

More Balkan Orienteering

Philip Cooper

It is 4.30 in the morning and we are headed down the M1 to Luton Airport for the early morning Wizz Air flight to Sofia in Bulgaria. Great excitement as our previous experiences of O in Macedonia and Serbia suggest that we are in for some real forest orienteering (See 'Downfall of Orienteering' www.youtube.com/watch?v=26cq16X7kq4).

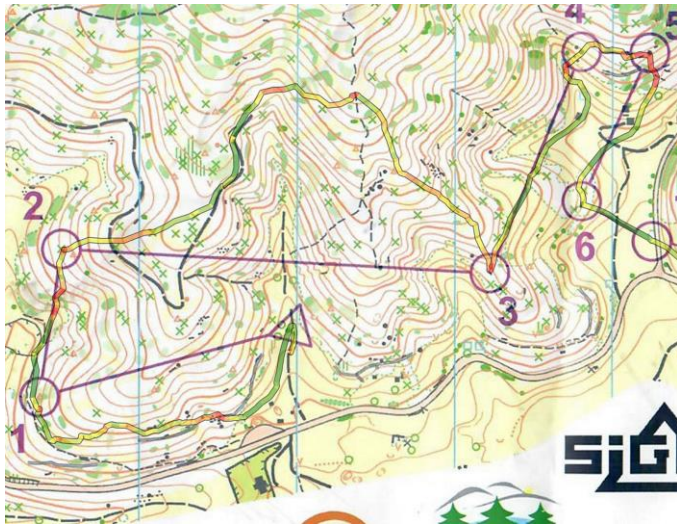
By the late afternoon we are drinking tea in our apartment in Plovdiv – Bulgaria's second city. A couple of days exploring the city's hills and the Roman ruins and we headed for Chepelare in the Rhodope mountains.

Variant 5 days is organised by the Variant Club which has a twinning arrangement with a Swiss club, so the main opposition are the local Bulgarians and a coach load of fit looking Swiss. The event centre was in the Coop hotel at the top of the pass (1350m) above Chepelare and the maps surrounded the hotel.

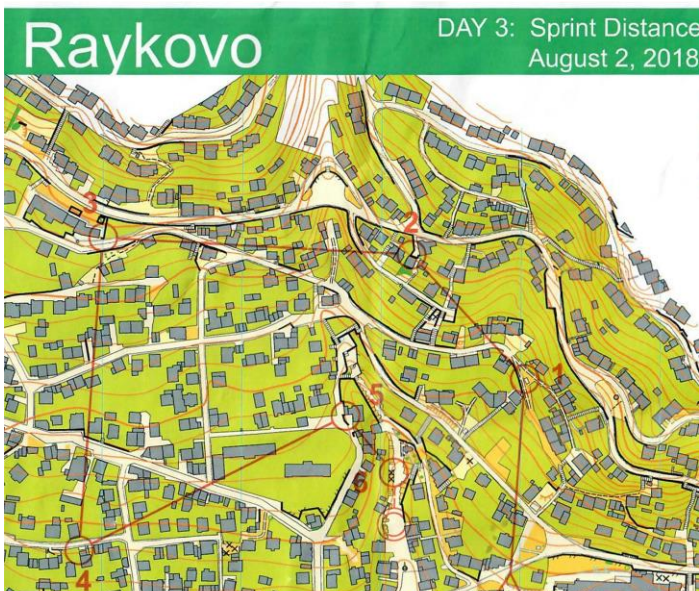


We register and collect our impressive event tops.

By the next day things have taken a turn for the worse and it is raining steadily as we head for the Day 1 start. Nonetheless it is warm at 22°. It is a middle distance race. It all goes well until control 9 where I misread the code on the longish leg to 9 and spend a while looking for 64 rather than 32, which of course I hit spot on!! Further confusion as the map uses the latest ISSOM spec which has interesting symbols for veg boundaries and gullies!! Not a good start 9 minutes down on the Swiss.



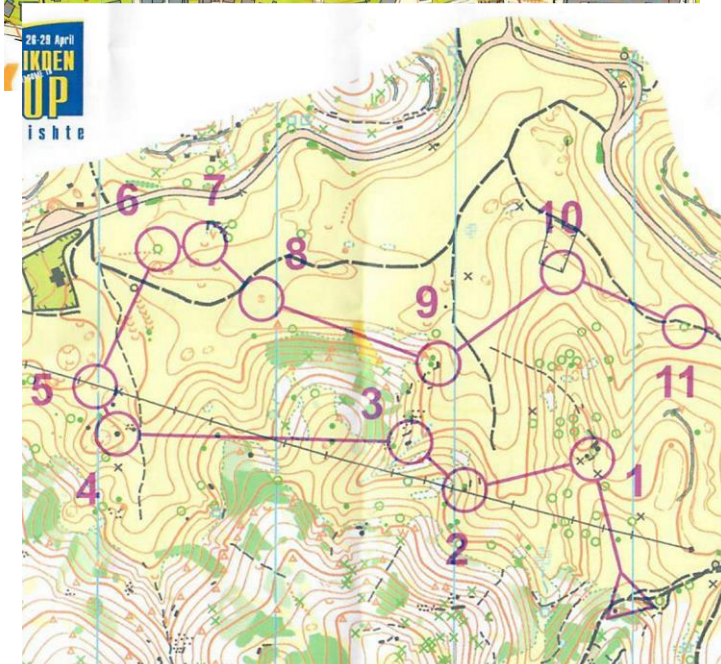
The weather brightens up for the long race on Day 2. No serious mistakes and I feel positive until I see the times – over 15 mins down on the Swiss. Despite feeling pleased with my route choice and execution from 2 to 3 I think was too slow and the smart money was on a quick dash through the open areas to the south.



For Day3 we head over the mountains to the town of Smolyan for the Sprint Race.

No big mistakes but still give away a couple of minutes to the Swiss – just not fast enough on the uphill sections.

For Day 4 we are back at the hotel but on the other side of the pass. The prestart winds up the hill to the edge of the forest. We all wonder if it will be more or less runnable than Days 1 and 2. The forests are very open – no brambles, no bracken – but occasional green patches and frequent windblown, but nothing to prevent straight line running except the hills!!



The planner has fooled us all, and all the courses head over the ridge and into the open for a fast and furious middle distance race. No excuses only explanations of my below par performance. I think 4 is a boulder on a hill rather than a boulder on the side of a large depression, so I end running up the nearest available hill!!

Day 5 is a long race with a chasing start. I have no hope of catching the Swiss so just resolve to end on a high.

| Variant 5 Days | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| Stage 5 - Long 04.08.2018 | | | |
| Chip | 9991947 | Stno | 261 |
| Philip Cooper | | | |
| WIM-LOC-DVO | | | |
| M70 | | | |
| Start | Finish | Time | |
| 10:57:00 | 11:41:19 | 44:19 | |
| Intermediate Top 3 | | | |
| 1 | Peter Wegmueller | 44:03 | 0:00 |
| 2 | Philip Cooper | 44:19 | +0:16 |
| 1(59) | 4:37 | 4:37 | 2 |
| 2(31) | 2:05 | 6:42 | 2 |
| 3(42) | 3:35 | 10:17 | 1 |
| 4(33) | 5:58 | 16:15 | 1 |
| 5(52) | 5:46 | 22:01 | 2 |
| 6(54) | 6:38 | 28:39 | 1 |
| 7(37) | 2:14 | 30:53 | 1 |
| 8(45) | 10:28 | 41:21 | 1 |
| 9(88) | 1:12 | 42:33 | 2 |
| Finish | 1:46 | 44:19 | 2 |

Both the forest and the course are splendid.

I hesitate at 5 but otherwise things are pretty clean. I am impressed by my route choice and execution of the long leg from 7 to 8.

They have gps for the Elite runners and a display adjacent to the finish.

Your results slip has your position at each control –never seen this before. So my run to 8 put me in the lead, but I lost it over the last two legs. I finish 19secs down (in 45 mins) on the leading Swiss runner.

An excellent 5 days – where next – there is a suggestion of Montenegro.

