Planners Report 2016

For anyone interested in the thought processes behind the planning…

Several people have asked how I find control features to use. First I decide roughly the areas I want to put controls in, then I spend a while at home poring over the map and circling features on the map that look interesting. I run out to check them out, but often they are not usable – either the feature is not obvious enough on the ground, or the map is out-of-date or misleading in the area around it. However often I stumble across some other feature that I can use instead. A lot of the control features that I use are places I stumble on just by reccying throughout the area.

Then back at home comes an iterative process of removing controls that don't work well and deciding where I need another control, or one needs moving. To go out again and check the new locations.

I aim to make the section between each control to be interesting – either with a choice of ways to go, or requiring concentration to keep on the optimum route. If the route between two controls is straightforward then I need to think about changing something.

Similarly for the controls as a whole – if there are obvious routes to join the controls up then something needs to change. The best event makes you think hard about the best sequence to take the controls in, and ideally when you get back home you are still thinking that there was a better route that you didn't spot at the time!

The other thing I do is try to run on most of the options between the controls that I think people may take, to check that there is not some issue with the map, or blocked paths or even problematic landowners. I avoided putting a control on Crow Hill because I didn't want people to have to run past the unpleasant dogs at the farms below it!

The Tracklogs version of the OS map that I use for the map is fairly up-to-date but even so there are a lot of paths marked on the map that don't exist on the ground and vice-versa. Using Paintshop Elements software I added two paths on Bell House Moor (NW of #11) to your maps, partly because I was going to put a control at a group of boulders on one of those paths – but didn't in the end because there were already enough controls near there. I also added the dot at #19 marking the standing stone there.

My worry each year is that someone else – farmer, walker, whoever - will see a control and move it before the event. That would be a disaster since the competitors would be searching the area fruitlessly. Fortunately it has not yet happened in the 12 years I have organised this event, but is why I make the controls not **too** visible. This year I put #2 out just before dusk on the day before the event because it is on a well-walked path.

2016 planning

Originally I was planning to do a map with our house at the centre – i.e. go towards Midgley Moor as well as to the south. But after working on options I reckoned that by concentrating on an area south of Mytholmroyd we could do an A4 map that would take in a lot of open fell around Withens Moor & Stoodley, as well as the complicated lanes, paths and hidden areas to the south-east, which is what we ended up with.

There are limited options for placing controls in the latter area of lanes – with most of it being farmland we are limited to either the pockets of open-access land or putting the controls on footpaths. I also need to prevent making the quickest route between controls being across fields – which would tempt people to trespass, and reward them for doing so; and at the same time I need to prevent there being one single easy route between controls, which takes away the challenge of route choice.

As a result, controls 1,2,3,7 are widely spaced out. To mitigate this they were worth more points than most other controls, which would give a good option to anyone who wanted to take the option of navigating the lanes and paths in this area. In fact a route of 2-3-1-7-6-5-4 should be readily achievable in 3 hours and be worth a respectable 95 points, with the option to add in #21 for an additional 15 points if you had sufficient time after going to #7.

I think I have used #3 in a score event before. The ground to it from the main path to the east of the control is rough, and the mapping of paths around it is no longer very accurate. All of those factors meant I was reluctant, but I did want to have a control in that area – it gives lots of options – and decided in the end that it was the most interesting spot to use. I did, however, make the kite very prominent on the top of the wall. Generally I don't mind making the controls tricky when they are further away from the start and likely visited by the better competitors, but this one was close to home.

I didn't know the lanes around #1 at all, and spend a pleasant few hours running around there before finding the lovely path down to the river that I placed the control at.

#7 is an air-raid shelter that many people will know of. I have thought of using it as a control ever since first running past it years ago. I thought of putting "shelter" as the control description but decided that people might instantly think "ah I know that" and go straight to it without needing to navigate, hence it became just "building" instead.

For the trio of controls through the centre, 4,5,6: I know that area well, although I was surprised of the extent of the ruined walls at #5 – how far off the path they go. I reckoned these three controls would be an interesting route out/back for people doing either the eastern controls or the western ones, while the top runners who combined both sets of controls would have a difficult decision about how to fit these three in or whether to ignore them.

The control at #6, that caused a few people problems, I changed the location of on the day before the event! Originally it was going to be at the wall corner a couple of hundred yards to the SW of where it is now, in a direct line continuing up from the path from Cragg Vale road. That location would have (a) presented a choice of route to the road and on to #16, and (b) give a run through a nice part of the wood. However I decided at the last moment to change it to the new location because otherwise the best route between it and #5 would be along the main road - it is much more interesting to get people to go along the paths instead. In theory with the control now on a marked path it should have been easier to find, but perhaps that wasn't the case in practice!

The other control that I also changed on the day before the event was the other one that caused people problems: #17. The stream that it is on flows down a small waterfall into a wide re-entrant – the most prominent feature on that part of the fell. Originally I had put the control in the re-entrant below the waterfall, but when I was on the edge of Withens Clough reservoir I could actually see the control. That's not ideal – it takes away any challenge in finding it from below – so I returned to it a couple of days later and moved it (on the ground and on the map) to above the waterfall. On the day of the event however the area was in clag, so it probably wouldn't have been possible to have seen it from the reservoir anyway!

Every year I find new places I didn't know existed – this year it was the Cuckoo Stone at #8 and the small standing stone at #19. I don't know anything about either of them, but they are both interesting features. Also puzzling are the cairns at #16 – I've no idea what they are for, but just stumbled on them when I was looking at a place for that control. Originally I had headed out to the bits of wall and spring shown on the map to the NW of that point – but the ground was horribly tussocky and I felt I couldn't inflict it on anyone so was looking for an easier place for runners to get to.

Speaking of horribly tussocky ground, the worst area is around #18 – hard work to get to from any direction. Spare a thought for me since I approached it several times from multiple directions to check it out. It is one of the furthest checkpoints from the start, so I reckon it is fair to test the stronger runners who made it that far with some tough ground – to test your physical and mental stamina to get through it!

Finally two thought processes behind a couple of groups of controls:

8,9,10,11 present interesting options for someone heading for 12 and beyond – you could do those four in either order, or miss out 11, or even go 8-9-10-11-16-15-12 for the confident. More choice means more fun!

17-18-19-20 also offers a choice of sequence of visiting them - for the top runners who make it to that far corner of the map. Finding 17 is easier by following the lines of the streams down from 19 or 20 than it is by contouring from 18 or coming over from 21. It is easiest of all when coming up from the reservoir. So for that reason (and for what it's worth) my planner's suggestion would be: 8-9-10-12-13-14-15-16-17-19-20-21-6-5-4-2 (210 points).

Cheers, Bill