

Orienteering on the Level – 36 hours in Holland!!

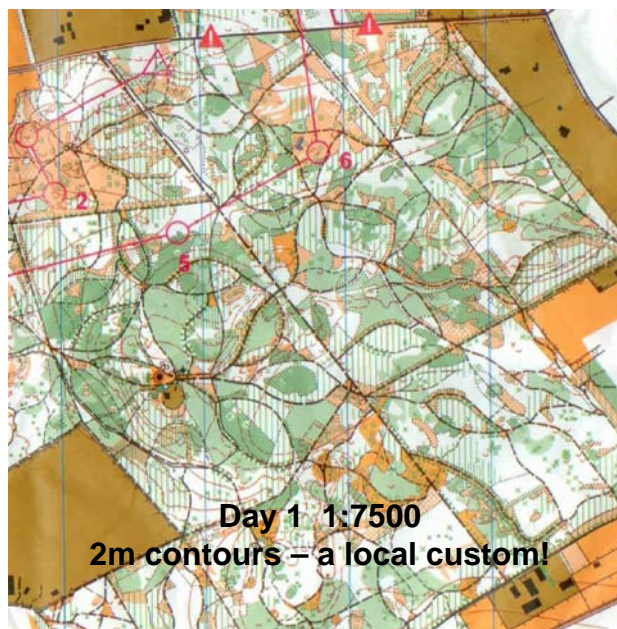
It was at the Lakes 5 Days that a flyer appeared for a weekend's orienteering in Holland. After the 400m climb to the start on day 4 the prospect of Dutch orienteering had its appeal!!

A quick visit to Kayak threw up early morning flights to Amsterdam from Southampton, Birmingham and Southend all landing in a 30 minute slot, and surprise, surprise three more flights back late on Sunday all close together as well. Now that Team Cooper is scattered around the country meticulous planning is essential!!

At first we thought train and bike in the Dutch style might be the way forward, but the prospect of a rainy weekend in late October made the offer of Helen's Hertz points very attractive.

So on Saturday 25th October we rendez-voused in Schiphol Airport at just after 9. Our start was a little traumatic – EasyJet had put Rachel's cabin bag in the hold as she boarded in Southend and some light fingered baggage handler had helped himself to her wallet!! Moral: if EasyJet take your bags, make sure you take your goodies. Some hasty calls to cancel cards and we were off in our dodgem car - actually a Citroen C1!!

A hour along the motorways and we were headed South down the by roads to Lunteren. The orienteering was on the heathland areas North of Arnhem, the open parts of which were the drop zone for Operation 'Market Garden' in 1944.



Our abilities in Dutch were severely tested – the final approach road looked to be closed, but we understood not a word, so as there was nothing in the way we kept going!! We wound down the window at the car park entrance, to be greeted in rapid Dutch!! But no worries everybody speaks better English than you!!

Day 1's Event Centre was in the Dutch equivalent of an English Country pub. Top local offerings were Pea soup and Apple slice.

A longish 1.5km walk to the start with storm clouds gathering. Views of the forest suggested it would be a bit like Shearwater (nr Longleat) minus the hills!!

It was a middle distance race, so lots of short legs. There were lots of paths full of twists and turns, rough brushings in many blocks, and areas of thicker

forest. Most disconcerting were the open areas. We were expecting nothing more than knee high in these areas, but if the surrounding trees were 20m high an open area could include trees at head height!! Apart from that the mapping was pretty good.

We finished just as the heavens opened. All finishers got a packet of local waffles – delicious!! We managed a 1 (Helen W35), 4 (Philip M65) and 6 (Rachel W21).

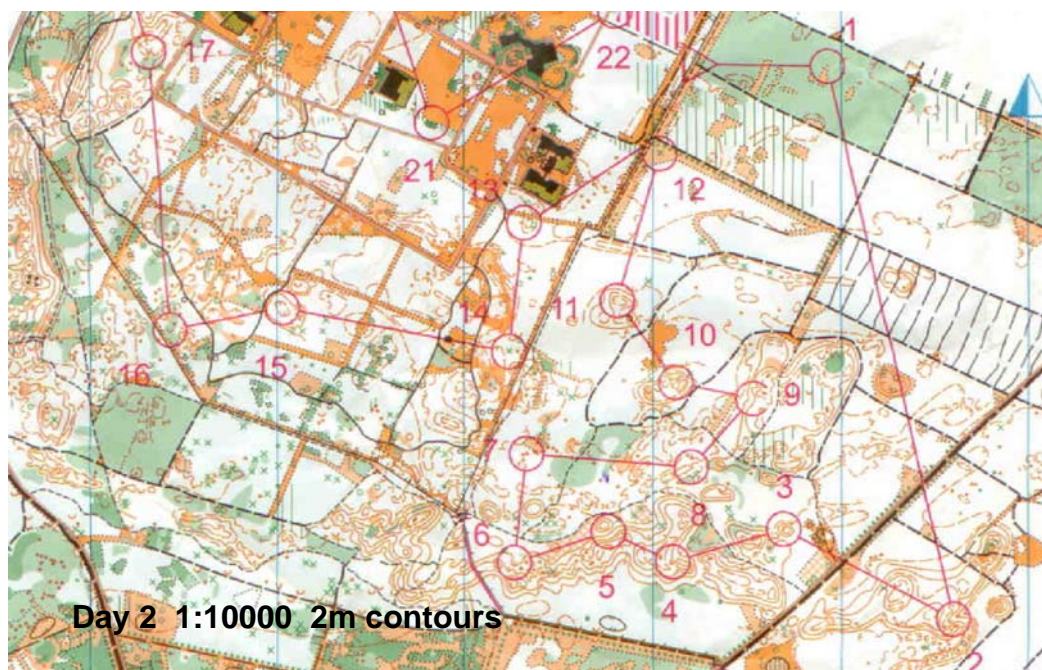


Pippowagen

The wonders of the internet had found us a B&B about 10km away and a stone's throw from the Day 2 Event Centre. A little quirky – hay was provided if you had brought your horse – and we had a room in the farmhouse together with a Pippowagen!!

With an hour or so to spare early on Sunday we visited Oosterbroek and the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery – most everything was closed on a Sunday morning in this very conformist area. Day 2 was in an impressive park which was home to a community supporting adults with learning and other difficulties. They ran the café that was the competition centre.

The final details had promised us 'flat and varied forest with some high hills



and hillocks- covered with medium to high bilberry bushes'. Well high is relative, but some were certainly steep and there was lots of contour detail, and despite the bilberries the going was fast.

It was certainly more fun the Day 1 and a long distance event to extend the fun!!



Our thoughts of mounting the podium were severely dashed – the locals seemed to know how to run extra fast in this stuff. However we got close over the two days – 4 (Helen W35), 7 (Philip M65), 7 (Rachel W21).

There was free entry to the first Dutch Trail O. Excellent intro for those for whom it was entirely new, with a couple of testing controls for the more experienced.

We headed off to the local National Park – the biggest in Holland. Euro 8 to get in but for that you got a free bike with 'back pedal'



Control 6 a tough one



Look – no brakes!!

braking!! We were glad we had brought our helmets – inexperienced sudden braking on our part and excessive speed by the more competent locals were a potent combination. Just over two hours later we arrived back in the gathering gloom – certainly the park would make a splendid O map.

Then it was back up the motorways to Schiphol.

Mark up your diaries up for next year – October 23 – 25, when there will be an equally splendid week end a little to the North of this year's epic, kicking off with a Friday night sprint race.

