

Orienteering in Serbia – The Belgrade Open

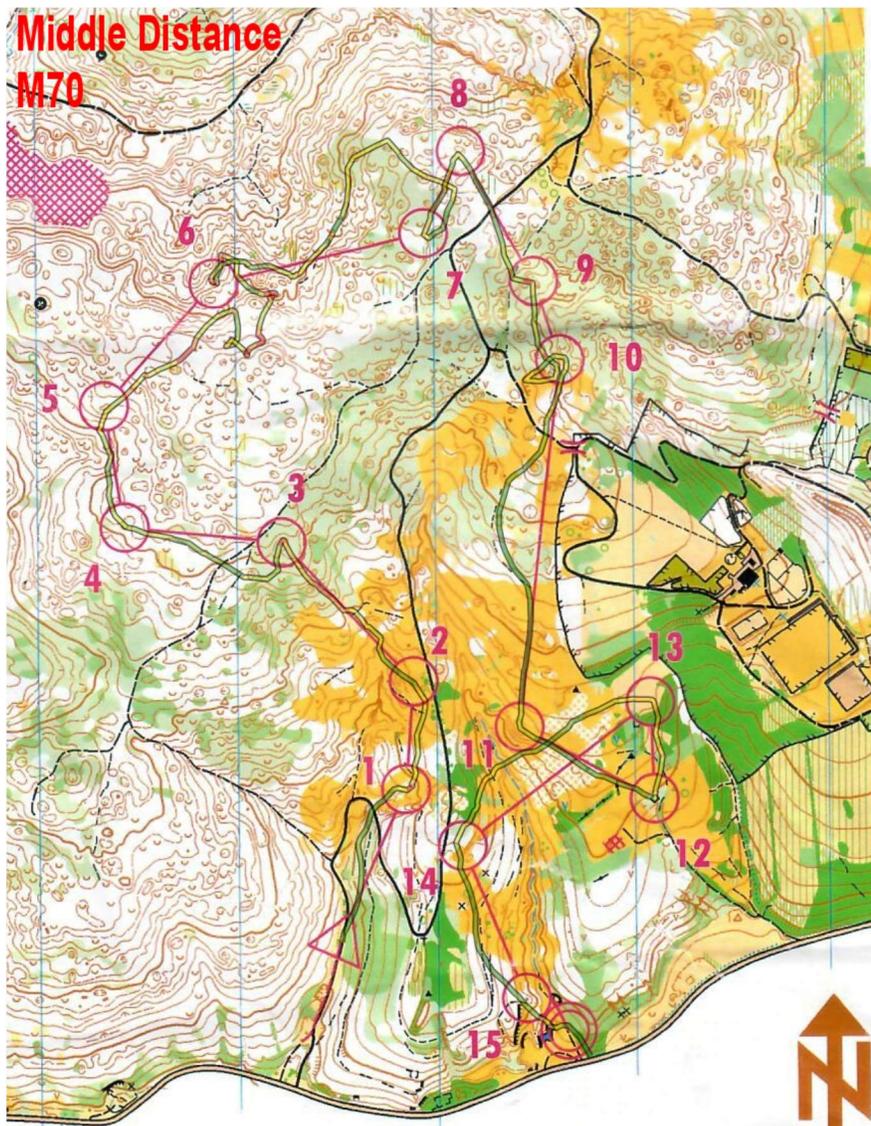
Philip Cooper



Our annual family European orienteering trip came early this year. We decided to swap the JK for the Belgrade Open. Advertised as ‘forest orienteering as it should be’ it was difficult to resist when added to the promised drier and warmer climates. It did not disappoint with no rain (unlike the JK) and temperatures of over 20°C most days, although we were glad we packed our hats for the day when it dropped to 10°C.

We found cheap flights from Luton, courtesy of Wizz Air and a super apartment, complete with sauna for post-race recovery in the centre of Belgrade. The orienteering consisted of two races – a middle distance and a classic, both on an area about an hour south of Belgrade, called Babe. The area had previously been used for a WRE in 2012 so we had high expectations! The old maps looked like they were going to present a good orienteering challenge, consisting of steep open forests which had been used as a copper mine in Roman times, leaving behind thousands of depressions, pits, holes, knolls, and micro-contour details.

Middle distance



The day was warm and sunny as we had ordered! When we arrived in the assembly field the event director came over to personally welcome us – the local clubs love to see competitors from further afield coming to their events!

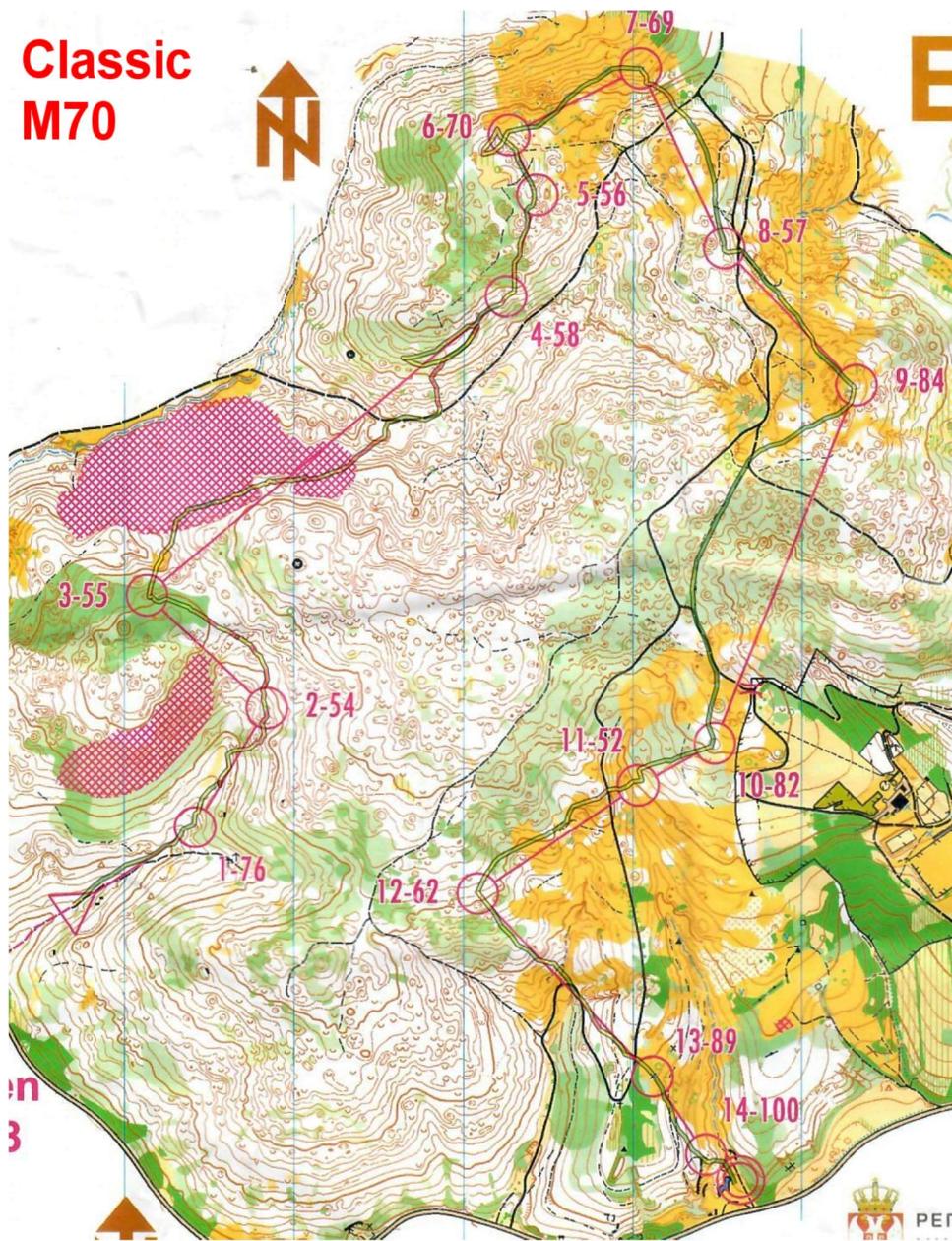
The final details warned us “courses require from athletes top level navigation skills and strong physical and mental shape”. The M70 course was tough with over 150m of climb in the first 4 legs, followed by mesmerising legs across a detailed plateau and a run down to the finish.

Failure to read the contours at 6 and failure to use the compass correctly at 7 plus getting on the wrong side of a big knoll at 10 were my downfall. These disasters left me 9 minutes off the pace.

There was a good atmosphere in the assembly field and a

local catering firm were serving up goulash and beer followed by delicious Serbian cakes! All in 23°C sunshine.

Classic



The Classic was on the same area as the Middle, although the map was extended to cover an additional hillside. The final details promised “courses based at contour features, bearing legs and lots of direction changes and there will be several long legs.” A chasing start added to the fun.

Unfortunately, the temperatures dropped overnight and we were presented with a bit of a dreary day, at least 10°C cooler than the day before. However, we consoled ourselves with the pictures posted on the internet of the quagmire that was the JK!

Line features were few and far between and you really had to keep in touch with the map if you were not going to lose a lot of time. Depressions were

deep, and knolls were tall, so if you were on the wrong side of the contour features you did not see the controls!

After the long uphill to 3, this was my downfall at 4 – just the wrong side of a spur and then deciding to move off in the wrong direction! Wrong side of a knoll at 6 and my fate was sealed!

Proving the practice makes perfect, we all had better runs in the Classic than in the Middle.



Prize winners!

Without some of our costly mistakes we may have been on the top of the podium, but we collected an array of impressive plaques!! with a gold for Rachel (HAVOC) in W21A, silver for Helen (DVO) in W35, silver for Doug (HAVOC) in M21A and bronze for me in M70.

Après-O

All these European orienteering events are really only an excuse to visit somewhere new, and the Belgrade Open was no different. None of us had ever been or even considered visiting Serbia before, and the event provided the ideal excuse! So we made sure that we had a few days either side of the event to go exploring. We managed to see the highlights of Belgrade. It has a fortress that we all agreed would make a fantastic sprint map if permission could ever be gained! Positioned on a large hill overlooking the Danube and Sava rivers, it had loads of tunnels, impassable walls and steep slopes – route choice would be interesting! We also took in the delights of the Nikola Tesla museum – a name you will all

know from school physics lessons (he invented AC current without which our lives would be somewhat restricted!), and who Serbia seem to have adopted even though he was born in what is modern day Croatia and had Austrian and American nationalities! We also visited several monuments commemorating the partisans from the area who died during the National Liberation War during WWII.

We took a day trip up to Novi Sad, which just like Belgrade had a fortress overlooking the Danube. We enjoyed a slightly rustic wine tasting in Sremska Kamenica on the way home, which promotes itself as one of Serbia's leading wine producing regions.

Overall it was an excellent trip and whilst I wouldn't necessarily recommend a trip to Belgrade purely to see its sights, the addition of some great orienteering made it a good weekend. The Belgrade Open is an annual event – so keep your eye peeled on the World of O calendar for future editions.