

# Funchal Christmas Lights Score Event

*by Rosie*



Having orienteered in Madeira 5 years ago John and I were keen to return for this year's Euro City race and Ann and Rachel accompanied us. We, as the advance party, arrived On Monday 4th and Sandra and Ian were due to arrive on Thursday. Funchal embraces Christmas and in its main pedestrianised street there is a Christmas market and free entertainment. On the board listing the daily events for December I spotted "Orienteering. Christmas lights" 8pm Thursday. I sent a quick WhatsApp to Sandra and Ian otherwise they would not have known about it.

So, just before 8pm we all met at the assembly area by a statue, in the middle of the Christmas market. Free t-shirts and waterproofs were given out (it wasn't raining), and entry was free too. What's

not to like about this event already?

Then we were asked to download the "iorienteering" app on our phones. The format was a two hour score event with the controls being QR codes. The app allows you to scan the QR code and it will ping and record your successful visit. It also gives your score as you reach each control and has a countdown timer at the top. Funchal goes bonkers for Christmas lights and all controls were on, or by, lights with the QR code stuck around the nearest post.



This is such a simple way to run a course but there is one drawback: trying to scan a QR code that is curved and stuck around a post is not easy. I found this a problem and there were several controls that I

visited but couldn't get my phone to scan and capture the code. There was also the problem of not having too much battery life on my phone.



Angelic SMOCies near the last control.

We all made it to the end with varying success. Ian and Sandra outdid the rest of us, but John was more tactical and worked out the best way to capture the code.

We spoke to the organiser / planner afterwards who told us that the reason the event was put on was because the organising team wanted sponsorship for the Machico Euro City Race on the following Sunday. The local council asked them to do something to get visitors interested in seeing the fantastic Christmas lights, in return for financial support. On November 25th the organisers finally had the go ahead to plan the format and courses around the sites of the Christmas lights. There was quite a good turnout, despite limited publicity, and they were very pleased that we had taken part.



# Day 1: Vila do Caniçal Night Sprint

by Ian

After the Xmas Lights event, the first formal event of the Machico City Race weekend was in the neighbouring village of Caniçal. This is still an active port, and from the 1940s to 1980s had an active whaling fleet. The Night Sprint started in the garden of the Museum of Whaling – Sandra and I had earlier visited the museum but found it a little disappointing, putting technology above content, with too many rather wonky 3D videos; perhaps I had hoped they would be more contrite about past activities. After the museum closed, we walked to the pop-up event centre in the village square, where I decided to splash out on a Machico City Race running shirt to wear in the main City Race.



Our starts were both soon after the first start at 7pm, so it was fully dark for all competitors. The first couple of controls were up the hill behind

the museum; almost everywhere in Madeira is either up or down a hill (except when there's a tunnel through it)! From there the course moved into some of the many narrow alleyways, often with surprised dogs barking as you ran past. As with all sprints it was necessary to commit to a route, and hope that under the torchlight I had not missed a blocked passage. My race went well, apparently taking the best route for all but a couple of controls, so I was pleased to finish the 1.8k course (50m climb) in 15:11, coming 6/21 in Ultravet Males (MUV). Britons took four of the first six places in MUV, led by Peter Jones of SN. Sandra also had a decent run, coming in 8<sup>th</sup> on the slightly longer ladies Supervet course.



Ian was running too fast for the photographer!



## Madeira Day 2: Middle Forest event

by Sandra

The second day of the Machico City Race weekend was a cross-country event. There was a beautiful little bit of forest close to the finish, with a carpet of pine needles that was lovely to run on. But forest the rest of



the area wasn't. Of course, that did mean there were no brambles, brashings or bracken, which is never a bad thing in my book. According to my reading of a paper from the Geological Society of Glasgow, and Wikipedia, we were on the Upper Volcanic Complex on Madeira, laid down by volcanic activity during the Pleistocene to Holocene eras, from around 10 million years ago. The rock that formed the area of the map is laterite on top of basalt, rich in iron and aluminium, and is quite friable so using weathered rock as a handhold could be risky. The hill to the south of the start and my first control is the remains of the cone of a volcano. Cool! As you can see from the map, almost all the terrain was either rough open ground covered by grass or ankle-biting plants (think flat holly on steroids), or open rock/dirt. There were a lot of rock features and good contour detail, so it was an interesting area for an event.

There was a road running right through the competition area which had a fair amount of traffic but no mandated crossing points, even for the juniors. I had to cross it twice, and also ran along the side twice, without incident.

I found the map to be accurate, but the placing of controls on features could be a bit off. As the ground was so open you could usually see the controls that were slightly misplaced as long as you were close enough so it wasn't too frustrating.

I thought it was an interesting event, and well organised except for the mis-sited controls. It was good to have a cross-country event as part of an urban weekend for a bit of variety although it did mean having to travel with another pair of O' shoes. Afterwards, Ian and I headed back to the nearby village of Caniçal for a late lunch to fortify us for the City Race the following day.



(Left) Ian at the start, volcano just visible in the background

(Right) Area roughly to the north of the finish



Control 12



## Madeira Day 3: Machico City Race

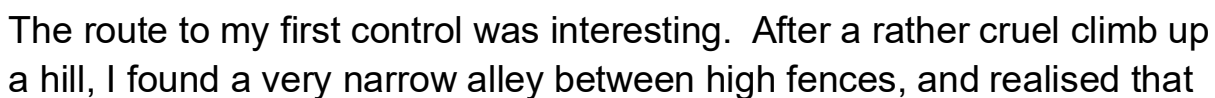
*by Ann*

The climax of the weekend, and the reason that we were all there, was the Machico Euro City Race... the final race in the 2023 Euro City Race series. Machico is a coastal town to the east of Funchal. It was the original capital of Madeira, after the island's discovery by the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays it is an unprepossessing town spreading up the valley from the rocky coast. The main beach, as with the rest of Madeira, is made up of black pebbles. Machico's main claim to fame is a small beach of pristine sand, apparently imported from North Africa at vast expense.

The weather on race day was sunny, with a temperature of around 25 degrees. Assembly was at the local leisure centre, a modern building right on the seafront. The route to the start followed the river inland. During the walk I was surprised to see a life-sized plastic cow over the fence... later revealed to be a part of a life-sized nativity scene.



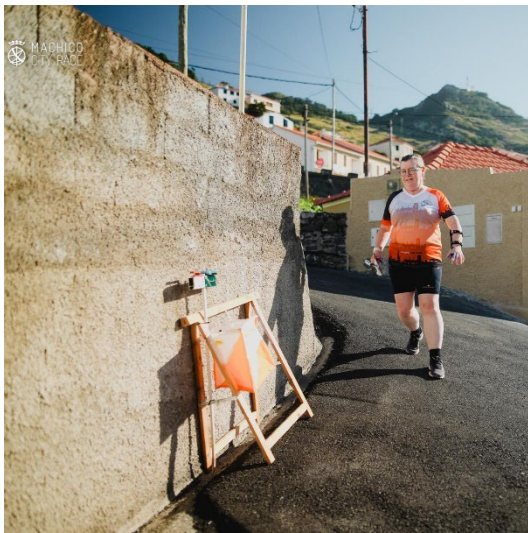




The route to my first control was interesting. After a rather cruel climb up a hill, I found a very narrow alley between high fences, and realised that



I was running on a grating over running water. This may have been one of the network of irrigation channels, or levadas, that cover the island... just a bit unexpected in town! The rest of my course was straightforward apart from control 3, which was at the far side of a school campus. I managed to find an alleyway around the building, accessed via a canopy, which saved a longer run around the outer fence. By the end of my run I was suffering from the heat, but was able enjoy having a penultimate control right on the beach. The good news at the finish was that the entire SMOC contingent had found all of their controls... in the right order!



Once home I checked the final Euro City Race rankings and discovered that I had finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the WUV category, winning a certificate and two

free entries to the 2024 races! Whilst delighted with this, I do need to point out that this race series is a bit like the East Anglian League... turn up to enough qualifying races, have solid runs and you will probably get onto the podium.

