

Fibbersley

The main purpose of the event was to publicise the opening of the Fibbersley permanent course. The publicity was handled by Walsall council press department. Unfortunately the Express and Star only really picked up Pool Hayes School having had a grant enable them to have local Orienteering sessions, and didn't mention that Fibbersley, an area probably unknown to all but locals and a few hundred people, now had a new resource, open to all.

Chris McCartney of OD, a PE teacher at a nearby school and adjacent to Adrian Bailey's school had sorted the grants and permissions. He planned the control locations, 12 newly planted trickier controls and 38 easier controls utilising existing nature trail posts and fence posts. My role at this location had been the painting of 50 O marks and numbering, and re-numbering yet to be completed.

Use of such an area in July on the hottest day of the year was not ideal, but the path system made access easier. Richard seemed to make easy work of it, although he did start 4 hours after the first competitor so the undergrowth was probably a bit trampled.

Access to the first control after 80m, but with interesting route choice, was tricky. I spent some time clearing the undergrowth and dead branches as I feel that if competitors have a bad experience at control 1 their view of the whole event is tainted.

As I was earlier going round I failed to find a control in the North that Chris had termed 'signpost' and so put the white half of the O sign on a metal sign about 5 metres from the marked site. Chris later assured me it was there, and when I went back the next day to do the red paint I found it, a huge sign about 10' by 5' by 10' high saying Black Country Urban Forest, but just in the undergrowth, so I over-painted the metal sign. The day before the event I went there with my heavy duty secateurs to clear the undergrowth but some of the trees were 2" in diameter and needed a saw so it remained partly obscured, confusing competitors.

Within the area was high fenced area enclosing a permanent travellers site. I was surprised how even the 13 year old boys were nervous of going near there, quoting (literally) hair raising stories.

I am hoping to put a district event at Rough Wood around Christmas, another of the 6 newly mapped Walsall areas. Chasers, who partly funded the whole scheme, will be utilising Pelsall North Common. Shire Oak would probably make a good SEE, but Arboretum with Extension and Barr Beacon are probably only good enough for sprint areas. Existing Walsall areas are Brownhills (Wyrley) Common and Walsall airport. About ten schools in Walsall were mapped by Graham Gristwood together with about 40 Wolverhampton schools, so the potential is there to get a new centre of excellence!

Barry McGowan