

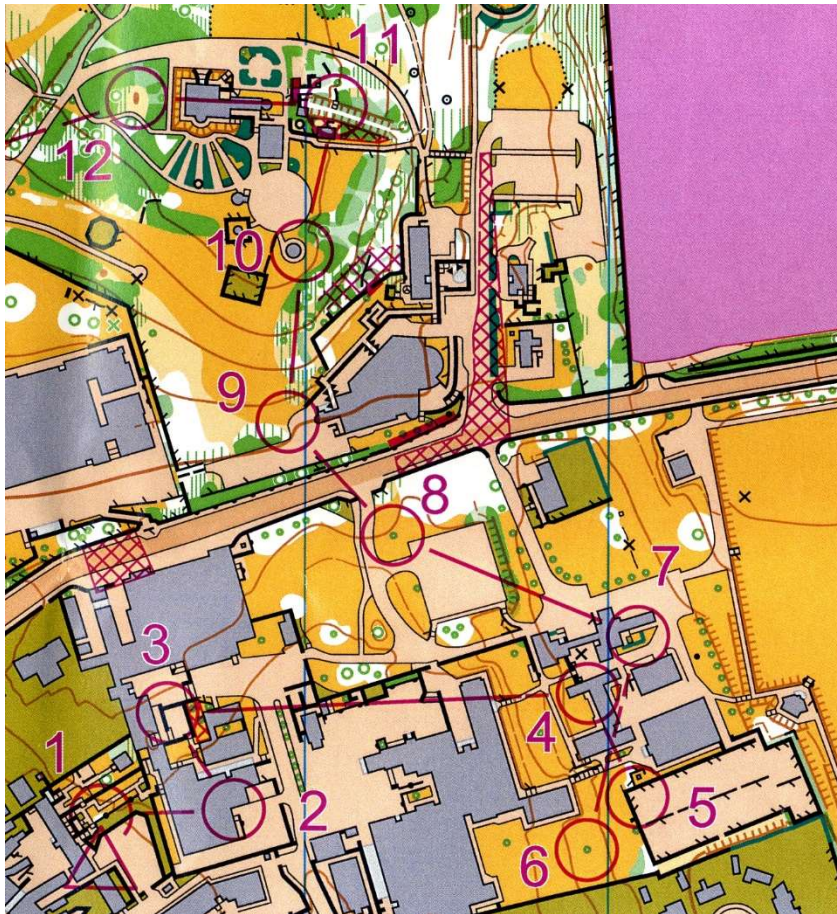
## British Sprint Championships 2023

Nigel Hault

Armagh was not the easiest (or cheapest) place to get to for the British Sprints, so in spite of the attraction of other events in the preceding week (and the British Middles the following day), it was unsurprising that only three BKO members made the journey, one of those just for the Trail-O.

As the qualification start times were not too early, I decided to fit in a parkrun beforehand as a warm-up. It was only a few days before the event that I realised that Irish parkruns started at 9:30 rather than 9:00, which left me wondering what start block I'd requested and whether I'd have enough time. When my start time was listed as 11:28 I thought all would be well; 30 minutes for the parkrun and 30 minutes travelling – which was much the same whichever of the five local parkruns I selected – would still leave me almost an hour. However, when I got to assembly and saw the long queue for the portaloos, I decided I'd better join that before doing anything else. By the time I reached the front, with about 20 minutes left and still to collect my bib and walk 1km to the start, I was getting a little concerned and decided I'd have to jog there; at least that meant I wouldn't need to warm up. I reached the start with 3 minutes in hand, which was fine.

The qualification was to the east of Armagh, and the start was very well thought out. Call-up was in a park and from there we went across the road and through the narrow building passthrough in the SW corner of the map; you could see nothing of the start before this. The start was in the courtyard, from which we exited by a small passage to the start kite, giving no clue at all which way people were running.



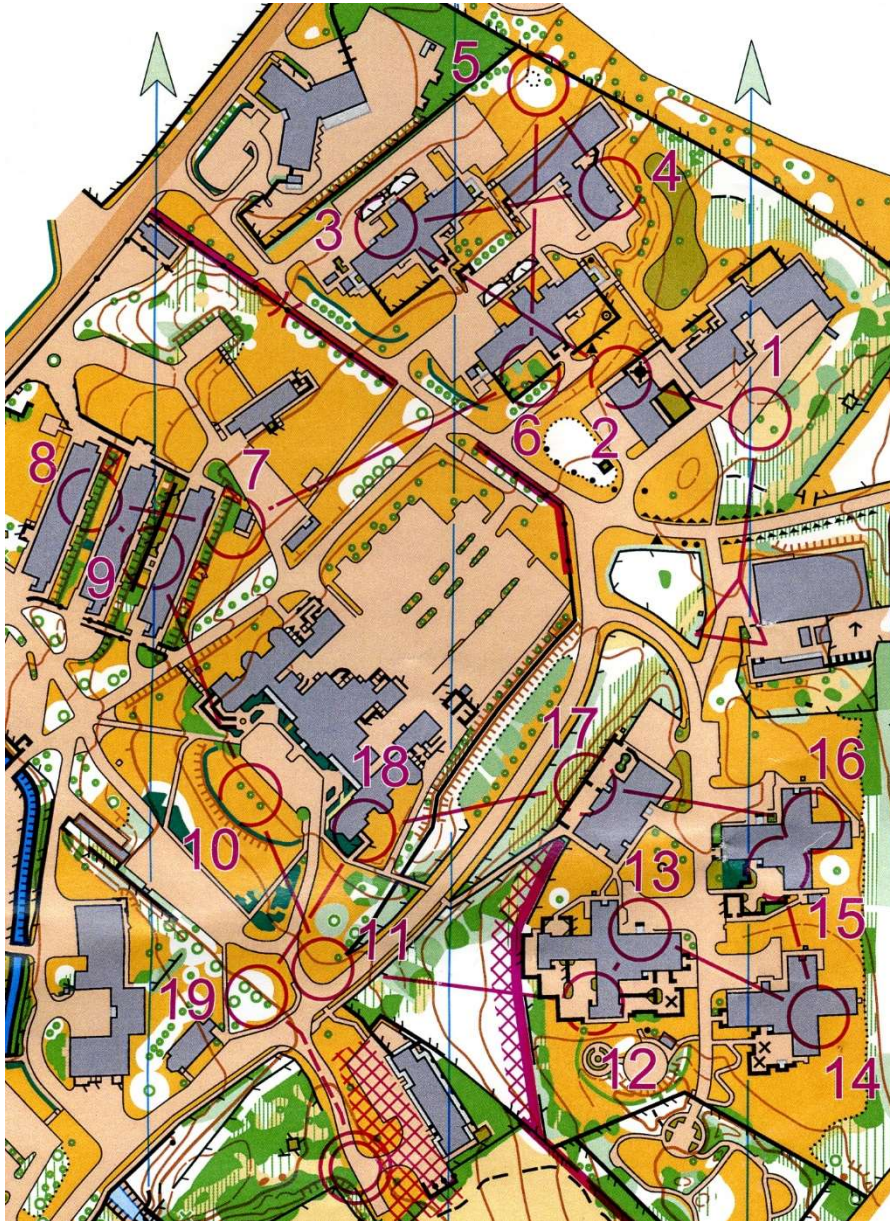
When I picked up my map I was surprised how short the first leg was. So short, in fact, that I overshot into the adjacent open area which also contained a control: not a great start. After that I settled down and the next few legs around the buildings and open areas went pretty well, until control 5. This was cunningly placed in the NW part of the tennis court (rather than the corner) so there was no possibility of cheating by punching through the fence. I failed to spot the uncrossable fence as I ran to the opening in the north which meant a bit of backtracking round the building.

A few controls later we had to cross a main road, which was to have been closed for the event. However, although permission had been granted it seems the local council failed to follow the correct procedure and so it had to remain open, which must have given the organiser some headaches. The solution, as described in the last minute information, was that there would be a timed out road crossing with two controls not shown on your map but on the route you would have taken anyway! I wasn't sure how this was going to work but in the end it was fine; as you can see, there really is only one possible way out of control 8. The first crossing control was on trestles but the one on the other side was handheld; presumably they felt that trestles there would completely block the pavement. Like most people, I headed west to get to control 9, and only saw the route to the east afterwards; it does look a little shorter but also a little more complicated, so perhaps my choice wasn't too bad after all. From here we headed uphill to an observatory where some of the controls were on telescopes (a first for me!). This area was the cause of some protests as competitors on some other courses felt there were two controls close together on similar features.

The end of the course was more straightforward and we ended up back by assembly. I finished 7<sup>th</sup> of 14, so had a nervous wait to see whether I would make the top half and therefore the A final; in the end I was 10<sup>th</sup> out of 34 so comfortably in there.

During the wait before the finals we were entertained by a local folk band; there was to have been a big screen showing the Coronation as well, but this didn't materialise. The entertainment was welcome, as the starts were delayed by 30 minutes which seems very common in these events.

The walk to the start for the finals was quite unusual, as we crossed farmland to end up in a large grassy field, with extensive views across the countryside and hardly a building in sight apart from the adjacent farmyard which was the location of the start. The weather had turned warm and sunny by this point, which was good as once there we learned of a further 30 minute delay.



The final course was a fast and furious race around the buildings of a former psychiatric hospital, a number of which were identical in shape giving plenty of scope for errors. I managed a pretty clean run with only a couple of “wobbles”, ending up in 6<sup>th</sup> place. However, as two of those ahead of me were not eligible for the championships, this meant that I was only just out of the medals, albeit more than a minute down on bronze. All in all, I thought it was a good competition in an interesting area, and I was pleased with my performance.