

SInS 2021 – Stapeley & Rorrington

Planner's Report

After a year with very little orienteering, and feeling that I could do with a challenge, I jumped at the chance to plan one of the SINS events when the call for Planners came out.

Having never run at Stapeley, I was keen to see the site as soon as possible and made my first visit as soon as travel restrictions were lifted on 29th March. My only companions that day were a few red kites swooping overhead, and young lambs keeping with their mothers. It was only when I got back to the car and drove away from the site that I realised that I had strayed into Wales, which was technically not allowed by the Covid restrictions at that time. Thankfully Mark Drakeford was nowhere to be seen!

My first impression of the competition area was of a large open expanse, with complex bog and drainage channel features in the valleys, and added complexity caused by an estate boundary marked by a barbed wire fence that could only be crossed at a handful of gates and stiles.

Peter Jones from WRE has been mapping this area since 1985, and has produced a first class map with great and accurate detail on physical features such as numerous mining pits and the complex drainage channels in boggy areas. We agreed that it would be impractical in the time available to update all of the vegetation features, particularly areas of gorse, and that it would be best to use physical control features.

The layout of out of bounds areas and the desire to keep start and finish apart, to encourage social distancing, dictated their positions. Working with Controller, Adrian Pickles from WRE, we concluded that it would be best to have the start away from areas used by the public near the car parks, ending up with a similar start area to that used in 2015.

Given that numbers were to be restricted, I was asked to produce just eight colour coded courses. However, as it was decided that the event would be used as the Midlands Championships, I was asked to produce courses on the longish side, but we were aware that, without a Very Short Green course, a lot of veteran competitors would run the Short Green course.

Planning the junior courses proved quite difficult due to the complexity of the footpath network to the south of Stapleton Hill, and the vestigial nature of some of the paths following vegetation clearance by the commoners.

The main issue on the longer courses was to avoid too much climb, and to keep an eye on the issue of overloading control sites on the more interesting features in the valleys and to find good route choice legs using the crossing points in the estate fence which divides the site into two. I had great support and advice from Adrian Pickles, who knows the area well, in preparing the courses which were greatly improved due to his input.

On the weekend of the event, I put out all of the northern controls on the Saturday, and then returned on the Sunday morning getting to site at 6:50, in thick mist. Putting out the controls on the top of Stapleton Hill was wonderful as the mist was in the valleys below me, but finding one of my taped control sites in the valley was made quite difficult by the mist. After lots of pacing, and counting off drainage channels, I was convinced I had it right and that the tape must just have disappeared but I asked Adrian to check once he had woken up the northern controls. When he arrived, the mist had burned off and he was able to relocate the control onto the taped spot- phew!

After adding a few smiley faces to the White course, we were ready at 11 am and competition began.

With the exception of one injury, and a handful of very experienced M60s mistaking the first control on the White course for the Start flag, there don't seem to have been too many problems. However, several runners on the green course found a misplaced tape (note to self- remove all unused tapes in future) on a control site similar to the one they were navigating towards- fortunately, no one gave up looking for this control.

We had a fantastic team of control collectors which made wrapping up very easy. I'd like to thank Ian Pickering, Andy Clough, Mandy Mackereth, Andy Hemsted, Peter Rose and Robert Rose. Despite having run the Brown course, Robert agreed to collect in the most distant controls- a sterling effort!

John Leeson HOC