

Report from Ella Gilbert (NOR)

Deeside is a training camp for 16 athletes in the M/W16 class. To get selected you have to run in at least three of the 'qualifying' events, and then the selectors will make a choice from everybody eligible. After a series of awful runs at the qualifying events, I was sure I would have to try again next year. But at the end of May, I got the news I was one of seven girls to be invited, and couldn't believe it! The actual week was still two months away, but I was already excited!

Two months later I boarded a train for Edinburgh (which I had to then get off, and wait half an hour for the next!) and made my way up to Templars Park, the scout site we stayed on. I was really looking forward to a week full of orienteering, and meeting the other girls I compete with when I go to big events.

On the first day, Sunday, we travelled to Scolty for our first training exercise. I was a bit nervous, as it would be my first time navigating in Scotland, but the coaches were all so friendly and didn't put any pressure on anybody to do well. On the first course I quickly realised even if Scolty and Norfolk didn't have contours in common, they certainly had brashings! Because of forest work, the map's vegetation was marked wrong, which really threw me out because I had been counting on it to get me round the course!

I did three of the exercises, the attack point, a route choice and an aiming off. Even though none of them were very fast, I learnt very quickly that the only usable features were the contours. After lunch, we walked several kilometres, to the top of a hill where the coaches had organised a clock relay. It involved hanging controls for your team-mate, so precision was everything!

On the second day we were orienteering at Inchmarnoch. The forest was much nicer, with no brashings, and the contours were really detailed, despite only being marked at 5m intervals. I had decided to concentrate solely on using contours. All the exercises I did were really useful, and I really felt I understood the map by the end. The coaches focussed especially on getting us to use contours as line features, and there was an awesome course which involved following a spur and all its twists and turns for 500 metres. It was actually a lot easier than I thought, and taught me that contours are actually useful!

There was a twenty minute score in the afternoon, which was a really good opportunity to test out whether what I'd learnt stayed in my head when I started racing! I was really pleased with my result, as I got seven controls with only one minor error. Once we'd finished, we went swimming in a river, which was really fun, if a bit cold! We also got our Tour Tops that day, which are an interesting shade of maroon.

Day three was probably the hardest day physically, and another first for me. Sand dunes. On my first exercise, I completely missed the second control, and spent ten minutes looking for it (while being shadowed by a coach too!) but once I'd figured out the contours were not as complicated as they looked, I did a long course, being shadowed again, and was really pleased with how it went. The coach got me to tell him which features I was using, and I found that really helped me stay focussed, and visualise what I was looking for.

The race in the afternoon was not such a success, but I was more at home on the contours than before all the training! In the evening we did a night urban around Templars park. Everybody turned up wearing shorts, and very quickly after starting the course regretted it! It was fairly easy, though the darkness made staying in contact with the map vital.

On the fourth day, we were supposed to be having a rest day, but I found it one of the hardest! There was an urban around Templars in the morning, with a fiendish mirco spring in the middle. I started off well, but in the end my navigation couldn't keep up with my speed, and I had to stop for quite a time at each control to plan out what I was going to do next. We did a session on core strength before lunch, and later in the day went to a castle. Then we went swimming in a heated, saltwater, open air swimming pool! In the evening we returned to Scolty for a night'o, in which I got horrendously lost.

On the fifth day everybody was beginning to get tired, so the only training was a normal length course at Glen Dye. The day before they gave us the maps, and got us to plan a route to three controls in twenty seconds, then stop, then plan the next two in ten seconds, and so on. After the event we compared our time pressured routes, and our actual route choices. I was surprised by how conservative my 'classroom' route was. The terrain was beautiful though, with large rolling contours, and some precise detail right at the end which forced me to maintain concentration the whole way through. Despite a heavy downpour of rain, I loved it.

The last day was really tough, physically and mentally, especially as we were all exhausted. It was the tour champs, at Glen Feardar. It was a proper race with dibbers, and my course was 5km. I started badly, forgetting to punch the first control and having to go back! Then later I got bad stomach cramps, and decided to stop. But up until that point I was pleased with my navigation. In the afternoon we did what at first was supposed to be a relay, but turned into a slow walk for the girls! We all only did half the course, but it was good to just go around slowly and really use the contours.

Each day the athletes would debrief with a coach, and pick out some things to work on the next day. This definitely helped me focus on practicing those skills, and in turn helped me work on visualisation, simplification, and staying in contact with the map. There were several talks by the coaches on the different aspects of orienteering. One of them was about the fact there are four important points to remember, 'physical, mental, technical and tactical' choices you have to make on a run, at home with training and so on.

I also really worked on having a process, which is essentially a series of steps you do for each control, and that was really good for me. I never thought about how I work out my route to the next control, and it also forced me to work on picking an attack point, something I've never consciously done. It gave me a structure, which I'm sure will be really useful in the future. At one point during the week we also did running stride analysis. Nobody escaped getting made fun of, but the coaches said some useful things about everybody.

In short, it was an awesome week. Brilliant fun, and really helpful! I didn't really know any of the other athletes before the week, but it'll be great to know the people I race against at national level, and meet up at events. The coaches were amazing, and very patient with my lack of knowledge on squiggly brown lines! I learnt lots of new techniques and tips, and practised old ones. Many thanks to everybody who made it happened, especially the East Anglian coaches who put me forward for selection, and EAOA for funding part of my trip. I just wish my Scottish Six (or Scottish three, as I had to leave early) results showed how much I've improved and learnt!