



17. – 21. July 2022 Umeå Sweden

Martin Wilson

(+ David Jukes)

The OOCup is a long-established international O event held in Slovenia since 1991. Slovenia has superb complex karst terrain, very detailed, with steep areas of mixed rock and boulders adding to the challenge. The format is always the same: a model event followed by five successive stage days, four Long Distance, with one Middle Distance, no rest day, no discard. Thus all mistakes accumulate into the final result. It is a really difficult challenge.

I've run in the event three times since 2014. On my last visit, I learnt the event would be held in France in 2021 and in Sweden in 2022. When I asked why, they said they were 'running out of new good areas in Slovenia' – something very hard to believe. Astonishingly, they seemed to obtain permission to set up and deliver the event in these other countries with the assistance of local clubs. Imagine if the UK tried to deliver the JK in, say, Austria!

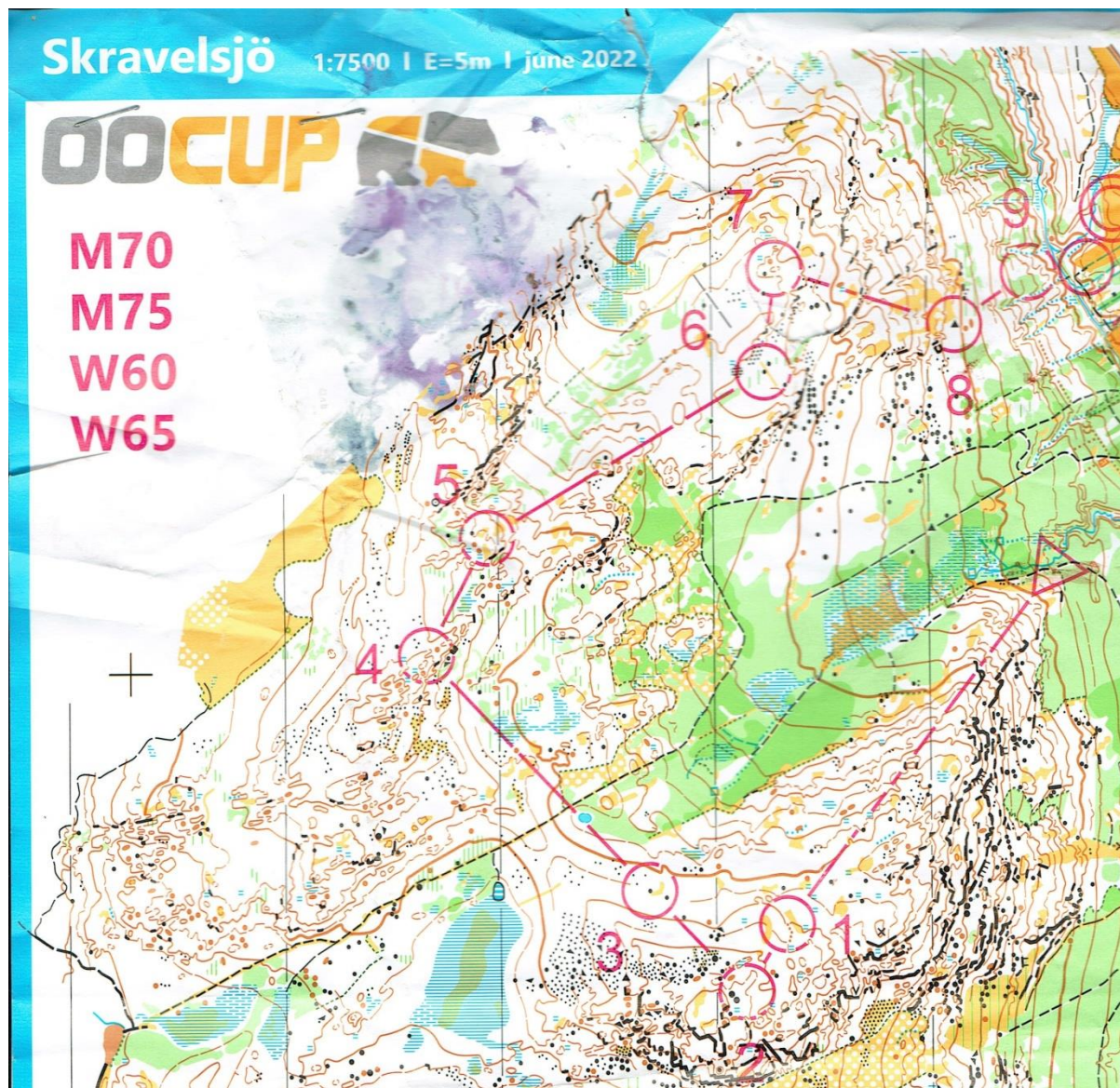
When the bulletin for Sweden was released, the terrain looked fabulous, some of it being used for the first time, so I decided to go. David Jukes was keen enough to join me, helping to reduce the logistics cost by sharing airport parking, hire car and accommodation. The event was centred at Umea, a city about 400km north of Stockholm. Umea (pronounced 'oom-you') is actually the home town of BKO member Bo Oqvist, and Bo was able to give us some help on local attractions we could visit.

The model event was a seriously complex section of terrain, with only mini-kites hung on features, but slightly spoiled by continuous rain. I was able though to remind myself that Swedish maps a) tend to use the dot knoll symbol for large rounded rocks with lichen and grasses growing on the summit, looking alarmingly similar to other large boulders, and b) use yellow to show areas of open bare rock, not always as distinctive on the ground as on the map.

The stage lengths were an unusual mix: Middle/Long Distance/Extended MD/Shortened LD/Extended MD. Readers are invited to sort these by length: we couldn't!

David and I were in different classes, but actually ran the same course each day. Our distances were short by UK standards, but times were high, around 15 min/km, with winning times around 45-50 mins.

I'll show each day's maps below, and comment on the most interesting or complex legs. Scales each day were 1:7500 with 5m contours.

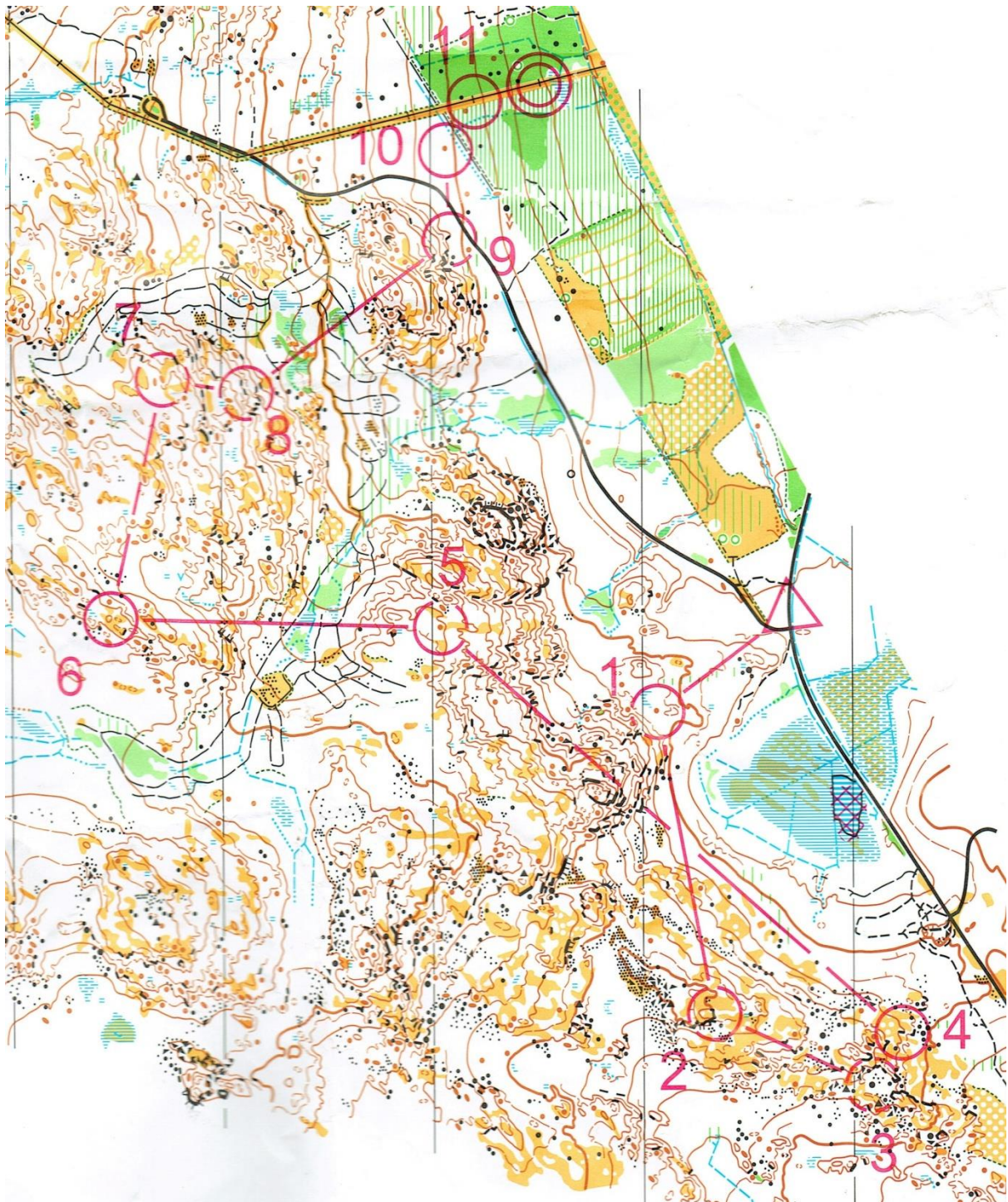


Leg 1 was a superb leg, a real challenge for the opening leg of the entire competition. Ask yourself how you'd plan it. Note the several small bare rock yellow patches, not easy to rely on for navigation.

After taking the path SW for 200m, I started climbing towards the high ridge on compass, keeping E a little so I could eventually see the E cliffs. Terrain was reasonably runnable, but as it flattened out, I found it hard to recognise specific yellow patches. Several times I passed small groups of runners clearly looking for earlier controls, but held my course till I saw the twin (large) boulders at the W edge of the control 2 circle, then back NE to the negative feature control, a tiny erosion gully, not visible *en passant*. My GPS track later showed that I had actually run across the S edge of the 'clear area' by the control, but not recognised it. Lost 2-3 minutes on the leg, but was OK with that as a first leg success.

David took a more westerly route along the path from the start, then climbed S on compass, but he also missed the exact site and lost similar time. All in all, a good challenge.

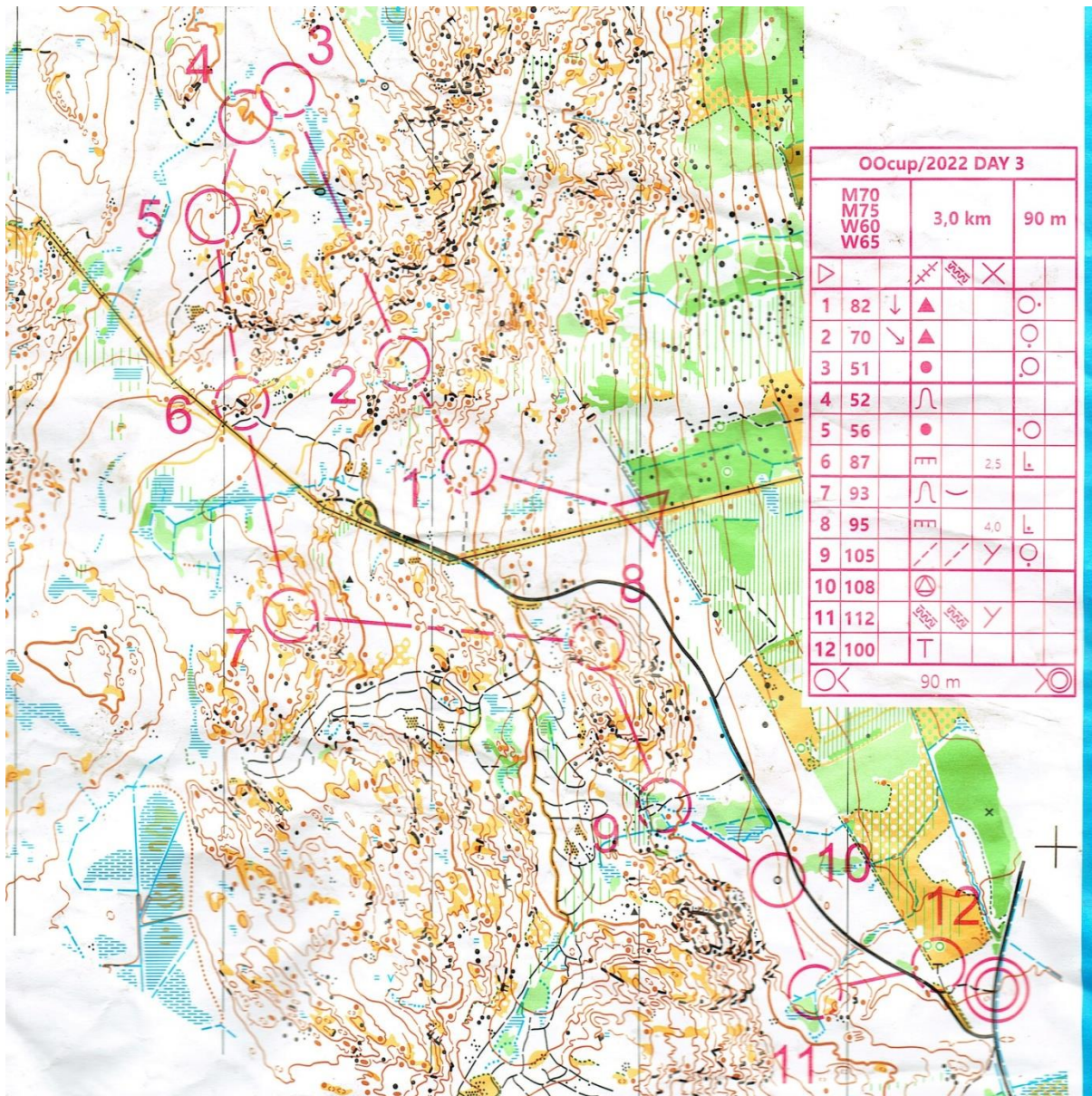
Day 2: Long Distance



I was leading the class after 1-4. Now have a look at 4-5: how best to tackle that monster?

The *haute route* L of the line looked very awkward to run and maintain contact with the map onto a tiny knoll. Like many others, I chose the lower route back to #1, then W to the base of the steep hill, then NW climb through the crags to the narrow yellow section and on to the control. Made it clean back to 1, worked the entrance E towards the crags, and started to climb NW. This became very rough and bouldery, impossible to pace count, and eventually I turned more N to gain a clear area. Sadly, this area had no control on it, so passed on further E into flatter terrain. By now I was 'not found' and circled for some time, eventually relocating on a ring contour well SW of the control, losing many minutes in the process. My GPS track later showed I'd climbed the crags slightly S of the ones I wanted, so was never on target line. This was a tough loss to take. David suffered a similar fate on the same leg. Key message is to make sure you are exactly at your 'attack point' before climbing.

Day 3: Extended MD



A short leg 1-2 this time became my nemesis. It was very steep, rough, rocky and detailed. I found it extremely difficult to follow a compass course while trying to match the features to the map. Here's a re-scaled section of this leg. How would you plan this route?



My intention was to compass to the group of boulders at SE edge of the circle, and attack from there. But I found I just couldn't maintain map contact, confused by unmapped rocks and wavering in direction due to undergrowth. Pacing proved impractical. Eventually I swung E and managed to relocate downhill on small crags and back to the control site, losing 5-6 mins. My GPS track showed I actually reached the edge of the circle on the initial route, but never resolved the multiple boulders correctly.

This loss was a shame, as for the rest of the course I was matching the class leader for speed, with several top splits. I think I was right to simplify onto compass and pacing, it gave the chance of a good split. Perhaps with a dry Model day before-hand I'd have worked out an effective uphill pace count. David did this leg cleanly on compass, apparently relocating on the tiny marsh at half-way: all credit to him!

Interlude: (Days 4 & 5 follow later).

One of David's many hobbies is butterfly spotting and photography. The longer he maintains this hobby the harder it is to find new species. One of the reasons he came to Sweden was (hopefully) to spot some new species. As a result, we would often spend time before or after our races near the Day arenas searching the edges of woodland or wild meadows for flutterers. This proved quite successful: the photos below show some of his discoveries:



Scarce Copper



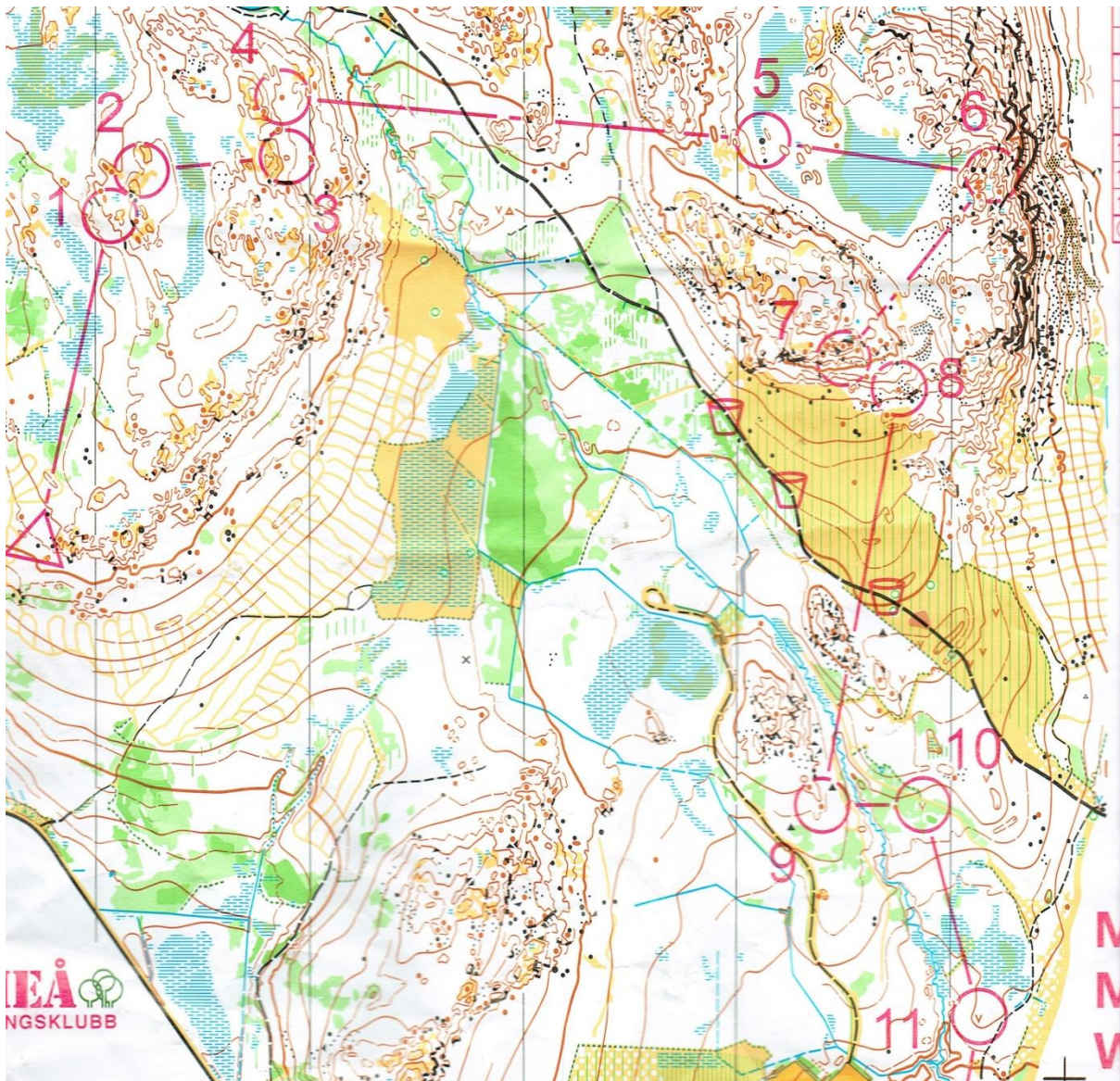
Pale Arctic Cloudy Yellow

With the cost of restaurants in Sweden so high, we ate in each evening, but we decided one day to visit a well-known ice cream parlour recommended by Bo, about 15 miles from that day's event Arena, to lash out our credit cards on enormous and delicious ice-creams. Well worth the trip through rural Sweden, it included some very nice Swedish scenery.



Team BKO enjoying the post-event carbohydrate re-loading exercise on Day 4!

Day 4: Shortened LD



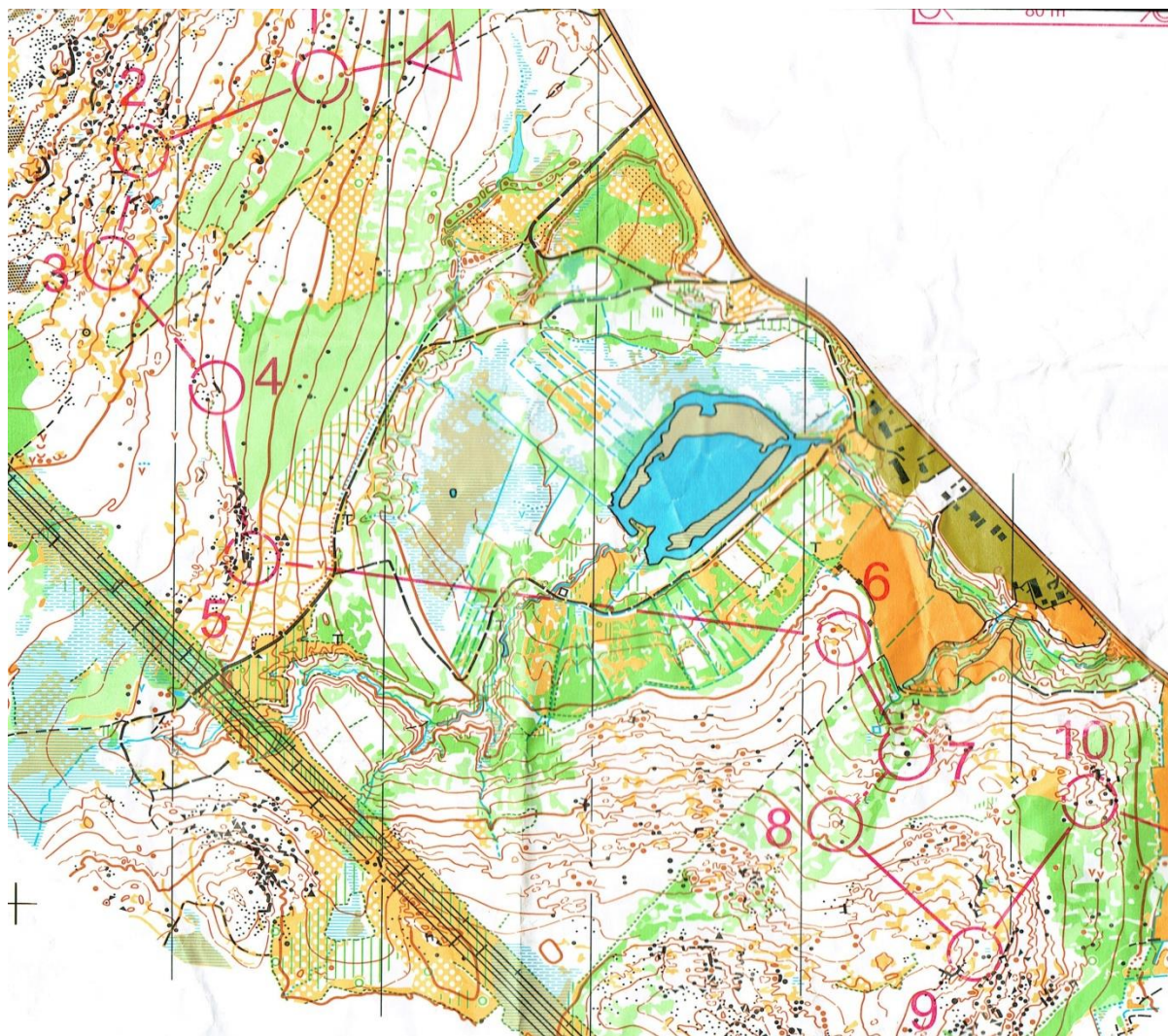
Martin has asked me to comment on the final two days as, by now, my ability to interpret features and map read was starting to pay off with some better legs. Note also that, despite some concerns about my knee, I am jogging/running at these events.

For Day 4, once again, the first leg provided a significant challenge. The white on the map by the start triangle is rather misleading. There were trees but they were quite young firs. You could run between them but you could not see very far ahead. Also, the ground was tussocky with some rocks under the low growing plants. It was tricky to keep on compass and to pace count so ticking off features was necessary to keep in contact. I passed close to a group of 3 prominent boulders – presumably the ones marked on the map. Then the trees thinned a bit and I could see the small rocky ‘yellow’ outcrop and, beyond it an apparent change in vegetation to older trees, presumably the short vegetation boundary on the map – nearly half way and still ‘in contact’. The map was showing the control to be on an area of raised ground so maintaining the bearing should mean it would be visible ahead at some point. I think I spotted the eastern marsh and then, up ahead, a small hill. Followed it round to the left and into Control 1. A good start.

5-6 was another potentially difficult control but I managed to follow the northern edge of the large marsh to again tick off the various features and drop down into the control.

Overall, an enjoyable day with my best result – 7th in a class of 18.

Day 5: Extended MD



This was probably the least interesting area. The longer courses went further north onto a complex hill which would have added challenge. Our course simply used a bit of its southern slope for controls 2 and 3.

Control 1 was actually extremely awkward to find, there was little difference between the green screen and adjacent 'white'. Martin and I each took 10 minutes, and the M75 class leader took 18 minutes (!). It was definitely a very difficult control to find without losing any time.

Control 5 to 6 was perhaps the most interesting routing: check it out for yourself. Unusually, it had quite a lengthy path run although, with hindsight, a possible route might involve using the path until the southern-most point and then finding a route round the edge of the hill in the white. I had chosen to run the path until I was to the NW of the control. However, you will notice that early on the path goes SE but then turns sharply NNE. I decided to leave the path and take a short-cut due E to re-join the path just before it changed direction to again head SE. Unfortunately I drifted slightly north and just missed the path bend. I struggled on through some 'green' bits and only realised that I had missed the path when the lake started to appear ahead. A quick change of direction towards the SE eventually enabled me to get back onto the path. My attempt at saving a few seconds had cost me several minutes!

My position on the day was 11th – without the error it might have been another 7th place. But anyone can say 'without an error it might have been ...' – it is guesswork, as we don't know how many seconds (or minutes) the faster people had lost in similar circumstances!

Overall impressions of the event:

As usual, the OOCup was difficult (but that's why you do it!). Swedish terrain can be a gorgeous mix of good running and high technical merit. I felt this particular event had more of tougher terrain than I was expecting, I had clearly been seduced by the pictures and words of the event Bulletin. To perform well in Sweden you need to have lots of practice in that type of terrain, learning to decide which features are the most important to use for navigation. But overall I enjoyed the week, and would gladly travel to Scandinavian terrain again. The country is very expensive to stay in, and the Umea destination meant a double flight each way from the UK. We used an Airbnb apartment in Umea.

Two things I liked about the event organisation were the Start management and the results service.

The Start each day was set out very simply, and seemed to use very few helpers. There was one set of block lanes (no individual lanes) for the EOD classes, one for pre-entries. Just one time clock display only. When your start time came up on the clock, you moved into your -3 block. Your bib number had been checked by one helper at that point (no call-out of names). At -3 mins, there was a single Clear SI unit which everyone used (no Clear stations elsewhere in pre-start, hidden by other people). At -2, there was a single SI Check unit, which everyone used. No loose CDs, you had received a full sheet of your complete 5 days of CDs in your registration pack, and no blank maps. At -1 you walked forward to stand by your map box (no-one feeding out a single copy for you to take). At -10 secs you picked up your map from the correct box, and then started on the long beep. It all worked like a dream, and seemed to need only 2 or 3 people. I do sometimes feel in the UK we-over manage Starts ("look out for x.y.z, step over the line, etc").

Next to the Download tent, there was a tent which had a huge (60"?) TV screen set on a table about 6 ft inside the tent, with a rope fence in front of the tent holding people back from crowding. The screens had four sections of slowly rolling results of classes, easy to read. Thus you could download then walk round the corner to see exactly how you were placed within your class. It was a really neat solution. Probably not favoured by those worried about Covid, but most people used it. Somehow I can't see the UK ever introducing a clever scheme like this: a shame, we've lost the one focal point and meeting place of an event.

Martin.

July 2022.