

Race Coordinator and Planner's Report

Getting permission to use the Black Mountains for OMM 2018 proved to be a challenge!

The **Black Mountains Land Use Partnership** (the Partnership) is a collaborative venture among local landowners, graziers and relevant regulatory bodies. The Partnership promotes the restoration and sustainable management of the natural resources of the Black Mountains, an area covering over 24,600 hectares of upland and lowland habitat. More information on the [Black Mountains Land Use Partnership](#)

When I approached the Partnership, they were very supportive and I want to thank Harry Legge-Bourke, owner of Glanusk Estate and Chair of the Partnership, for all his support in obtaining permission from all land owners. National Resources Wales (NRW) is the environmental body responsible for maintenance of the SSSI status of the area, and were very concerned about the impact of 2000 pairs of feet. It took us a considerable amount of effort to convince them that we would not trash the whole area. We were only able to convince them due to the efforts of David Broom, an independent Ecologist, who has made a study of every OMM since 2013, producing reports that demonstrate that we have had no long-term impact. David's extensive knowledge of National and International Ecological matters was crucial to persuading NRW, but permission was only formally granted less 2 weeks before the event!

When I first looked at the shape of the Black Mountains, I realised that it would be a difficult area to plan courses – a hand shape with a small palm and 5 fingers, separated by farmed valleys. In addition, the significant forest – Mynydd Du – offered very limited east-west routes, making it unusable. The location of the Event Centre and the Overnight camp on the eastern side of the area also applied restrictions as did the landowner of the eastern side of the ridge above the start when he told us that we could only use tracks through his land. So, you can see why the Saturday courses used the western fingers and some of the palm on the way into the overnight, and Sunday used the eastern ridge together with some of the palm for the longer courses.

Score courses had an option to use the Beacons Way to cut across to the ridge to the south of Mynydd Du (from their southerly control, either DK or CT) and I can see on RouteGadget that at least one team used this whilst most teams seemed to head north and then loop around the palm. Similarly, Long and Medium Score also had the option to use the Beacons Way to cross the Grwyne Fechan valley onto the western finger and then climb or skirt Pen Cerig-calch. The marshals at these far south-western controls were a bit lonely, with virtually just Elite coming though.

I can also see on RG that some cut across fields on these valley crossing. I am also aware that some competitors also tried to, or crossed, the Grwyne Fechan valley further north but not on Rights of Way. We didn't mark farmers fields as OOB as we considered that all should know that these are private land not to be crossed, but we were proved wrong, resulting in one irate farmer, and no doubt a black mark against OMM ever coming back to the area.

We also had an irate landowner at the north end of the Mynydd Du forest due to competitors crossing the fence into her property having descended from the eastern ridge. If you look closely at the map you will see that the footpath is on the south side of the fence to this property.

There were 2 other issues with competitors crossing the valleys on Sunday – one where competitors used a track which was access to a farm (which I should have marked OOB) and one where a RoW is diverted but wasn't adequately signposted such. I have reported the latter to the BBNP who will send out a warden to investigate.

The Event Centre was on the fields of Maes-y-Beran, owned and farmed by Mark Morgan who was tremendously helpful in supporting the event. He negotiated with his neighbour to let us walk you through their field after crossing the bridge on the way to the start and he cleared the track up through the woods to the road. Mark also installed the gate in the fence and constructed the path down from it that you used if you visited AN (just above the final control) on Sunday, and mowed the path down so that we could see competitors coming in from 600m away.

The farms either side of Mark's were made OOB, and all courses had BL as their final control to steer them – it was mandatory on all Score courses. The short option on the Short Score course was to return down the ridge to Bal-Bach, descend to Llanthony and use the RoW to AN and I made the road OOB to steer competitors on this route. However, some chose to come in through the day 1 start and failed to ascend to BL, so were disqualified.

Another issue with this mandatory last control on Score was for teams who got to BL (probably from AB to the south) and then realised that they had the time to collect the 10 points for AN. If they had punched BL again on the way down then they would have been alright, but since BL was defined as mandatory last control to be preceded by either AN or AB then AN was not counted.

A number of teams said that they hadn't read the control descriptions and that we should have briefed the mandatory control at the Sunday start. I accept that we should have briefed at the start, but everyone should read the information provided.

We've had a good few complimentary comments on the courses, for which many thanks.

I was a little concerned that Sunday courses might prove to be on the short side given the runnability of the terrain down the eastern ridge, but this proved to be wrong; the challenge of the descent and climb in heather, bilberry or gorse seems to have slowed you all down a bit. Sorry about the gorse, this seems to have had a very good growing season this year.

Whilst on the subject of gorse, A Class and some score course competitors may have noticed that the gorse has been pruned on their ascent to their first Saturday control from Henllan. This was down to 2 members of my hill team who spend a good few hours on Thursday making this path useable.

Incidentally, did you notice that you were crossing an international boundary as you ran across the ridge on Sunday?

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank the dedicated volunteers who helped me. My Hill Team consists 4 people who have extensive experience of the event; they spent 5 days in June checking my proposed control locations and 5 days leading up to the event putting out the controls. One of them, John Britton, also acted as Controller – checking and advising me on the planned routes; without John's input the courses would not have been as good.

23 controls were marshalled this year, by 15 pairs, some of who moved between controls from Saturday to Sunday. They are an important component of event safety; they all had comms back to the EC so that they could call in assistance if needed, or we could call them to help to localise the position of missing competitors. They also bring in controls on Sunday afternoon, allowing us to read the data to check on teams. My thanks to them all.

We're already working on next year's event and I hope to see you there.

Dave Chapman