

## Notes on Planning (and Weekend Co-ordinating) Harrogate EuroCity Urban Race, Ruth Ker July 2023

“Why hasn’t Harrogate been used for an urban?” I innocently asked at a Claro committee meeting in 2019. “Hmmm. We don’t think it would be very good...?” Quentin and I decided to give it a go and a base map was drawn. Early 2020 and I’m getting intensive training on urban mapping ready for the event in the summer. We ended up with a lot of mapping time that sunny spring and summer so the map expanded and excessive detail got added. We found hundreds, possibly thousands, of appealing control sites. Sometimes we were out for just a tad over an hour. Don’t tell Boris.

We quickly identified Harrogate Ladies College as a perfect base who confirmed they’d be happy to host us, outside of term time. After two dates and two sets of staff, came and went, we rather lost heart and went for a date so far ahead it didn’t even seem real.

Then in December 2022, the EuroCity bombshell arrived in the form of Gavin Clegg (UK CRET liaison) ringing up to say that Bournemouth had to pull out and would we like it? Our little Harrogate? In a league with the likes of Venice, Rome and Barcelona?! We were given several whole minutes to decide (CRET were in a rush to publish their venues). Quentin said yes, he was up for it. Linda Kelly said yes, she would help me with Weekend Coordination. I have faith in my Claro club mates and Liz Potterton confirmed she’d still be Organiser. Somehow I coned myself it wouldn’t be much more work as we were doing it anyway.

How wrong could I be? This weekend moved to a whole new level for Claro. Kay Hawke of BOF got in touch to say “EuroCity’s in Europe are amazing. We do great urban races here but without the wow factor. I’m picking up from your website that you want to make it great; can I help?” It quickly became apparent we were on the same page and Zoom meetings between Kay, Linda and myself morphed to include Liz Drewe (organiser Knaresborough and O Maze with Will), Connor Smith (Altra prizes, artist’s image on posters, certificates and magnets, numbers, we had a finish funnel but the wind decided against allowing that to go up) and Louise Satherley (Accessible course).

Adding a sprint race at Knaresborough Castle felt just right. Easy public transport, tourist wow factor and a contrasting run. Thank you to the Knaresborough team of Tim, Liz and Mike.

Meanwhile I sprinkled PurplePen controls over our huge map dreaming that I would magically get permission to go in every place I fancied. Which wasn’t how it worked out. About 3 months ago I simplified big time and chopped the map in half. The good news is, you have the other half to look forward to. We live on the SW corner of your map so could walk, run or cycle everywhere in a matter of minutes (travel expenses, zero). I reckoned I could still plan a Men’s Open course that wouldn’t rely on long, dull legs or repetition. Feedback suggests I managed.

Planning urban courses is a bizarre blend of thinking. You need to be creative, almost wackily daring and yet utterly pragmatic and realistic at the same time. So precise and so big picture. Imaginative and clear-headed. It’s easy to get bogged down in one aspect of this and go, well, wrong. We have controller’s courses. I wonder if we should have planner’s courses?

I have rather too many ‘good’ ideas while I lie awake at night.

- I’ll plan every class their own course. As a WSV I’m paired with MUV and, you might have noticed, there are a lot of us. Often we are half the competitors at an event, queueing at the start and tailing each other around the course.

- My friend Ursula deserves a course that suits her. Who in their right mind thinks she wants the same course now she's 89 as she did when she was 75. And hence the Grander Veterans course was born. I hope the idea will gain traction before I am 85.
- I was asked if my Short course might by any chance be wheelchair friendly? Hmm, no, but I think I could join up my existing controls and the Accessible Course was born.
- I was really keen to create proper age-class competition and encouraged entering of your own category (which you politely did in droves, thank you). Therefore the Short, Medium and Long courses were created to provide options.
- Two maps evolved based around the two starts; 1:4000 for most however we could do 1:3000 from the Near Start. More work, especially for Quentin, and I'm sure it was appreciated.

Normal Claro protocol for events is 'keep quiet'. Get annual permission from the council, keep quiet and go orienteering. This time we decided we had to do the opposite. Tell everyone we possibly could. Spread the word. We were in the local papers, on radio, posters distributed to everyone participating and splashed all over Visit Harrogate social media. And it's been good. We feel the sport and Claro locally has gone up a notch in terms of awareness, respect and cooperation.

Asking for permissions is tough. If you haven't done it, believe me, it's tough. And, in the end, it's what so often makes the difference between an ok urban race and a good one. So permission-seeking was done. It sometimes took many goes from first opening a hotel door to agreeing with the right person exactly what we were allowed to do: To the extent that we had faith that the gates will be unlocked, the staff briefed, the guests not inconvenienced and you not shouted at. If you kept an eye on the webpage you could watch my permissions list growing; fun for the true O geek I hope. The Majestic Hotel was high on my wish list and was hosting "Home&Gift" so my imaginary courses were largely re-planned. Despite working so hard to avoid nasty surprises, Quentin and I still arrived at the Wesley Chapel, in the rain, at 6am, armed with control 193, trestle and safety cone (so you didn't fall down the large hole right by it; it worked, you didn't) to find both gates locked. Cool as a cucumber, Quentin climbed through a hole in the fence, sited the control and we carried on putting out. At 10am he was back there talking to the Rev. Trev (who knew nothing about us) and acquiring temporary ownership of the keys. At 10.30 you were out orienteering. Thank you Quentin. If you're asked to plan an urban, having ace people with you is vital.

I got totally carried away finding you local prizes (we had real money thanks to HMCA and the council), liaising with Will Drewe who put on the most aMazing Maze, sorting catering, shops, walking tours and dinner. At times both Linda (thank you Linda, you've been amazing) and I felt like we had full time Event Planner jobs.

And then every single control is a whole bunch of work. Each one is checked, re-mapped, triple checked, assessed for being describable, re-checked for description accuracy, circles cut, lines cut (did I mention I had 17 courses?!), listed for control assemblage needs and then worried about as scaffolding goes up and down, holes are dug in the road, property changes hands (we lost Westminster Arcade at the very last minute - apologies to competitors who had 217 - it was much prettier three weeks ago), gates that were always open are suddenly locked and vice versa...

None of it works unless you can read your map. I think this map is a thing of beauty. I thank Quentin for adding my name to it. I did indeed do my share of the endless survey-then-draw leg work however the fact it is excellent is credit to him. Draft maps went to Jack Benham at BML weeks ago along with detailed conversations over colour density and clarity. We poured over them, bending index contours out of ways through, re-cutting lines, altering patches of vegetation (some of you still explored the Victorian's promenading quarry behind

the council buildings despite our efforts to suggest you may prefer the paths), expanding detailed places as much as we dared without distorting your image of the area... There are things that can never be seen on screen so sending a map off for draft printing (several weeks before even if courses aren't finalised) proved a really good idea.

It was so gratifying that you came and appreciated what the whole of Claro had done in putting the weekend together. That you enjoyed your orienteering. Which is what it's all about. See some of you in Ghent and London for more EuroCity adventures.

In case you're wondering, I won't be planning an urban again for a while. A double sprint in RHS Harlow Carr is in the pipeline for next year. And then we'll see.