

Planner Ruth Ker's comments following the Northern Sprint Championships in RHS Harlow Carr, 28th September 2024

Another bonkers O scheme: will I ever learn? Yes there were sleepless nights and plenty of times when I regretted it. Those professional gardeners keep changing the place, just as if they own it. Harrumph. Quentin kept his cool throughout.

We live just down the road so have been eyeing it up for years. Claro started by running Taster Days for the RHS during the school holidays. Once they discovered how well run these were and how much they were appreciated, we started daring to moot the idea of putting on our own event.

Thank you RHS Harlow Carr, James, Tim, Sarah, Gareth, Lynn and the reception and gardening teams, for your faith in us. It was an O treat to orienteer in such a unique, beautiful place and to be hosted by the new Harrogate Arms Cafe.

The idea of running almost all (MWJ right through to MHV) on the same gaffled course came to me after the York Indoor event where men and women had comparable but different courses. Despite being talented indoor orienteers, us women got rubbish BOF ranking points. I wait with baited breath to see if some of you women are rather chuffed with your ranking points. This would also mean everyone could compare splits with friends and families.

Much mental logistics pondering ensued for it did not mean that planning was easier. You had 6 gaffles; I had to somehow get you in the all the best bits while making your course legible and avoiding too many collisions (just one that we know of). Using the wooded half first and the more formal gardens second meant less chance of upsetting visitors. And that the oldest, youngest and accessible orienteers could enjoy a spacious jaunt round the pretty gardens before you got there.

It was brilliant to have 6 entries for the Accessible course. We are still learning how to put these on; it's only just over a year since the first one at Harrogate EuroCity and they are spreading around the country. I think, when they become the norm at all areas that can support them, more and more competitors will arrive. They are good for those with mobility issues beyond needing a wheelchair. We had two on crutches.

There were some unusual aspects which hopefully added to the customer experience:

Thank you for arriving in time for the 4.30 briefing. It was rather epic suddenly finding nearly 200 of you gathered and listening so attentively. This felt the fairest way to give you the opportunity to know stuff assuming you too find listening on the start line almost impossible. "Only today, control 183's hedge has simply disappeared into thin air; there are little tiny hooped fences you can go over; the unusual starting and downloading arrangements; slowest off first; we are aware of a couple of controls not showing up as well as we'd like (sorry); olive and dark green do not cross; the path closure that caused tears yesterday has been opened for us, wow thank you gardening team".

I spent a happy Wednesday evening (prompt service from BML appreciated) meticulously stapling your unique descriptions onto the back of your map. Sprinting without loose descriptions isn't my idea of fun, so loose descriptions you would have. Several commented this was a first on a gaffled course and much appreciated.

A late afternoon event. This came about because the gardens are much busier during the day and closed from 6pm. As we watched the nights drawing in we did get concerned about the dark, re-jigged timings repeatedly and suggested bringing a head torch. In the end, pushing first starts slightly earlier and over-lapping the two sprint starts by ten minutes or so, ensured all was completed before sundown.

We cheekily called them the Northern Sprint Championships (which don't exist) after being told they couldn't be the Yorkshire Sprint Championships (because Claro don't hold those?!). It was nice to be able to reward you with prizes - Harlow Carr excelled themselves with garden vouchers so you can come back, Taylors Yorkshire Tea are Claro favourite prize donators and gave sample packs for all as well as boxes for winners, plus Betty's treats).

There is probably an RHS garden in most O clubs patches. Hopefully this event can act as a precedent showing orienteers can be trusted in these lovely places. Can I recommend the planner's experience? Well. It's been a pretty place to hang out. However those pesky gardeners are forever changing it, almost as if they have the right to. The day before the event I went up for final checks. Storm Lillian, a month ago, brought down a big tree between 172 and 200 and red tape festooned the woods. Quentin couldn't even get in to map (having unfortunately left that bit to last). With two weeks to go, no sign of red tape removal. Maps needed to go to BML. Much to-ing and fro-ing and promises from Events Team James that it was safe and he would personally ensure the tape was gone and hey presto, no tape. But, and it was a big but, we had torrential rain on Thursday and the path along the far side of the stream beyond 178 was closed with subsidence. The gardeners working on it said it would be closed all weekend. I was a bit tearful and they, knowing nothing about the O event at this point, listened carefully and said they'd do their best. Quentin and I came up with Plans R (cancel the event) and Q (where you would all copy down the closure yourselves when handed you map). We visited again on Saturday morning to be assured they were working super fast and would fence off just one side and provide access by 3pm. Phew. It wasn't until I went to hang control 183 that I had the bizarre experience of not being able to see a hedge I'd seen yesterday.

Apologies for the somewhat hard to read controls 171 and 183. They were cut so you could read the map detail which meant they ended up too minimal.

Thank you for coming, for being so co-operative and agreeable and for your kind comments of how much you'd enjoyed it. The Claro team were amazing, again. Skilled, charming, helpful, hardworking. Kerensa manning the gate wins the resilience award. Also Quentin, June and Katie for taking on the key roles and working so co-operatively.

My next planning will be an urban on the east side of Harrogate on January 19th 2025. Just a normal urban event, no EuroCity or UKUL or Championships or anything. Should be a doddle right!?