

Women's training weekend

3&4th March 2012



Robyn Pallas took up the challenge to deliver a 'women only' training weekend which had been discussed for some time in orienteering circles at State Leagues, over club barbeques and at club meetings around NSW. She did a fine job. With NSW Head Coach Nick Dent lined up to lead, and Robyn and Colin Price managing all the logistics, the course attracted nearly thirty women from across NSW and ACT.

Wet weather and flooding was affecting most of the State and more bad weather was forecast, so it was with relief that participants received a message from Robyn reassuring them that the course was still on, and confirming what all the participants knew; 'Orienteering – Rain, Hail or Shine'. There were only two casualties of the weather. Sally Devenish and Elaine Bennett were cut off by flooding in their areas preventing them making it to Belanglo State Forest.

The experience level of the group ranged from urban orienteering savvy orienteers who had little or no bush experience - Megan from Canberra describing herself as 'consciously incompetent', to those who had been orienteering for some years picking up skills along the way and often coached by husbands, to a couple who had represented Australia.



The course kicked off on Saturday morning with introductions and a setting out of what the course would cover. Theory sessions followed by practical sessions delivered a tight training package, with technical exercises in Belanglo Forest ensuring that the understanding of the techniques was driven home. Working through the British Orienteering Federation six step ladder of technique Nick rapidly covered the basics of understanding the map, map symbols and direction. A practical session allowed participants to practice thumbing the map, identify features, orient the map by terrain features and use 'handrails' in approaching controls. There is nothing like standing in a forest looking at the terrain to finally understand what a secondary contour line means in reality.



A well earned break for lunch and a great spread of crispy salad, soft rolls and fresh fruit set the squad up for the sessions in the afternoon. This was all about reading rock and contour and The Piggeries area was an excellent choice to illustrate the points. Teams of three, with a leader and two novices, were sent to locate a control site which had no flag attached. This required careful reading of the terrain so that the team could be absolutely sure they were accurate with their control site identification. As the teams wandered in

amongst the brush discussing the specifics of small gullies, vegetation thickness and fall of the slope, it became clear why Nick exhorted us all to try planning a course and see the course from a different perspective. Gayle Shepherd (Uringa) commented, 'this is so much more difficult and challenging to

find the control site. When there is a flag in an event I will often run to the rough area and hope to see it without really understanding the detail of the control site terrain.'

After the afternoon break and a change of clothes it was off to Mittagong to the RSL for dinner and a session on 'Using technology to help your orienteering development.' Robyn and Nick sensibly changed the order of events to allow a famished squad to eat before the desk session! The technology discussed was familiar to some; Attackpoint, WinSplits and Routegadget but the analysis of the results was fresh and interesting. Participants were encouraged to look at their WinSplits data over several races to see where their main weakness might lie. A consistent percentage slower than the winner would indicate fitness issues, where an erratic set of splits might indicate technical weakness or particular difficulty with short or long legs between controls. Some reminiscing with WMOC coverage and it was back to The Hut for a well earned rest.



Sunday morning looked like it might herald better weather and the team headed hopefully into the forest. The map area was 'Miner's Despair', with a really challenging contour only exercise, followed by a short SI course to get the motors running. Vanessa Freeman (Big Foot) was amongst those who tried the course twice, seeing if she could improve her

time on the second attempt once she was familiar with the terrain. Taking a slightly different bearing out of control No5 led her to a path junction identical to the one she was aiming for further south, and to the sleeping quarters of a red bellied black snake. The combination of tired legs and this unpleasant distraction meant Vanessa had a perfect opportunity to test her map reading and relocation skills under stress conditions!



The final relay race, after lunch, was a star relay with teams of three, all members completing all legs of the course. This was fast and furious despite the rain, with plenty of discussion between team members on the right techniques to ensure all runners could complete each leg securely whether it be following handrails, aiming off, distance estimation or route choice based on terrain. Team No5 (Maggie Jones Uringa, Celine Anderson Bushflyers, Airdrie Wilson Garingal) took 68 minutes to complete all controls and win the event with the other teams close behind.



And so the weekend was over. Much was learned by both organisers and participants, but overwhelmingly the feedback from the women was hugely positive. 'Great fun,' 'Extremely helpful' and 'Really enjoyable' were amongst the comments from the departing trainees. 'You don't often get the opportunity to spend serious time working on techniques, like really reading contour. A great weekend,' summed up Jane McKenna from Uringa Orienteers.

Many thanks to Nick Dent for his time and expertise, to Hillary Wood and Colin Price for their support roles, and of course to Robyn Pallas for her determination and hard work in bringing the weekend from wishlist into reality.



Maggie Jones
ONSW Communication
5 March 2012