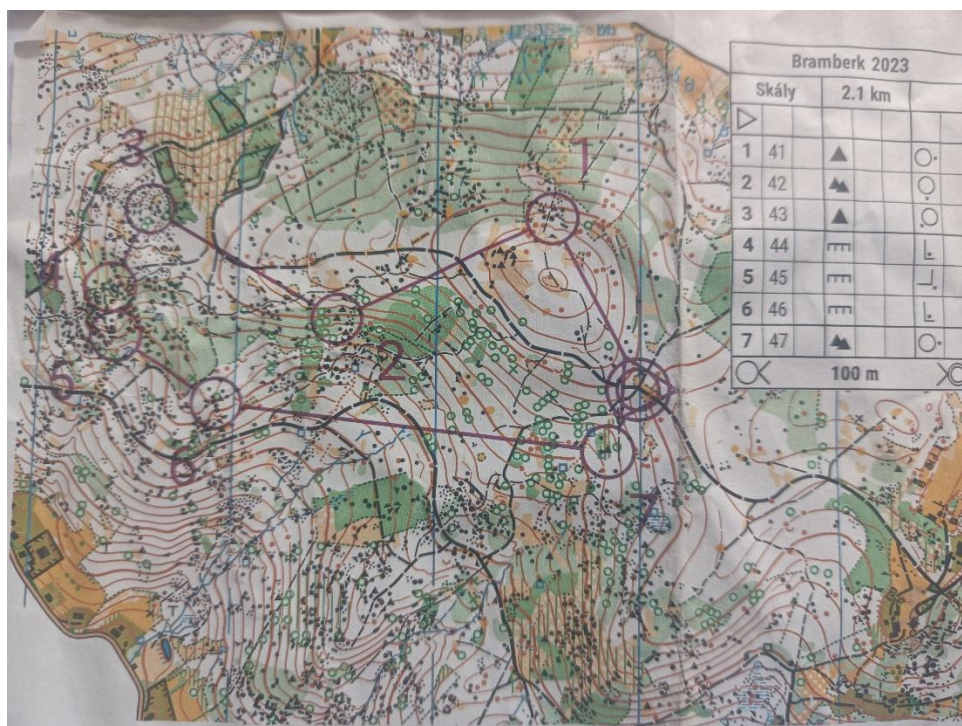


Czechia Tour 2023

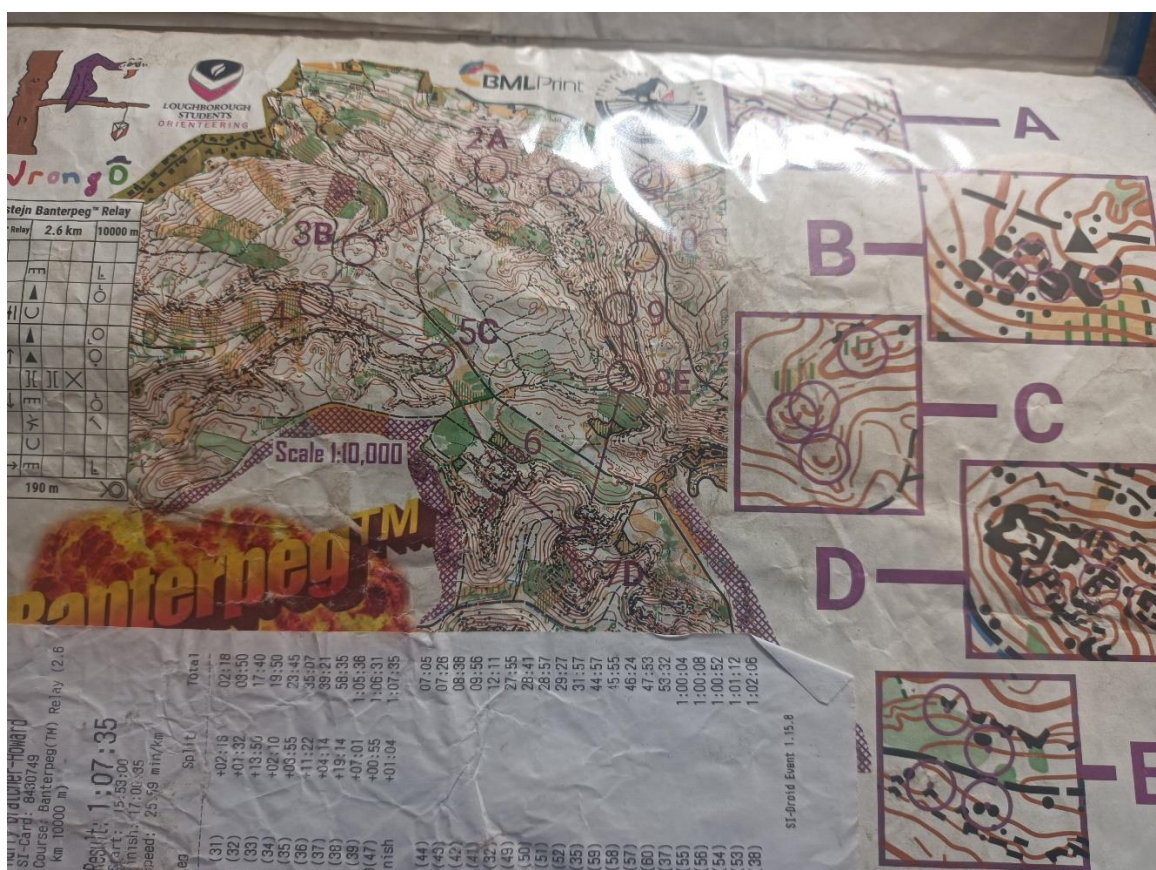
After a long season of many trips away to race, I was thrilled to be selected for the JROS 16s tour to the Czech Republic. The tour is based at a lodge called Potkávárna u Havrana in the Jizera Mountains near the city of Liberec and ran for the first time last year.

In the north of Czechia there are two types of terrain: “mountain” and “sandstone”. We arrived on Saturday 12th August after half a day sightseeing in Prague. Our first day was based on the local mountain of Bramberk, where we completed courses to get to know how to identify key features on Czech maps, and how to negotiate the steep rocky slopes. The afternoon was a chaotic 2-man 6-leg relay on a 1:2000 map of an especially steep area which was tricky yet fun.



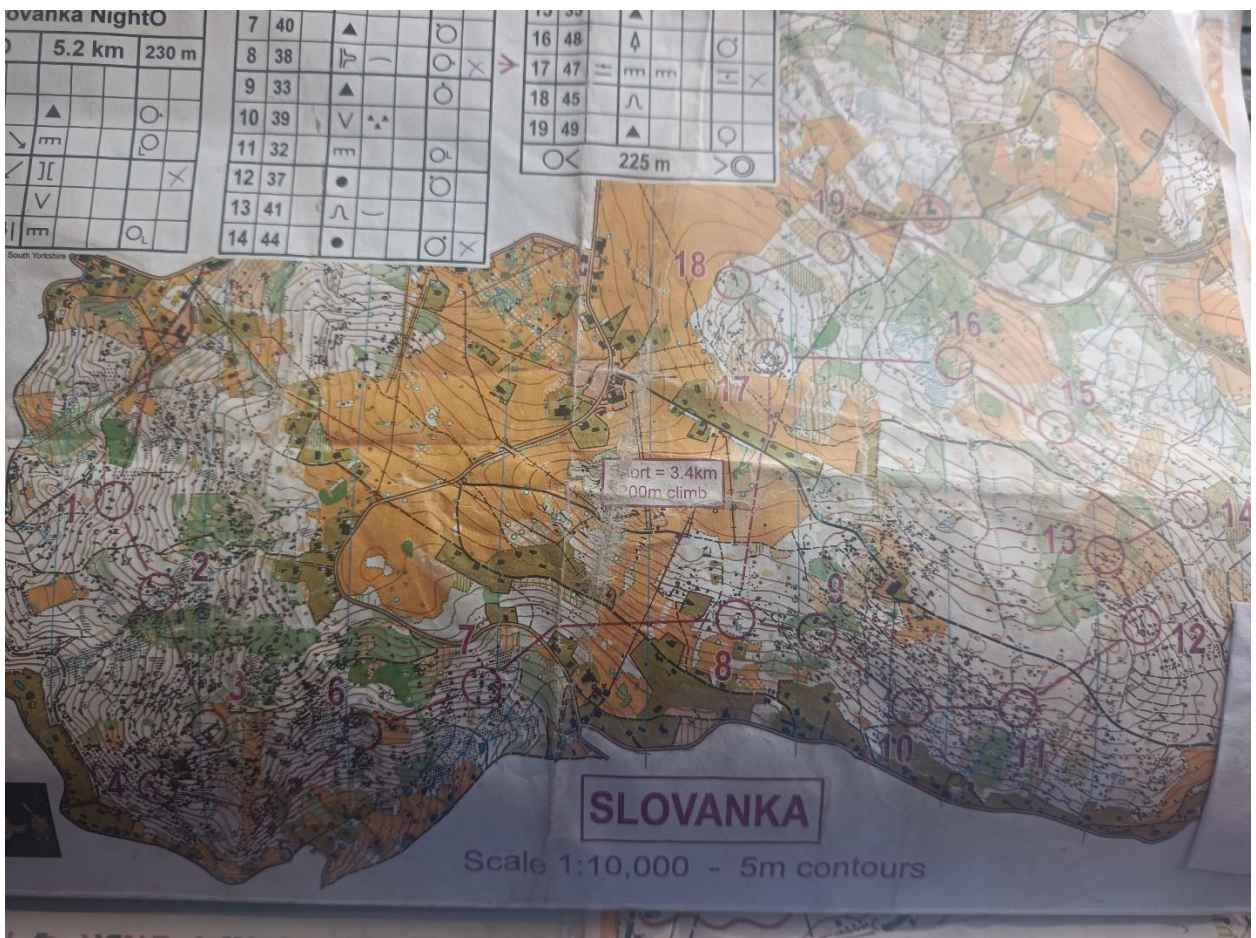
Day 2 saw us travel south to Valdstejn Castle for our first taste of sandstone maps. These sandstones are all 10m+ high rock pillars on some very steep slopes. It was more like rock climbing/scrambling than running at times! The morning consisted of some short leg courses in and around the rocks, plus some routechoice work (round on the paths was nearly always best...) The afternoon entertainment was a peg race with a twist. A peg race is like a 1-man relay, but if you are one of the first to a control, you have to take a clothes peg and complete an extra loop of controls. The twist? The peg loops were around the edge of the map, so you

had to work out where on the map it was before setting off to punch the controls. I finished with 4 pegs, in 3rd place. I really enjoy fun relays so had a lot of fun on the exercise!



The third day involved a trip to Kalich, Mala Skala. We started with a line in some massive sandstones and then worked on speed with some orienteering intervals. The afternoon involved exploring some very impressive rocks and then a swim in the local river. It was 25C plus the whole week so the end of day swims were very much needed! That night we went back into the mountains for a long night O course. Mine was going really well until some silly mistakes led to me losing a LOT of time, and I was out until nearly 11pm! The course was tricky, a bit scary and quite fun at times!





After a rest day which involved a fun micro sprint involving 4 controls in each circle and no control codes (which I won by a good margin after not getting any mispunch penalties), a trip to the water park and several matches of a volleyball variant against some local Czech holidaymakers, we journeyed to Supi Hora, an impressive sandstone area next to the areas used for the 2021 World Championship long and the 2023 World Cup Long. The training focused on route choice (up and down or 1km round?) and navigating the detailed slopes. We finished the day with Vampire Orienteering, which is a crossover between tag and micro-orienteering. Basically, the vampires (people “on it”) have to steal other competitors control cards, who then become the new vampires. It was very tactical and utterly chaotic, but so much fun.



The penultimate day was the start of the racing, a middle race on the sandstone area of Drabovna. It was very tricky, and a 7 minute mistake left me in 6th place, a good result that would have been really good otherwise! The afternoon was downhill training on a steep slope

in preparation for the long tour champs the next day.



The final day of the tour meant the long tour champs on the local mountain of Bukova Hora, used for the Middle World Championships in 2021. I had a good race with some good route choices, and finished 4th, but only 3 seconds of bronze... After a mistake on the first control I ran fairly clean, including number 7 in the thick green. The final entertainment of the tour was a micro relay incorporating the grounds of the lodge where we were staying – and all four floors! The tour ended with a trip to a local tower and cave before the trip back to Prague and our flight home.



Thank you to everyone involved with running the tour on masterminding the most fun and enjoyable tour that I have ever been a part of! Thank you also to WIM and SWOA for supporting me financially on the trip.

Harry Bratcher-Howard