

# WCOC Juniors' Summer Report on EYOC, JWOC and Pre-JWOC Camp

By Naimh Hunter, Alastair Thomas and Daniel Spencer

## EYOC Model (Daniel)

EYOC started with the model day. We had a nice long sleep after all of yesterday's traveling then breakfast in the hotel, a fun game of "guess what that fried thing is" as well as some familiar food.

After breakfast we headed out into the town to get a feel for the sprint area. We had a small model map which was mainly tiny alleys which were hard to tell apart from people's gardens. There was also a not very relevant to the sprint final monastery as well as a huge (20m) sword monument mapped as a statue. The model was ok but showed us the sprint was going to be tricky, also the fortress section of the final map was basically impossible to recreate so we knew we just had to look on street-view for that bit.

In the afternoon we headed to the long/relay model area which was green and hilly as expected. It was also insanely muddy. The long is going to be tough and is quite similar to Wass in places. Looking forward to the sprint tomorrow even if it looks tricky!

## EYOC Sprint (Niamh)



This was held in Tsarevets Fortress and the old town surrounding it, about 10 minute drive from the hotel.

Niamh and Alastair both had late starts with Daniel in the slightly earlier block of starts. Quarantine was in an astroturf with just enough shelter to keep the sun off! After packing waterproofs and umbrellas what we really needed was sun-cream! After standing in the toilet queue for what seemed like an age it was time to chill. Ali and Niamh had GPS tracking so had to collect their vests - fresh out the packet.

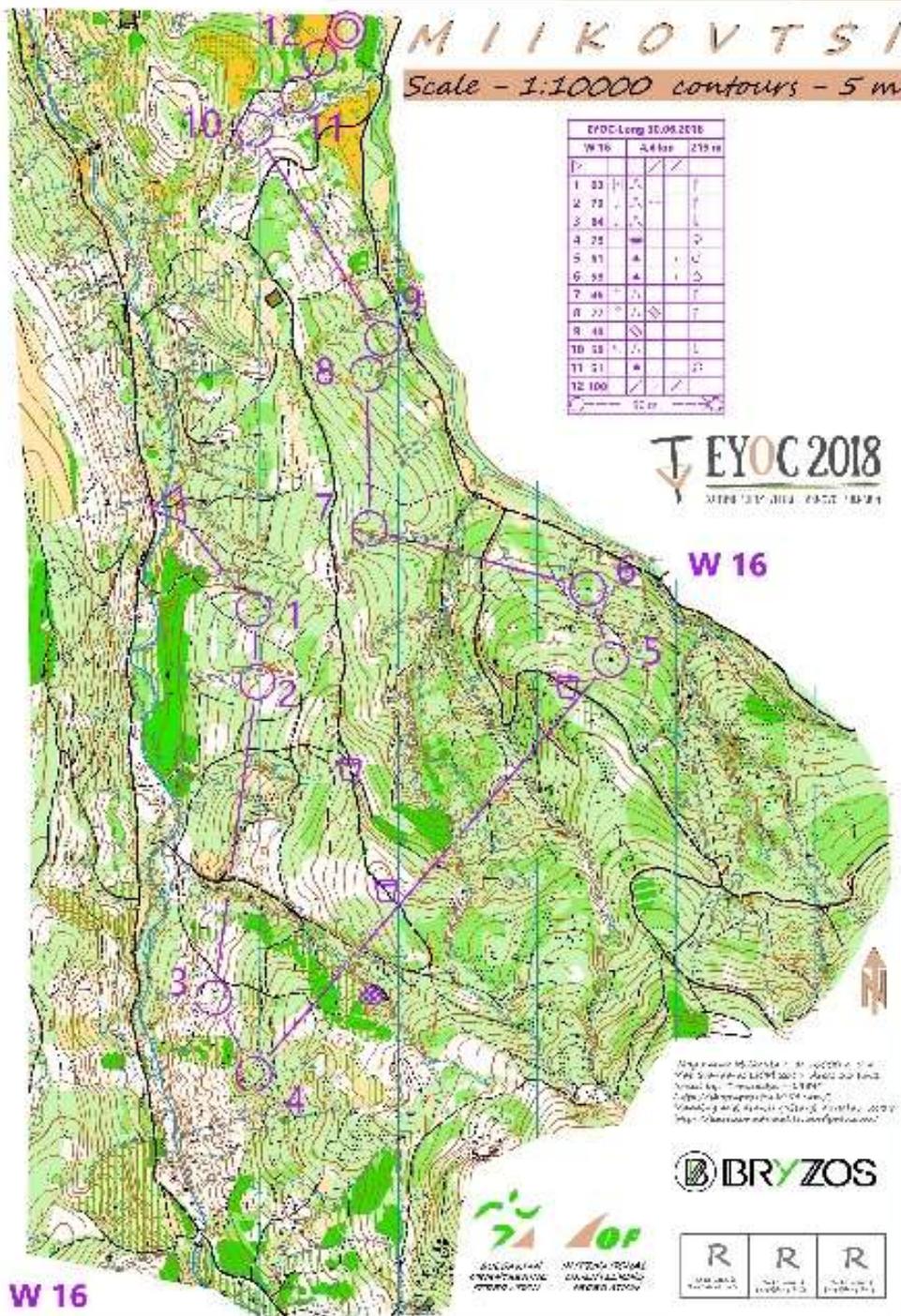
Pre start with a -10 minute call up was about 300m away from the quarantine. So after a good hour of lying around and multiple toilet trips I got my shoes on and organised my stuff. I had a jog down and back from quarantine, got my o stuff and

then dropped my bag at the bag drop. After a bit more jogging around and a few drills i was called up to pre start. The -3 call up was 500m up a hill to a gatehouse of the castle.

And....then we were off. Straight up the hill to the very top of the fortress for me and then a loop round the more complex walled bit of the fortress. Down through the spectator control and a loop in the old town with a couple of controls round the church then down the run in.

Ali had a clean run coming in in 16th. My run was pretty average no big mistakes just a bit slow (I came 35th). Dan simply said his run was 'not good'. After celebrating Megan Keith's win at the flower ceremony we walked back to the hotel, had lunch and a quick team meeting about tomorrows long and then...more time to just chill and get an ice cream (of course!). Later we have the opening ceremony for the event followed by the official prize giving for the sprint. Another team meeting and a chance to give Paul his birthday presents!! and then off to bed.

## EYOC Long (Alastair)



The morning of the long distance race marked the beginning of an almost non-stop schedule for the rest of the competition. Firstly, we all had to be on a bus at 7am, meaning getting up at 6am for breakfast. This was a tough ask (bearing in mind 6am is 4am in the UK) and almost too hard for some... But we all made it onto the bus and soon on the long bus journey to quarantine. As we progressed into Bulgarian foothills, the roads became narrower, the villages we passed got smaller and the hills bigger.

Eventually we arrived at quarantine, at a place that looked to be a school. We soon found out that our short stay for the morning would be in an English teaching summer school; with the students still there...! At one point they all came out for a lunch break and started asking for autographs of everyone, I felt honoured and quite amused.

A long, long time later (almost 5 hours) and I could finally start to get ready to race. Kit on, check everything and then head to jog up to the start and warm up, almost exactly like I would in the UK. Anyways I got to the start fine, no drama, ready to race. Excited to race.

The race itself was okay, but not

amazing. I've come to realise now that it was just an average run. Not what I had hoped for, but probably what I deserved. The course on the other hand was very well planned and a constant challenge. A mixture of really technical controls in green areas, and two mega long legs with no clearly faster routes. In the end I think that I got the fastest routes just lacking a bit of execution so I still lost a fair chunk of time.

At the finish I knew that I had performed okay but not great and was hopeful that I would be rewarded with a good result. 14th was good but without a few of my mistakes it could have been a whole lot better... maybe next time!

So that was the long, next I was bundled straight onto a bus in soaking wet clothes (yes I forgot to mention that I finished in a thunder storm!) And back to the accommodation. Quick change, a bit of food and then back out to the EYOC party.

A few hours later, lots of food eaten, a bit of dancing completed and we headed back to the hotel, hot and bothered, sweaty and tired but very content and happy. Nice.

## EYOC Relay (Alastair)

7am and time for the final day of competition. No bus to catch today since we could take our own transport to the race, so it wasn't as rushed as previous days. Once there, we checked out the arena, I got my kit on and then the team did the classic Paul square warm up. Good times. I was on first leg, and I felt confident. Not too many nerves on the start line but I was just a tad anxious to get started and just to get stuck into a bit of racing. The countdown began, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, GO! We were off, a pack of 18 year old boys from all round the world, charging into a forest, weird huh but I wasn't thinking about that, instead I was very focused.

The first control gaffle in a relay I think is perhaps the most important, you sit in the middle of the pack, wait for the split at the front and then choose your pack correctly. Job done. Now I can race. The next section of the course went really well, I ran to my gaffles, chose good routes and at about two thirds of the way round was leading/ very near the front of the course. Here I made a little miss which lost me about 1 minute and I dropped back, I was joined in this little mistake by Aston Key, the Australian runner and from here on in we raced the rest of the course cleanly and clawed back some time to the leaders. Well when I say the rest of the course, I got gassed a little bit on the run in...

I finished quite happy but again a little frustrated at what could have been!

However seeing Sweden and Finland finish behind me was a nice touch. Dan got a

branch in his eye and couldn't see for half the course, not ideal and then David ran very well on last leg. Overall an okay team performance.

So that was it. Three years of racing EYOC and it's now over. I am so grateful for having the opportunity to compete at these competitions over the years and I feel like they will provide invaluable experience for the coming years. I certainly felt a lot more comfortable putting on that GB top and racing this year than I ever have before. Anyways, thanks to everyone that had helped me!

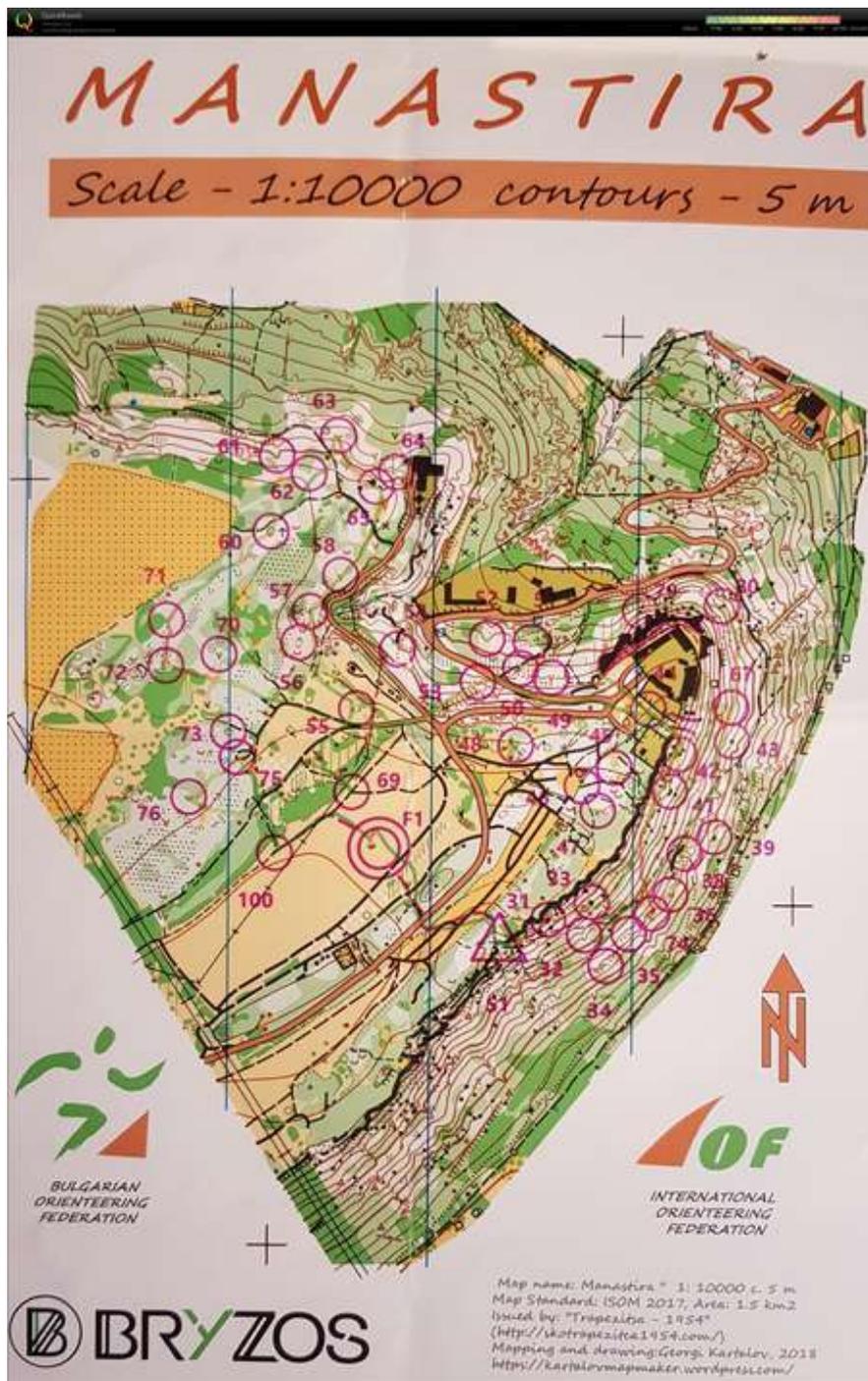
Now to rest, but only for a week!

## Post EYOC (Alastair)

The next 4 days were spent as follows:

2nd: relaxing in the hotel with a trip to the gym just to loosen the legs

3rd: recovery jog round a park in the city we were staying and some preparation for the long race at JWOC



4th: again another recovery run round the same park and some prep for the middle and relay at JWOC, but also a swim in the pool and most importantly organising the transport to the airport the next day.

These 4 days were very important for the recovery from EYOC which of course meant having a buffet breakfast and a 3 course meal for lunch and tea was vital! Having this time also gave us time to reflect on all of our races and analyse what we should do in order to have the best chances at JWOC.

Looking back at the EYOC races I feel my runs were alright, could've been worse but most importantly could've been better. In the sprint my navigation was just too slow in the technical bit and I never felt I fully got up to speed. The long was a bit better however I had one big mistake meaning I lost 4 minutes at least. Again, the relay was better with only a couple of misses this time. So overall I am pretty happy with my first (and last) EYOC performance. We fly out to JWOC on Thursday to meet the rest of the team for JWOC, yayyyy!

## **Travel (Alastair)**

It's Thursday the 5th of July and today we travel. Veliko Tarnovo is the current location and Keks-kemet is the target destination.

5.30am. We wake up and do the final packing, then head outside to get a taxi down to the bus station. 6.20am. The bus leaves. It was sweaty and uncomfortable but we got to Sofia. Good. Now for a taxi to the airport, as we drove we realised that our coinage might not cover this taxi fare so some notes had to be broken out. Fair play taxi man, fair play. Terminal 2 was now our location. Except the flight was from terminal 1; about 1km away. Who messed that one up, not me for sure. Another taxi was hailed, some coins played and now we are at the airport.

3 pizzas and some card games later and it's time to fly. Budapest here we come.

We met the rest of the guys and then got into the hire cars and hit the road, the final part was upon us. And done. Hotel arrived at.

Man it is LUSH. Like I mean nice! No time for that though as we headed out on a little team jog to stretch the legs and finish a nice day's travelling.

## **JWOC Training (Alastair)**

For me these training days were a process of reacquainting myself with the terrains that I visited last summer on the Pre-JWOC camp but for Dan and Niamh it was a whole new experience. The terrain in Hungary is almost the complete opposite of what we just competed in whilst in Bulgaria. It is flat and sandy and very very bushy. In fact it is the bushes, more specifically the large patches of juniper bushes that pose the biggest challenge.

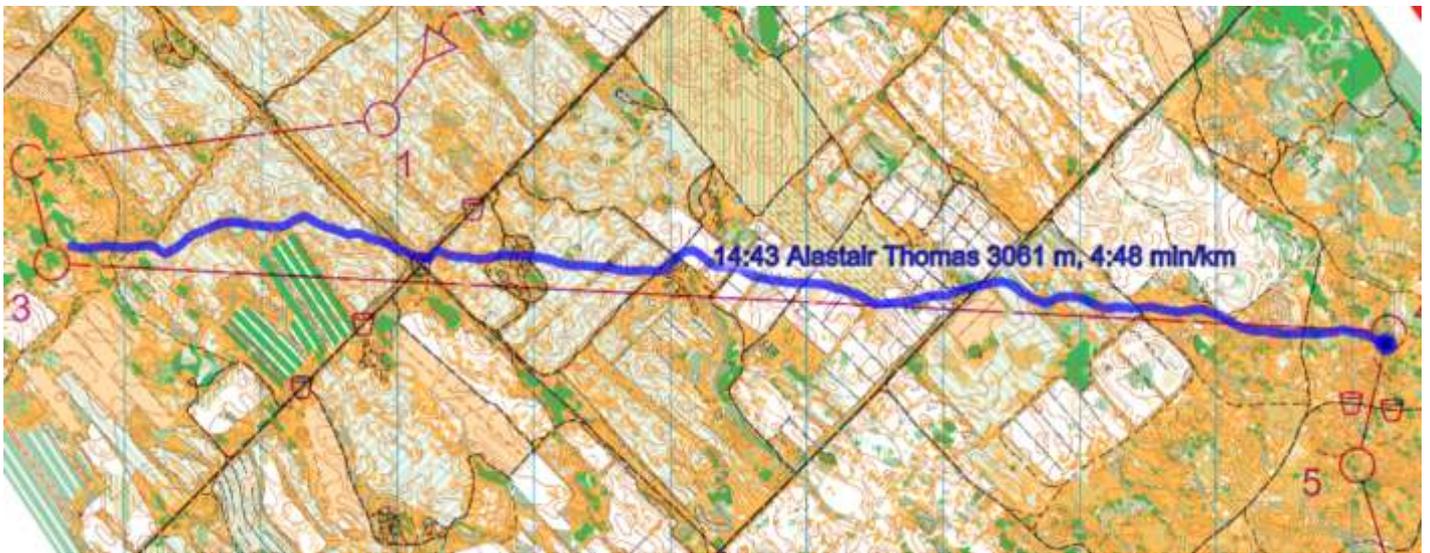
At first glance these areas just look like a green mess on a bit of paper, and to be honest the reality isn't much better. However after a few times running in the unique terrain we had worked out a few strategies to best navigate in them.

Tall trees are good to look for and you had to almost navigate as if it was a maze, looking for the patches of yellow which were passable and avoiding green at all costs.

After the past few days spent in the training areas I feel much more confident for the races coming up. On Monday we have the long, then on Thursday it is middle qualifier, followed by middle final on Friday and then the relay on Saturday. And we cannot wait, bring on the races!!

## **JWOC Long (Daniel)**

On Monday we had the long distance race. Thankfully the weather wasn't too hot, a cool 23 degrees, which was lucky for the athletes due to the length of the courses. For the men there was 15k and for the women 10k. We were told that this is the longest JWOC race ever due to the fast nature of the terrain. The area was mostly open with patches of dense vegetation and 2m contours which made for tricky vague navigation in places.



Because of my start time I was by myself at breakfast and in quarantine which probably wasn't the best for pressure which was building right up to when I had to leave for the start. To get there there was a warm up map which had the pre start marked on it, a nice bit of navigation to get you into the race. I made it with plenty of time to go and spent the few minutes before my start trying to stay cool and covering myself in water.

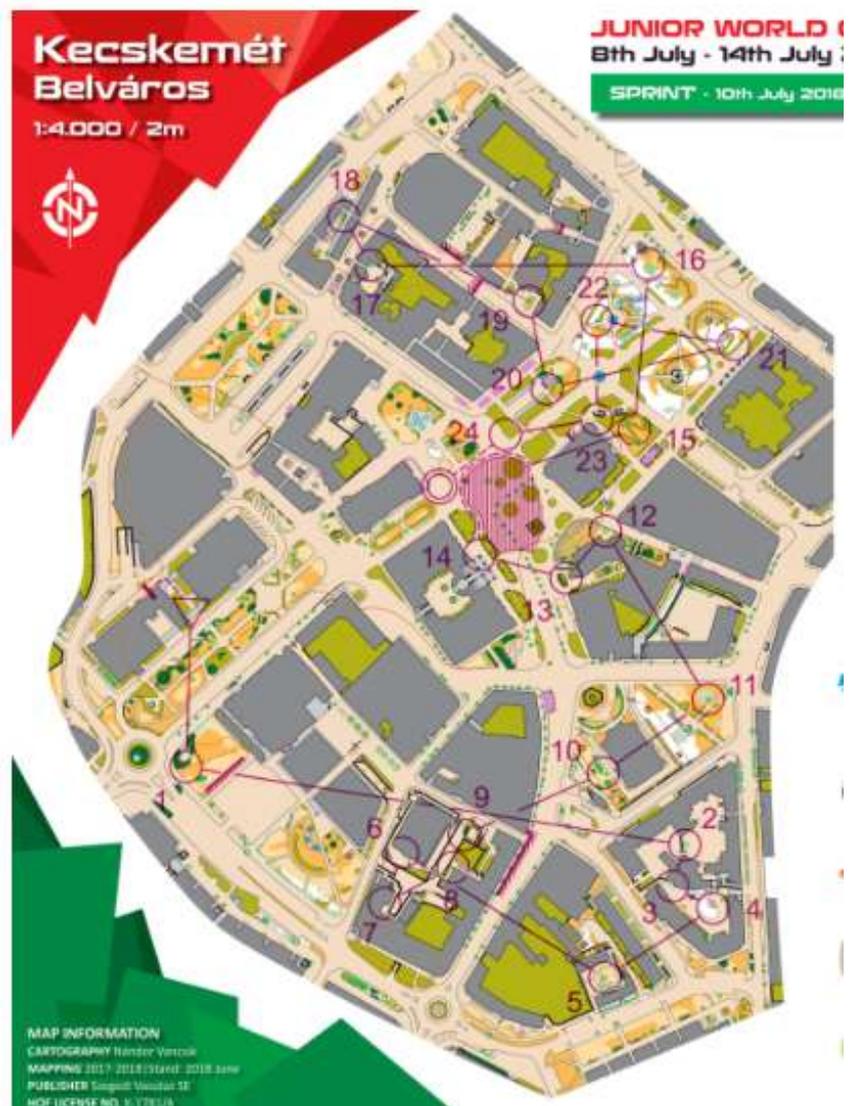
The course itself was challenging and overall I didn't feel I was prepared. I wasn't pleased with my result, but Alastair and Niamh performed much better and should be happy with their positions. The first race of JWOC is always going to be tough and some people can cope better with that than others. Hopefully now that we have the experience we can return and achieve the top results that we all want.

### JWOC Sprint (Niamh)

Sprint day...or spectator day for us three. One of the conditions for running both EYOC and JWOC was that we had to miss out the Sprint at JWOC. We were all a bit annoyed that we weren't allowed to run however if we weren't to run any of the days today was the most exciting one to watch!

There was no previous map of the Sprint so everyone was working their hardest to make a map that would as accurately as possible represent the race map so they could plan courses to look at. They knew that there would be a couple of small technical sections and some artificial barriers in the way but no one had really expected the course to be as hard as it was! A combination of artificial barriers and multiple controls in a multi-level section meant it was easy for mistakes to happen if you were running too fast. Even just standing and looking at the map in the finish I found it hard to find good routes to some controls!

Matt Felbaum (former NWJS member and WCOC's biggest fan) was one of the first GB runners to set off, after watching him on the GPS tracking through the race it was clear Matt wasn't being phased by the course. We waited



for him at the spectator run through and sure enough he was through in a very good time. At the finish (with the help of our cheering) sprinted across the line to come in 1st!!! However as Matt was an early start we all had a nervous wait until the last finisher!

After cheering all the other GB guys coming through, and watching on the GPS it was back to the agonising wait to see if Matt had done it. It came all the way up until the last couple of runners with Matt still in 1st. A German runner, Colin, had got a good start. However everyone seemed to be up on Matt's time at the start of the course and then Matt just flew from there. Colin unfortunately also flew and ended up just pipping Matt to the top position.

We were all however still so excited and delighted for Matt and just couldn't hold our emotions together!! It was one of the most amazing things I have ever experienced. Matt himself said it was more than he'd expected!

Myself and a couple of other GB girls then all had to run around the Sprint arena frantically trying to find flowers and leaves to make a flower crown for Matt when he was on the podium. And that was it, Matt's time was here, he was called on to the podium and I don't think GB have ever screamed so loud in their lives!! All the girls ran up and gave him a kiss on the cheek and put his flower crown on.

What an amazing day it was for everyone!

### **JWOC Rest Day (Alastair)**

Today was the official planned rest day, with a trip around the national park or a house show planned. However we decided that we would like some last minute practice on some middle relevant terrain and also just a chance to relax.

So, in the morning we headed back out to Keskantchu and just had a short jog around the controls in the green to refresh our memories of what was vital to use in this terrain. This was a good opportunity to also relieve any nerves we had about the next couple of races by talking with each other and the coaches.

After deciding we'd got all the knowledge we could get from that session we headed back to the hotel and straight to the spa! The rest of the afternoon was just spent relaxing in the spa and just unwinding from the last two days racing.

In the evening of course it was the England Vs. Croatia football match - the one we'd all been waiting for. The hotel had set up a massive screen outside for everyone to watch on. The atmosphere was great but unfortunately the result was not quite as we hoped. During the match, at half time we also managed to squeeze in a team meeting for tomorrow's race - of course. All prepped and ready for tomorrow's race we headed to bed hoping our results would be better than the football's!

### **JWOC Middle Qualification (Niamh)**

Today was middle qualification day. We knew that top 20 was required to qualify for the final and that's what we all aimed to get. After a 30 minute bus journey from the hotel we got picked up by military vehicles to take us along the sandy dirt roads to the quarantine. After about a 45 minute bumpy, dusty journey we arrived.

There was a warm up map just off from the quarantine which after a bit of sitting around I went to find some controls on this map. This was a chance to just get a bit of last minute knowledge of the area and also to get back into the map. Then it was time for me to start.

We all knew that a clean run would be a good chance at qualifying and that's all that I wanted to do. I set off from the start steady so that I didn't lose time early in the course. This worked and I started to pick up the pace a bit at the end in the white, more open bit of woodland. Only 1 slight wobble on the last control and the next thing I know I'm running my hardest down the run in! I knew when I'd finished I'd had a good, clean run and was feeling confident that I was going to be in the running for qualification.

I went back to the team's meeting place and asked Paul what place I was in - I'd finished in 7th so knew if made the final (as I was a late starter). I was very pleased - qualifying for the middle was one of my main aims for my first JWOC.

In the end I finished 9th, Alastair also qualified for the final coming in 18th. Daniel just missed out of the final (he placed 28th). The closely packed heats made it a tough competition for final places!



Anyway...Now time to get mentally prepared to tackle the bushy tomorrow!

### JWOC Middle (Niamh)

Today was going to be one of the hardest middles any of us had ever run. Not losing time in the green bushes was going to anyone's best chance at a good result.

After only being in Hungary's unique bushy terrain a few times I was quite nervous about the course. I knew that I did not need to race it but instead just needed to concentrate on where I was and getting the correct line through the bushes. We knew most of the course was going to be in the bushes so keeping up the good navigation would be key.

Again, like yesterday I started slow and spiked number 1 which was a real confidence boost so set off to two knowing I could find it if I just slowed down and concentrated but when I got to where I thought the control should be and couldn't see it I panicked and then just lost all confidence so lost time here (I was only about 5 metres away just didn't go far enough). From here I had a couple more wobbles to the spectator run through, then all the last controls spiked and I was finished.

I finished 41st which I am quite happy with however I do know I could've done better. Alastair unfortunately was disqualified as a result of the badly taped spectator run through which even caught out multiple time JWOC champion Simona Aerbersold. Both himself and Daniel (who was running the B final) said they didn't have great runs getting caught out in the bushes as well.

This middle was definitely an experience for everyone and one that no one will forget!

### JWOC Relay (Niamh)

Relay dayyyyy!!

The relay terrain was the complete opposite to the middle days - very open with little sections of woods. This meant fast starts and fast finishes with plenty of time for teams to form out on the courses. All of myself, Alastair and Daniel were in the 'B' teams for GB however after a flyer of a run from Eddie Narbett (1st leg in Al and Dans team), Alastair was sent out in 4rd! Alastair only dropped a few places to finish in 10th and send Dan off. However after 7 days of hard racing

over the past two weeks Dan was feeling the heat and was very tired. He unfortunately slipped a bit more down the results but still finished in a respectable position.

In the women's GB1 started strong and finished just as sting coming in 4th! This was an amazing finish to the week and left the team on such a high. My relay team didn't have as good of a start (Emma Wilson - 1st leg) but managed to climb back up the list on both 2nd (Laura King) and 3rd (Myself) legs to finish 21st out of everyone, 5th 2nd team.

In the end we were all just very glad to have finished racing, especially with the relay being the hottest day we had raced in!

After the prize giving which was an amazing feeling for the whole team, we were all ready to hit the spa and get ready for the farewell party. All dressed up in our matching outfits we had our last team talk and headed to partyyy!

## International Summary

Overall both the EYOC and JWOC experiences have been amazing and one that none of us will ever forget in a hurry!

Thank you to everyone who has helped support us at EYOC and JWOC as we would have never been able to get there without you! We have all now got more fire in our bellies to return for more next year!

## Pre-JWOC (Daniel)

After a few weeks rest and recovery including O-ringen for Alastair and Niamh and the Lakes 5 for all three of us we were ready to begin preparation for next year.

We flew out to Aarhus, Denmark met the rest of the GB team then travelled to Silkeborg the centre of JWOC 2019. Here we trained on the local areas testing out the terrain and route-choices that will be relevant to next year's JWOC. We had a big focus on analysing every session that we did to make sure that we learnt everything we could about the terrain.

On the first day we had long distance training in the morning on Vesterskov one of the areas supposed to be relevant to the long. This was good fun but I was surprised at how hilly it was for a supposedly flat country. The forest itself was fairly British seeming with lightning fast white as well as patches of green that provided very slow running in places. An example of analysis of one of the longer legs is shown below.

The afternoon was middle training on another similar area which overlapped with the mornings training. This was important to keep your direction on, again it was a good chance to sample all the vegetation.

The next day was Relay training with some of the other nations who were staying and training in the area. This meant a very very fast start and a high pace kept up all the way through, with some of the very best in the world running it was always going to be interesting.

In the afternoon we travelled back to Aarhus to do some sprint training around the university and drive



around the edge of the embargoed area, being careful not to go into it by accident.

The next day we had a rest with only one session at the coast on an area with 2.5m contours which was challenging in different ways to the previous days. Lots of people cut this short because of the long course and high training volume of the past couple of days.

Relay training near 'Himmelberg' Denmark's highest mountain. We were keeping it physically easy and trying to beat each other with better navigation leading to people taking better routes and increasing the amount that we learnt about the terrain and the nature of head-to-head racing in it.

Middle training, this was our last exercise in Denmark and provided a fast and varied terrain on an older map which made it a bit more interesting. One route-choice was made more interesting by the electric fence which was switched on....

*A huge thank you again for all the generous support we have received from CSOA, NWOA and CSOA.*

*Niamh Hunter, Alastair Thomas and Daniel Spencer (September 2018)*