So, if you are keen it would be worth getting your entry in early!

- ▶ Friday October 23, 2015 – Night sprint in the old inner-city of Harderwijk
- ▶ Saturday October 24, 2015 – Middle distance (WRE), Zandenbos
- ▶ Sunday October 25, 2015 – Classic distance, Zwolse Bos