



DEESIDE ORIENTEERING CLUB  
British Trail-O Championships 2009



Daresbury Firs & Laboratory  
28-29<sup>th</sup> November 2009  
Officials' Comments

### **Organiser's / Cartographer's Comments (Pete Owens)**

Thanks to all the Deeside helpers, many of whom were stood out in the cold and rain for such a long time; also to Barry and Louise from Daresbury who manned the first timed control on the Saturday; and John's sons Tim and Olly who did a great job in raking/sweeping the previously indistinct paths on the top of the hill and clearing away lots of debris. Those who had been on the area in the past would appreciate what a difference it made.

Special thanks to Chris for setting up the ropes for wheelchair use, unfortunately these weren't needed in the end; to Don and Anne for the efficient download and prompt results; and of course our Controller Alan Gartside who made two visits from Belfast, and was hard at work in the forest from the early hours helping John set up the courses.

I'd also like to thank STFC Daresbury Laboratory staff for access to the Lab including the coffee lounge and registration area and removing the chest-high brambles from the path from the timed controls to the start of the courses.

I don't know how anyone manages to plan two consecutive trail-O courses at a remote and unfamiliar location. We had everything going for us – we both work in the Lab so we could spend every lunch hour for several months experimenting with control sites; we are very familiar with the terrain (or at least we thought we were before we started); we had surveyed the original map and had a pretty good idea of how the vegetation would change and what would be visible in November. Even so, we came under time pressure so couldn't do full justice to one or two of the controls in the Lab.

### **Planner's Comments (John Kewley - MDOC)**

First of all thanks to Peter Roberts for inviting me to be the Planner for this year's BTOC. Having only planned one mini Trail-O event before this was always going to be a challenge so I suggested a local area to maximise the time I could spend on the ground. Pete Owens was effectively co-planner (as well as Cartographer and Organiser!) and had a significant input into virtually all the controls over the two days, so a big thank you to him for all his work.

From the start we knew our map would have to be amended, firstly for 2.5m contours and

secondly to "tighten up" the map around all the controls. This has been a huge job over many lunchtimes taking bearings and measuring stuff with tapes - and definitely easier as a pair.

Note that unknown to any of the organising team the BOF website states that only Elite courses have Z controls. So apologies for those on the Standard course who didn't expect to have any Zs. I expect that this wording will be re-visited by the Trail-O committee sometime soon.

The solutions that are on the DEE website were written before the event, so how did they live up to our expectations?

### **Lab Event**

I stated in the advanced information that this was not intended to be a model event. I therefore felt inclined to give you a bit of fun so I hope you enjoyed some of the novel aspects of Trail-O that an Urban Trail-O course gave. Note that I wouldn't have even considered some of these had this been the BTOC course:

- An indoor TC
- A timed control on fences on tops of buildings (apologies for the sun, that control was planned months ago and Pete and I had passed out that door hundreds of times and never seen the sun there (or virtually anywhere to be honest!)
- Two controls sharing the same circle.
- A multi-piece statue (I'd have disallowed this for an Elite course, but I hope it was fun and educational)
- Looking across a low building to kites above it.

I heard some comments about two of the controls regarding the use of accurate compass. Make your own minds up on their validity, taking into account that accurate compass should be considered a last resort in Trail-O, especially on an urban area with large lumps of metal around:

- "There seemed to be some magnetic anomaly near the statue!",  
"You mean the lump of re-enforced concrete with a large red metal girder sticking out of it?"
- "All the kites looking across the field were out of line with an accurate compass bearing (with my sighting compass I get 0.5 degree accuracy) from the corner of the paved area!"  
"You mean the corner with the large digger in its corner, which was inaccessible to wheelchairs?"

As a final note, just because you can measure to 0.5 degrees doesn't mean your bearing is that accurate. Thickness of lines, cartographic limits and many other things mean it isn't as accurate as that. In Trail-O planning you can assume that competitors should be able to

take bearings to 5 degrees accuracy, but no closer.

### **BTOC**

Some controls in the Firs caused more trouble for competitors than was expected. I'd be very interested to hear your thought processes to see why you chose what you did:

Firstly I hope you all agree it was worthwhile taking you up the hill, given the excessive amount of rainfall we had had in the previous few weeks it was a lot damper than expected and I suspect would have been a bit hard for electric wheelchairs in those conditions. The top of the hill did (in my opinion) had the best area for Trail-O, although I think the controls on the lower slopes had a different flavour and gave better variety to the event.

Apologies to some of you who didn't do all the lower controls before climbing the hill and to those who had trouble finding E10. In retrospect I'd have amended the sign at the bottom of the hill to remind people to ensure they had punched all 7 before continuing. I don't regret not having a sign to say where 10 decision point was, there was a direction arrow in the descriptions and you are supposed to navigate round an Elite course.

Lines to link controls together were always going to be a problem so we missed them out altogether. For those thinking of doing this in the future note the following ramifications:

- Placement of the control numbers is crucial otherwise people will get confused where to go.
- It was a bit easy to miss out 7 and go straight up the hill, which is why I think we should have had a sign to help people as stated above.
- These lines are very handy for working out the precise centre of the control circle (if your compass baseplate doesn't have a 6mm circle with centred dot like some of the Russian team!).

Looking at the results there were two controls in particular where I was very puzzled by how few got them correct.

### **TC1:**

The bottom of the steps should have indicated only one possible kite. In fact I had to consult Pete's photos to convince myself that I hadn't had A and B the wrong wrong way round ... I hadn't. Maybe it was the orchard symbol or the Open land control description that threw people, but Elites should really know these. Only 3 people got this control correct (including 7 year old Robert Seddon who was tied for the overall lead after the 2 timed controls!).

### **E10:**

I guess the centre of the circle should have been a tad further North and the two wrong kites a few inches further from the edges. I didn't find anyone who thought the symbol was for a col.

**E20:**

Trickery (possibly excessive?) by the Planner, but most of those who said "B" hadn't read the description properly and have now learned the distinction between the 2 IOF Control Descriptions.

**Controller's Comments (Alan Gartside - FVO)**

The first point to be made is an appreciation of the enormous time and effort put in to the staging of this event by John and Pete. It helps that they work within the area of the map but, even so, they have spent much leisure time prowling the car parks and woods of Daresbury Laboratory and Firs. It struck me, on my inspection visit, how they were able to converse about flag positions without recourse to the documentation – that meant they had collectively learned the details of almost 150 sites!

The map with which they started was the subject of a BOF mapping award just a couple of years ago, but John and Pete acknowledged just how much it had to be "hardened up" for TrailO – it's not widely realised in the orienteering community that a map which is sufficiently accurate for the foot orienteer running across the terrain can show flaws when studied by the motionless trail orienteer.

The Controller's main role is to represent the competitors in terms of fairness and safety and I had no qualms on either count. I turned on my Planner's brain occasionally to admire some of the distractors introduced at various controls including the unique, in my experience, need to navigate between decision points on the top of the hill thus making concentration a full time requirement. The timeout arrangement to allow ascent of the hill was, I felt, an admirable and very fair solution. Much work was done to clear the tracks and paths of undergrowth and leaf clutter, thus providing a "pitch" which didn't influence the competition.

The striking difference in terrain between the foot and the top of the hill provided a wonderful balance between the plantation conifers and the complicated contours and the idea of routing competitors out and back through those contours with a map exchange introduced yet another distractor (you can tell I'm keen on those!).

The laboratory event on the Saturday couldn't be given the same degree of check as BTOC but as it was being treated as a warm-up rather than a model event that didn't give me too much concern. There were a couple of controls which couldn't have remained if the event had had a championship status but the event showed what can be done in apparently unlikely terrain.

The registration facilities were magnificent as was the post-event lounge. A squad of helpers was conjured up and along with Don and Anne Braggins, who handled results, are all to be commended for sticking to their posts on a very wet Sunday.

I feel that John and Pete are to be congratulated on providing an event worthy of British Champs status.