

November Classic 2017

IF YOU ARE GOING TO WIN YOU MUSTN'T GET LOST!!

It is about 30 years since I last ran at Highland Water and from what I remembered; I was expecting challenging orienteering for the November Classic and Southern Championships.

If you are going to be successful you need to work out a strategy to cope with the challenges of any particular event. Highland Water is well enough contoured to be able to use the contours for navigation, especially with the re-entrants highlighted by the linear marshes. Major paths should be clear but minor paths could easily be missed and grassy paths were likely to be very muddy and provide slower running than the forest so I was generally going to run straight. I assumed that small clearings/thickets etc would be impossible to identify and I was going to completely ignore them. I was confident that for a Championship event the controls would be fairly hung and that accurate compass and pacing should be all I needed to find point features in flatter areas of forest.

In a forest where relocation, once lost, is extremely difficult I was going to pace every step of the way so I would always know roughly where I was. It may sound silly but my main thought was **NOT TO GET LOST**. As with the British Middle Distance Championships, **this was an event which was going to be LOST, not WON**.

I've done some analysis from the splits for the course. The splits give time behind winner so I've used these as the basis for assessment of lost time. I've added their position in the ranking list as an indication of expectations of the runners.

Bob Dredge (Rank 3), WCh, who won had a top four split on every leg, except leg 11 where he lost about one minute.

Martin Wilson, BKO, M70 (Rank 2) running up was second and became Southern Champion ; biggest error was 48s.

These two runners both run significantly faster than me and there was no way I was going to beat them unless they made significant mistakes.

I had 4 controls when I was about one minute behind the winner. Two of these were long mainly uphill legs when Bob would have been running speed (or my walking) that accounted for the difference. One was the critical long leg 3 when I probably lost 30s finding the control and the other leg 8 when I probably lost about 15s due to a navigational error and about 30s for reasons explained later.

Robin Smith (Rank 10), who finished 4th had a clean run and was three minutes ahead of me at control 12, but his splits for the last 4 controls and the run-in suggest he picked up an injury and slowed down rather than made mistakes.

Richard Payne (Rank 14), EPOC, lost about one minute on five of the first six controls and took the same time as the winner for the rest of the course.

Paul Johnson (Rank 16), BL, was ahead of me until a three minute mistake at control 9.

Mike Wimpenny (Rank 46), Devon, is another steady runner whose splits suggest a one minute error on control nine and a few minor (less than 30s?) errors.

We then come to pre-event favourites:

Andy Hempstead (Rank 4), HOC, who lost 3 minutes on control 1 and 5 minutes on control 3. (8th place)

Axel Blomquist (Rank 2), BAOC, lost 7 minutes at control 1, one minute at controls 2 and 3 and 6 minutes at control 4 after which he was so far behind that taking three minutes less than Bob Dredge for the rest of the course was irrelevant (11th place)

Don McKerrow (Rank 11), SLOW, is another steady runner who lost a couple of minutes at control 3 and other minor errors. (13th place)

Jon Simmons (Rank 9), BOK, never recovered from 4 minutes lost at the first control. (14th place)

Peter Martin (Rank 28), Sax, 5min lost at control 1 (15th place)

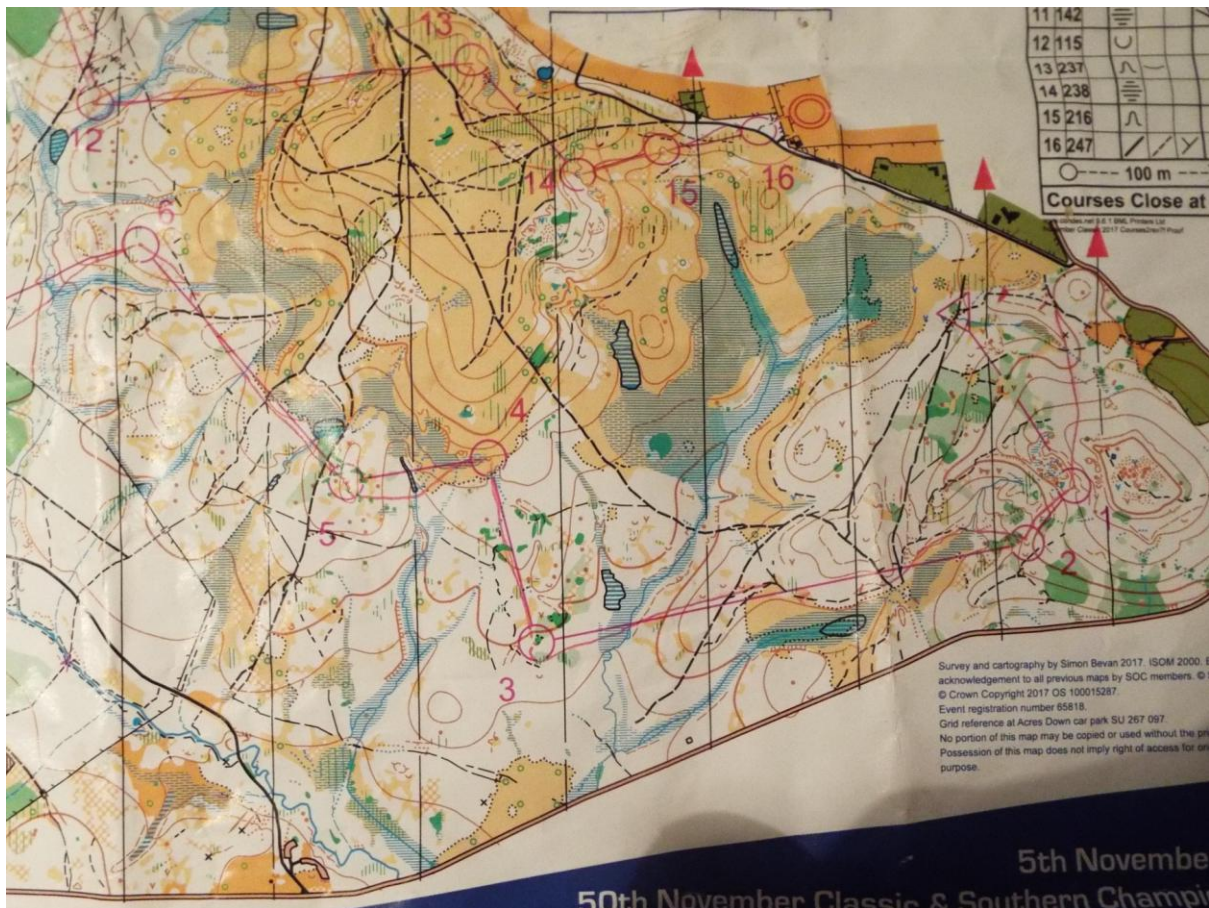
Mike Godfree (Rank 21), DVO, 12 minutes lost at control 3 (29th place)

Mick Smith (Rank 25), HH, 7 minutes lost at control 3 and 6 minutes lost at control 6 but fastest split for the run-in! (37th place)

You can lose an event at the first control, you can't win it there. Make sure you hit the first control clean, even if it means losing 20s.

It is also vital to spot the controls where relocation will be very difficult if you miss them. Control 3 was a classic for this and 29 out of 59 runners lost between 3 and 15 minutes on this control.

I've given leg time of leader at the end of each leg



Start to 1: I had spent the time in the start boxes, when I could have been looking at the map, watching the runner starting 2 minutes ahead of me and noted him studying the map and then heading off east along the path from the start. After picking up my map I immediately headed off along the path, but I'd failed to work out where we were on the map and it took me a long time to find the start triangle. Once I found it I realised I was taking a roundabout route to the control, but a safer route than the direct route. On consideration this was probably the best, but not the quickest, route for the first control. I left the path as the boggy re-entrant on the right was ending, set my compass (I still believe that in difficult terrain the old-fashioned plate compass is preferable) and careful pacing from the W ridge of the hill at the E end of the map, combined and what looked like old quarries on the right, took me easily to the control. I noted that the control was hung fairly high which gave confidence that other controls wouldn't be hidden. (+23s)

1 to 2: A straightforward leg; compass and pace and expect to find control on slope to right of ridge on left. (+10s)

2 to 3: I identified this as a critical control with no clear attack point and little to relocate on if the control is missed. First half was straightforward, follow the north edge of the marshy open area and then compass over the ridge and down to a very boggy stream. From here pace carefully and hope to run straight into the control. When pacing runs out add another 15 paces (the control is often a little further on when your pacing has run out). Since the terrain seemed very flat and there was no sign of the re-entrant to the NE of the control so I decided I must be too far left so I went right and straight into the control. (+1:16 my biggest time loss but probably 45s could be accounted for by slower running speed on this long leg and I probably lost about 30s by missing the control)

3 to 4: This control looked easy; Go straight, ignoring the vague path to the left and the marshy re-entrant at the edge of the wood led straight to the control. The only problem was I felt a severe pain in a calf muscle and had to stop and stretch it now and at several more times during the course (+21s)

4 to 5: I intended maintaining height by going north of the uncrossable marsh, but was getting stuck in slow boggy moor and dropped down to runnable grass at the bottom of the open area. I'd noted that the control was on the far side of the small ridge so aimed slightly left of the control then turned right when I reached the ridge and straight into the control (+20s)

5 to 6: Went straight staying left of the open in the runnable woodland, over the hill and up the vague path heading right of the control, veering left after crossing the linear marsh to the knoll which was on the apex of the ridge. (-8s 3rd fastest split)



6 to 7: I headed for the gate through the fence and got rather caught up in the bog as well as wasting time stretching my calf. From the gate I tried to cut the corner by going SSW but the going looked tough behind the earthbank so I followed it to the path. Right along the path, and went left along the clear vegetation boundary just after the path junction. Compass and pace let straight to the control. (+ 1:12)

7 to 8: I headed north on a rough compass bearing and got literally caught up in vegetation as my glasses got caught on a branch. I was still untangling the resulting mess when I reached the gate and got the string connecting my emit device to a wristband tangled in the latch of the gate. Temporarily without my glasses and with the distraction of another competitor talking to me led to heading a

short distance up the north path before returning to the correct path. Compass and paced from the ditch straight to the control. (+1:08)

8 to 9: Looked to be an easy control; head up the main track the grassy ride. The only problem was on the hill I couldn't push off my left leg so I had to walk up the steepest part of the hill.. Then it was compass and pace, crossing the track and some bad bog and aiming slightly right into the re-entrant to make sure I was below the control. (+58s all running speed up hill)

9 to 10: Go straight over the hill and down and through an evil bog. Then climb straight up the slope so I know the control will be to the right after returning to the forest.(+20s)

10 to 11: Go straight and compass and pace in from the ride junction. (-53s 2nd fastest split and Bob Dredges only significant mistake)

11 to 12: Went straight, not getting distracted by the paths. Went slightly left as I crossed the final path to be sure the pit would be to the right just above the stream (+11s)

12 to 13: Went straight following the marshy re-entrant up the lower hill and then the broad re-entrant up to the ridge (Unfortunately my calf was preventing me from running up the hill). Then compass down to the control in an obvious re-entrant. (+52s)

13 to 14: I'd worked this leg out while walking up the hill, so I knew I was going to head south to the track and follow it above the broad re-entrant. Then compass down from the path junction and find control easily as it's just below the end of the wood. (+10s)

14 to 15: Compass and re-entrant is obvious in the open terrain (+1s)

15 to 16: Head slightly left of the direct line and follow the good track to the control (+8s)

Run-in: (+4s)

Having finished running it was a real struggle to hobble to download; running with an injury can be easier than walking! It was even more difficult driving home as I couldn't put any weight through the ball of my foot.

I'd have probably been a few minutes quicker without the injury, but there's no way I could have closed the gap to Martin Wilson.

As at the British Middle Championships most of the fastest runners made serious mistakes. Positions 5, 8, 9, 11 and 15 had 11 fastest splits between them. These runners were all fast enough to win the event. By the time they reach M65 none of them runs too fast to navigate and they are all excellent navigators. I suspect most of them hadn't worked out a strategy to cope with this particular terrain. M60 and M65 are very competitive classes and it isn't possible to make mistakes and win (even for Axel).

Remember: **You won't win if you get lost!**