

Deeside 2016

We arrived at the Deeside camp on a Monday afternoon, and got into some training straight away. After the introductions/ warm up, which were typical Ian style and included some unexpected elements. We were immediately plunged straight into our first training exercise: the sprint tour champs qualifier 'race' which consisted of a micro sprint round the buildings we were staying in. I had been on the camp last year so knew what to expect from the map with a scale '1:variable'. This caused some navigational confusion for the rest of the group with an impressive 5 mis-punches being the record for the evening.

The first three days were focused on going back to basics and looking at each individual aspect of PDP, Plan Direction and Picture.

We began on the first day by heading out to Sluie, a typical Deeside forest: steep, rocky in places and technical. We spent the morning working on planning, by doing a variety of courses designed to test all aspects of planning, including attack points and route choices. Our time in Sluie culminated with a Norwegian course; a real test of our planning skills. Essentially there was a map at each control with the next leg on it for us to plan and then execute without the map. I think it's fair to say this was challenge for all of us, but we all made it round alive and in most cases very successfully!

Upon return to Templars Park (the accommodation) we were plunged straight into the Deeside 2K16 Sprint Tour Championships Final. This was a fast and furious sprint course around Templars Park, a mixture of parkland, urban features and forest: terrain to make exciting racing. Minute start intervals added to the pressure of the race and those who didn't adapt to the changes in terrain were caught by later starters which added even more intensity as packs of runners formed.

Day two of 'back to basics' focused on the picture aspect on the contour heavy area of Coull. The first exercises were short courses from a start location on a variety of contour only maps as well as normal maps. This was designed to get us to think about interpreting the contours and actually how easy a leg can be made when all you use is the big contour features, as opposed to trying to read all the clutter on the normal map. The afternoon exercise involved a map with all the legs on it, but no actual map. 5 minutes later and using our very dodgy cartography skills we were sent out to complete the course using only the features we'd drawn on and whatever we could remember from the full map. I found that the exercise highlighted how little information we need to execute each leg and complete a course since I drew very little and successfully completed the course. In the evening after a brutal circuits session we had an introduction to night orienteering with a relay round Templars Park, a fun and quite easy way to prepare us for more Night O later in the week.

The final day of skills training focussed on direction, i.e. compass bearings. To work on this, we were taken to Balmedie sand dunes, an area with many obstacles which would make

taking and following a compass bearing even more challenging. In the morning we had three courses to do, a straight line corridor, a course with blanked out bits of map and the final course which only had the map within the circle. All of which forced us to use direction and not rely on navigating from the (many) contour features. Then in the afternoon we finished off with a pairs clock relay to practise the skills acquired in the morning in a more pressured environment. Finally, we finished the day with some Night Orienteering in a local forest. I (and many others) got quite lost on the course.

The final three days of the camp were aimed at implementing the full orienteering process as well as increasing the speed of our orienteering:

On the Friday we got a 'rest' day so we only trained in the morning in the forest of Tyrebagger. I did two exercises both at a fairly high intensity, the first one being about making a simplified picture and then the second one was an O Intervals course which was run with David Bunn and Alistair Chapman.

On Saturday morning we relaxed the pace a bit with some training at Scolty where we could work on any weaknesses which had become apparent throughout the week. I chose to do a downhill course, starting at the top of the forested part of Scolty hill and worked all the way down to our base at the bottom, working on exit direction from the control and staying in close contact with the map at all times. This is what had been letting me down on courses throughout the week and prior to the camp. Once lunch (and many bilberries) were consumed, we headed down the track into the flatter parts of Scolty to do a Czech Relay, a fast head to head course in teams of two which tested all of our skills under the pressure of racing. In addition to the pressure of racing each other, the coaches had been tasked with distracting us, for example, joining in and then purposely running off line and the wrong direction out of controls to test our confidence in ourselves and our focus on what WE were doing, not anyone else.

This racing practise was good preparation for the final day which was the Deeside 2k16 Classic Tour Championships, being held this year in Glen Dye. Out of everything we'd done this was the most enjoyable area I'd run in all week and a varied course made the challenge even harder. It began with a middle distance section which took just under 20 mins to complete and then there was the long distance section which took up the remaining 40 minutes (for me) of the course and only had 6 controls! So evidently there was some very long legs and important route choices to contend with and which ultimately decided the outcome of the competition. The final activity of the camp was a mixed sprint relay style race around the most detailed part of Glen Dye.

I really have really enjoyed my two tours with JROS (both Deeside) and I really appreciate the efforts made by everyone who made them possible. Thank you!!

Alastair Thomas