

# SMOC TRAINING WEEKEND 2019

“You didn’t tell me that we were staying at Peppa Pig World!”. Rob was less than impressed as we headed south towards the New Forest for the SMOC training weekend. “It’s just a Premier Inn” I tried to reassure him. We were there, of course, to practice our skills in a fantastic orienteering location, not to visit Peppa Pig World!

Our coach, Jason, greeted us on a sunny, but chilly, Saturday morning at Longcross. Now a professional orienteering coach, he started his O-ing with SMOC after discovering that people really do race each other around forests with maps. Yes – it really is a sport! Although he’s now based further south so is no longer a member of SMOC, he had prepared lots of exercises to keep us busy over the weekend.



First up was an exercise to test and improve our skill at following bearings. It was called a “corridor” exercise and only 1/2cm of map was visible either side of the pink line between controls. The rest was blanked out. This really made you focus on staying on track as losing contact with the map would mean you were in no-man’s land! Rob and I decided to tackle this exercise together and I was very glad we did as it involved scrambling down into and then back up out of a rather steep and slippery sided river. When we saw the whole map later on it was clear we could have gone over a bridge just a few hundred metres up-stream but we couldn’t see that on our blanked out map! We found all the controls and afterwards followed the same course the other way around. The controls were actually equally hard to find even though we’d already visited them all once already.

During lunch we pooled our collective knowledge of control descriptions and came up with all but two - **II** is a “Narrow Passage” and none of us knew that two overlapping triangles was a “Boulder Cluster”. We then tried a longer course in the afternoon with a full map but practicing shorter and longer legs and moving through areas with higher and lower visibility to find controls. It was a great area to practice in despite being pretty marshy after all the rain we’ve had recently.

We gathered for a well-earned meal at the Premier Inn in the evening and compared notes from the day’s training.

Only Sue and Todd had dry shoes on day 2 (as they had stayed at home – Daisy not being welcome in the Premier Inn!) but we all knew our feet would be back in marshes very soon anyway. We took a look at contours first with a really good exercise trying to sketch 4 contours onto a map in an area between two river valleys.

It was quite tricky but by doing things like walking along a contour line and estimating where on a path was 5 metres above a known point really helped everyone see how to get more information from the contours on a map.

The final exercise was designed to put all the skills we'd improved over the weekend to the test. With some new controls out in the forest and several areas of the map blanked out between controls the course was a great test. One control literally sat in its own single square centimetre of map surrounded by white blanked out map! Everyone enjoyed the challenge and both Ian and I totally ignored our compasses at one point to our peril and had the challenge of relocating off a partial map! Helen missed out a control completely and didn't realise but still managed to complete the course only realising she'd missed it out when she got to the finish!

I think everyone enjoyed the weekend and Jason planned some great exercises and provided some sound advice and guidance. A big thank you must go to Debbie who organised the whole thing including getting permissions from SOC to use their area and maps, co-ordinating with Jason and making sure we all booked the right Premier Inn – "The one at Peppa Pig World, yes?!".

*Freya Askham*