

Northern Navigators
Shaftoe Crags - 2nd April 2022
National Middle Distance event

Planner's comments - Rob McKenna (NN)

I hope you all enjoyed competing on this small gem of an area in the North East.

Early planning considerations revolved around supporting a weekend of events leading up to the Northern Championships, but these changed when it was revealed that this event was to be a GB Junior selection race, later complicated by also being assigned a UKOL league event.

The guidelines for these two events are subtly different, but an emphasis had to be put on the Junior selection race in an attempt to emulate the type of races they would encounter in the coming months and into next year. This meant planning courses they would run to try and achieve winning times of 20-25 minutes.

Looking at past results and knowing how fast the area could potentially be and given the right competitors, I thought this could be done.

Past long distance events on the area had produced running times of around 6 mins/km with good local runners, so all credit to the faster juniors who managed speeds of around 4.6 mins/km.

The area is basically split into two quite different zones, with the northern part being generally fast but devoid of significant features. While there are some interesting rock features along its western edge, planning for a middle distance event made it difficult to incorporate these fully into the courses. On crossing the gates into the southern section the terrain changes to become a little more physical with a lot more rock features, although not a lot of technical contour interest. There is a steep rocky slope along the southern edge with many impressive crags and boulders but it was felt that this would not be suitable for a fast paced event such as this.

The start location was dictated by the two shorter courses as the area has very few line features. This did mean that the start could be close to parking, which had a good warm up area and seemed to worked well on the day. Unfortunately this also meant a bit of a trek back from the finish, again the position being more or less dictated by the length of the Yellow course. However the weather was kind on the day which made the walk back quite pleasant.

The plan was to have a few fast controls on the northern part then cross into the more technical southern area. I must thank Duncan for his advice and guidance on trying to maintain the right balance here and keeping me on track.

When tagging the sites I had used some small canes with a prominent tag number on them - this does make it easier for the controller when checking sites. I had printed the labels for the tags in a bit of a hurry, not checking them thoroughly before attaching to the canes and only noticed that a few had differing numbers on each side of the tag when putting them out. At the time I only had a red biro with me to make a quick alteration, which seemed to be fine for final control setting.

I hadn't realised that over the next few weeks that the alteration would have faded leaving the old number very prominent. Worse again that a few competitors would use the tag as an identifier for the control they were seeking, being more prominent than the actual number on top of the control box. This turned out to be a major issue for some competitors on the Green course even though the control in question was not on their course. The Jury was convened to field a protest and a solution to the problem was agreed amicably.

The results, particularly for the juniors, look just about right with the exception of one very fast Green course competitor. Unfortunately some of the older competitors, expecting an easier run, being a middle distance event, appeared to find it more like a normal course.

The early start times seemed to be a bone of contention for some given that they would be travelling a long distance to get to the event. Being a selection race the juniors were seeded by Paul Murgatroyd (BO Head Coach for Talent) to ensure a fair race. This unfortunately resulted in pre-entry start preferences not being adhere to. The initial concept was to have all the juniors start at 3 minute intervals to avoid following and pack running. On the Green course this would have required a 2 hour start window just for the juniors on that course. We agreed that starts would be brought forward to 10:00, but even this would have meant that starts for non-juniors on that course, even at 1 minute intervals after the juniors, would stretch to 13:30. It was finally agreed with Paul that seniors could be interspersed with the juniors without compromising their race too much.

In hindsight we should ideally have planned separate courses for Blue, Green and Short Green to accommodate the junior selection race, but changes to the status of the event and closing date looming had meant that this wasn't feasible in the planning time left available.

I'm sorry if the early starts caused any undue stress but hope you enjoyed the competition and the area. We hope to see you back here some time in the future.