

Training to Orienteering

No that's not a mistake for *training for orienteering* – I'm looking here at ways of getting to orienteering events by train. Like many orienteers, I'm concerned about the environmental footprint of our sport – and you only have to see the size of the car parks at major events to realise that there are an awful number of miles being driven. While I try to car share whenever possible, or to combine events with a visit to my elderly mum, who lives not far from the New Forest, I have also been trying over the last year or so to get to ranking events using public transport – and succeeded about 30% of the time. So here are some reflections.

Many urban events can be reached by train...

This is not so surprising, and last year I used trains to get to urbans in the City of London, Middlesex University Sprint, Warwick University Sprints, Epsom, Arundel, Tamworth and Shrewsbury.

...but so can those in Country Parks

"Country Park" is a bit of a misnomer, as they are often on the outskirts of large towns. Although we're familiar with the symbol on Ordnance Survey maps, the exact definition of a country park is a bit loose. In 2019, I got to two that might regarded as such – Bedfords Park (Havering) and Hylands Park, just outside Chelmsford.

Forest events are generally harder...

...but even here there are exceptions: the CHIG Mitre started from a school in Epping, a reasonable walk from the far end of the Central Line, and in the previous year it was close to Chingford BR station.



*I must rush back to catch the next train...
(Epsom, August 2019)*

Ticketing can be tricky

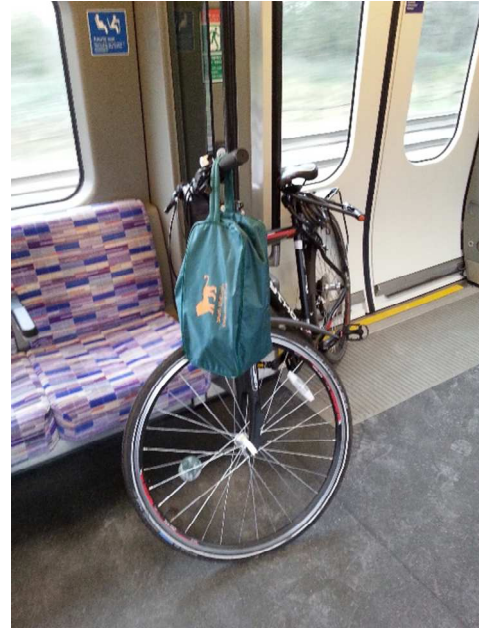
The ideal are events on the fringes of London, like the CHIG Mitre, where a one day Travelcard will take you all the way. Epsom was just outside the travelcard zone; I bought an additional ticket from Ewell East in zone 6, but only alternate trains to Epsom stopped there, limiting my choice. You can only do this legally if the train you are on stops at the station for which you have the second ticket. Even so, and using my railcard, in most cases the train option works out more expensive than driving – especially if there's a car share available. However anywhere on LNWR is likely to be reasonably priced – and there may be bargains by booking early.

And on Sunday trains can be infrequent

This is a perennial problem. Engineering work can also cause delays and diversions – so the first 2020 event (Hadleigh Park, near Benfleet) required an unexpected routeing via Liverpool Street, rather than Fenchurch Street as shown on the rail maps. Fewer trains sometimes means busier ones: coming home from an OD event at Hartshill Hayes, I had to stand all the way from Nuneaton as the train was so busy. And fewer trans also mean that total journey times are significantly longer than it would take to drive by the most direct route.

Taking a bike can be a great idea

I'm doubly unusual among orienteers for using rail and bike when possible. So far, it's worked well: Hylands Park is a lovely ride from Chelmsford, almost wholly on a dedicated cycle path with an excellent surface (better than Milton Keynes' Redways). Elsewhere, getting to Rewell Quarry for the Sunny Sussex weekend demanded a short spell on the A27 trunk road which was a lot less pleasant. It helps if you know the quiet ways to cycle across London from Euston to key stations such as Liverpool Street, Victoria or Waterloo. But even if you don't take a bike there are sometimes buses, and almost always a taxi. I have also found that as events often take place half way up hillsides, and the train runs along the valley bottom, it's worth looking at the contours on a map before committing to cycling. Even somewhere like Hadleigh Park has a remarkably long hill up from the station to the assembly (and annoyingly, the actual park goes back down the hill to the edge of the railway line).



*Not all trains have dedicated areas for bikes
(Greater Anglia to Romford, Jan. 2019)*

Don't forget buses

For Milton Keynes orienteers this usually means the X5 – last year I used it for the Cambridge urban, and it's also useful for events in Oxford or Buckingham. Although in theory I could have got to a Swindon event by a second bus, the timing just didn't work out! It's also not possible to bus/bike, which limits options for events like Stowe.



You can always stash your kit in the start/finish tent

This almost goes without saying. Changing out of wet or muddy kit after a run can be more challenging, so events based in a school or sports centre are worth targeting. I even managed a shower at one in 2019 (Epsom).

The map shows the 14 ranking events that I have been by public transport (or bike) since 1 January 2019. It misses off the local Keyne-O or London Park Race events that were also car-free, as well as ones reached by train in Latvia!

Ian Byrne, February 2020