



Swiss 5 Days – from our BKO reporter/competitor Martin Wilson

16th June 2022

The Swiss 5 Days was a new event, originally scheduled for 2020 as a World Cup, for 2021 as European Championships, but postponed twice due to COVID, so held in late May 2022 as a separate one-off event. It is completely separate from the traditional Swiss O Week held later in the summer.

I was attracted by the format and location (Neuchatel, Jura mountains), but also the easy travel logistics and lack of car hire needed. Five stages: Wed evening forest sprint/Thu Long/Fri Middle/Sat Long/Sun Urban Sprint. Early morning flight to Geneva, train from airport to Neuchatel, city centre hotel, and free local bus to the same Event Centre each forest day. Return immediately after last event, home by 8 pm Sunday.

I often run up a class at continental events, as course lengths are normally shorter than in UK, so chose H70, with 57 entries. Forest days were all on the same mountain area, the total map area shown on the website was A3 size at 1:15,000, a massive piece of very hilly terrain. This was going to be quite tough. Thankfully my forest courses were at 1:7500. The weather was a kindly 23 degrees and sunny all week (the previous week had apparently been 30 degrees: glad I missed that). There were over 2,000 competitors, the vast majority Swiss, but only 8 UK competitors. The scoring system was the old Scottish 6 Days method: 1000 pts for the winner, proportional points for others based on time behind the winner. The best 4 out of 5 results were to count.

The Jura forests are not only steep, they have significant wood litter and green foliage from young saplings and bushes. It was runnable, but not fast, and accurate running on compass was extremely difficult. Swiss runners were very comfortable in the terrain, class leaders of Vets courses posted astonishing times. My Day 2 Long course was very similar length and climb to my BOC Long M75 course in March, and I ran a very similar time at this event, showing the Jura had comparative runnability i.e. tough!

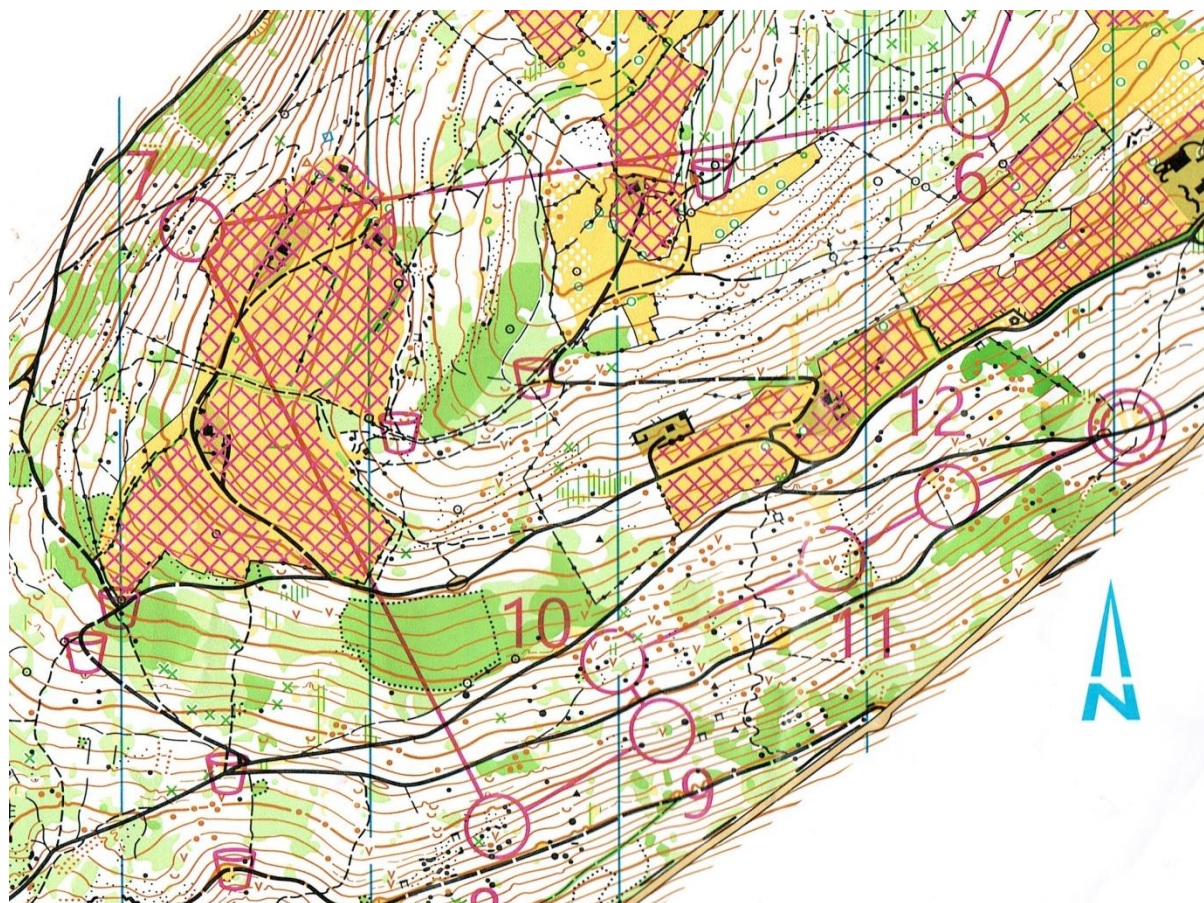
The maps were very good, in particular the mapping of boulders (minimum 1 metre for small black dot, not our usual south UK 0.5 variant, and 2 metre for larger dots: the latter made excellent attack points). However, the details did state that the boundaries of green and white runnability were indicative but not precise, and this did prove difficult.

I'll not try to cover each day here, too much detail. The best days were the two Long Distance events. 5km-170m and 4.3km-130m may not sound much, but at 17 mins/km it was quite enough, thank you! I've added some comments below the map section on my own routes. Please note that armchair planning on a well-lit computer screen with time to get a coffee is somewhat easier than a

first look after 30 minutes hard racing, with the clock ticking and your specs steaming up if you stop running...

Day 2: Long Distance

The map subset below shows the most interesting parts of the course. Readers might like to spend some time analysing how they would plan 6-7-8 before reading my comments. There are lots of options.

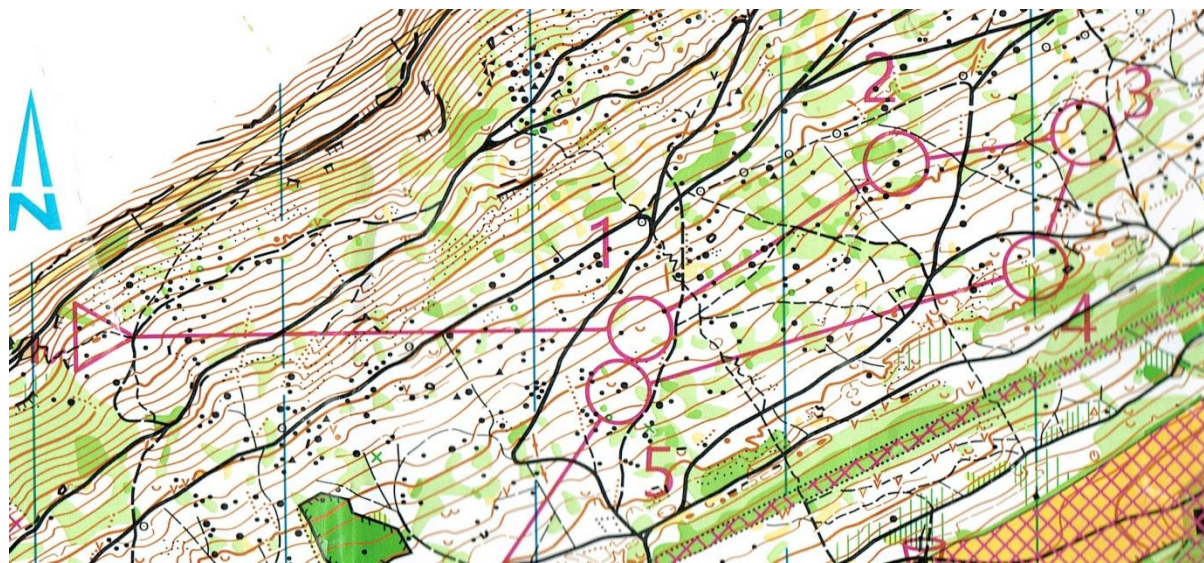


6-7: Plan A was to contour WSW round the immediate ridge to the open fields, then swing NW and work downhill N of the major OOB area onto the control. OK for a bit, but the mapped stony area proved hard going, so climbed to the open finger of land, then through the marked route between the OOB sections, almost on the red line. Now tried to work W through varying paths and screens towards N end of the major western OOB, and eventually took a SW path as green area looked hard going. Now got very confused: where was the N limit of the OOB? Much head-scratching from several runners in the same position. Eventually got back onto N heading, soon came to a clear taped route heading SW through the OOB, decided to take it for a longer but faster route heading to 7 from the S. Non-optimal, but got me there.

7-8: Plan A was to contour S then SE round by the drinks controls and tracks. But again, forest became increasingly 'green', so swung uphill onto major track heading SE for fast running. Then took delightful N-S path to drinks control, compassed onto 8 from AP at small path. Got a 20th split for this leg, probably optimal for me. Subsequently ran the final section 8-F quite well, lovely technical control-picking in steep terrain, pleased my stamina was strong enough to keep me running.

Day 4: Long Distance

The best part was Legs 1-4. Try planning your routes (is Leg 1 uphill or downhill?).



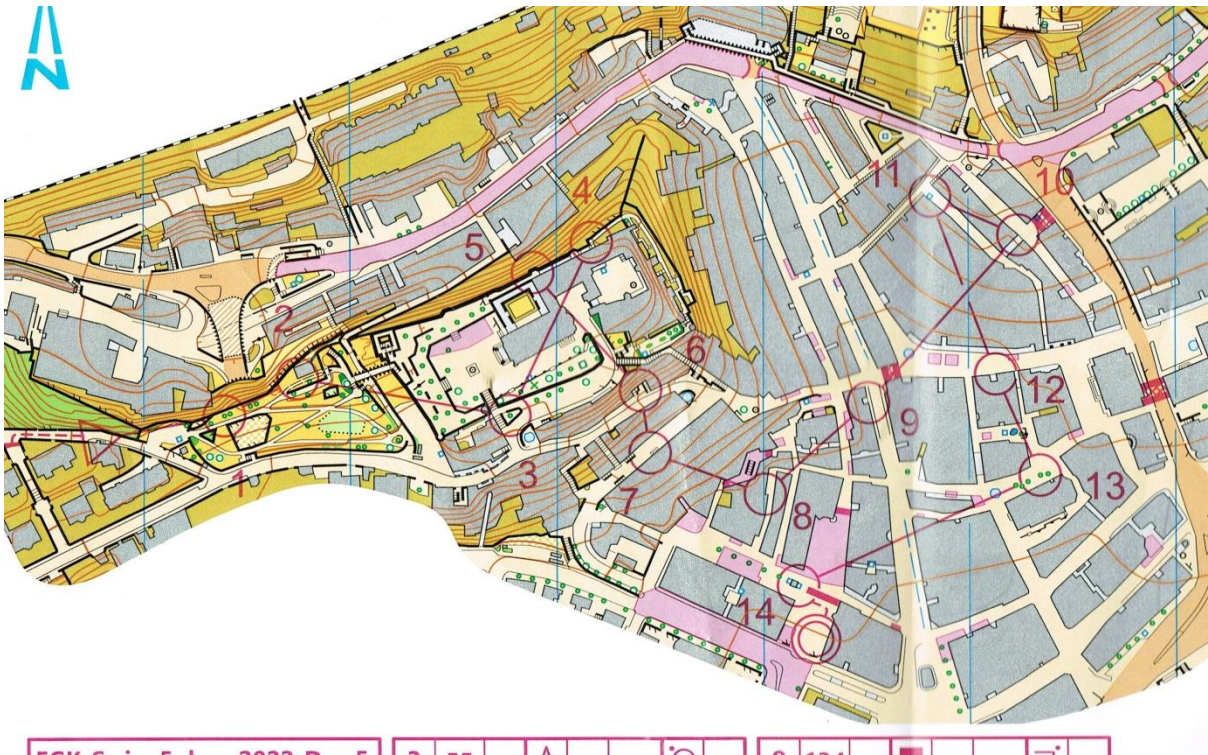
1-2: First starter at 10.00 after a 3k walk from the bus stop, no-one else with me as I disappeared into the forest, a strange feeling. Plan A was to run Start to 1 on rough compass, keeping just S of the red line so as to reach the third forest track knowing which way I had to turn. It was runnable forest, but still with litter and foliage pushing me off-line. Got lucky, reached track 3 at the large set of boulders S of the red line, turned L for a bit, then compass and pace straight onto the control. Checked the watch: 9m 58s, thought that must be a good split, and headed off towards 2. (Author's note: *..dream on, Martin, you had 20th fastest split... the winner took just over 7 mins!*). It was a downhill leg, and my favourite leg of the week.

2-3: Chose to run N of the line to pick up the small clearing in L part of the circle. Saw that, took a bearing to the control on edge of green/white boundary. Somehow I drifted, never saw the veg boundary, circled round, no luck, eventually relocated on large boulder at N end of the circle. A big penalty for a very small error. I was not alone: three rivals who finished in a similar time to me overall each took between 10 and 16 minutes for this leg.

3-4: Compassed along the red line, crossed track then road, checking L and R to confirm my position, then over the small spur and into...green grot. Circled for just one minute, no control, staggered back to spur, ran E along it till large boulder, compassed in again...into more grot. Circled again, and just saw the flag behind a fallen tree, very bingo: another big punishment for a tiny mistake. Overall, I lost ten minutes across 2 and 3, disappointing when I'd run well. *C'est la vie.*

Day 5: Sprint

This was held in Neuchatel city centre. Instructions said people staying in the city centre had to clear the area by 07.45. Not wishing to wait 2 hours+ to start, I and many others left the hotel much later, took a bus from the hotel to the station, then an amazing underground funicular railway down to the shore-side close to the Event Centre. Our feet never touched the terrain!



Not much to report on this event, 3-4 was perhaps the most interesting leg. Odd that 3-4 and 9-10 both gave a good option of passing the next control: I used both these routes. My only strategy was to avoid using steps too much, for speed and safety.

This was the first time I'd run the new 1:3000 scale. This is coming in on many Sprint and Urban races from now on. I rehearsed for this by making a 1:3k version of a Birch Hill home-made course. I did find it necessary to look much more often at the map to keep my thumb in contact with my position. This caused me not to look where I was going as often as I should for safety. At this scale, 1 cm is just 30 metres, 10 double paces and 10 seconds of running for me. On this race, controls 1 and 2 came up very quickly, no time to plan ahead. I think the answer will be to develop a better short-term map memory ('first left then second right, etc') to reduce map-reading. More practise sessions in Bracknell terrain needed!

Overall, I finished 23rd out of 57, not too bad considering the area. Clean legs gave a split position of around 20th, winners time + 30%, I'm satisfied with that. It was a great event, very well organised, and a beautiful area to visit. To save money on an expensive trip I took with me Swiss Muesli for breakfast...from Sainsburys. A case of coals to Newcastle perhaps?