Mapping and the planning saga…

Preparation for these Sprints started soon after the Coventry Urban race in June 2022. Initially, this was just a continuation of remote mapping work (started under COVID restrictions) to update the map used for the WOW weekend in June 2019. I concentrated on where new buildings needed to be added, converting the map to the latest ISSprOM 2019-2 specification and improving the accuracy of a map that had its origins back in 2005.

Early in the planning process, I investigated the Gibbet Hill campus (used by the Far Start) and decided to include this area for the Sprints. The Western campus had a new large car park that would be perfect for the event. With the addition of Gibbet Hill, I decided it was feasible to keep all courses on the more challenging Eastern side of the campus. I had an Arena based in the main Piazza -opposite the Arts Centre - which would be relatively close to the car park and well served with cafes, shops and other facilities. It had plenty of space, an Arena feel, and good provision for commentary. It even had a big screen if we could find a use for it!

Cryfield Village across the main road from the Piazza had recently been updated with new Halls of Residence and would make a perfect warm-up and model area as it was too isolated to use for any courses.

The decision to use Gibbet Hill would mean a remote start about 1000m from the Arena. Tocil Woods between Gibbet Hill and the main campus has been OOB for orienteering for many years and it would necessitate a "dead-run" down the main path to return to the main campus. For courses over about 2.4km, I considered the downhill dead running a worthwhile compromise to use this interesting additional area.

A map of the Gibbet Hill campus was completed in early 2023 and I produced a first set of Qualification courses. Qualification courses from the Far Start courses had a 1.2-1.5km loop on Gibbet Hill, the dead running and then another interesting area to finish uphill into the Piazza.

Things started to change in about June 2023…

Looking at the 2023 university calendar we could see Open days on Saturdays at the end of June and although dates for 2024 were not confirmed it looked highly likely that Saturday 22nd June 2024 was going to be an Open day. The Organiser - Phil Kirk - checked out one of these Open days. They can attract an attendance of up to 15000 and things are going on all across the campus. We couldn't be sure what we would be allowed to do in the Piazza so looked for an alternative Arena site. We also wanted some indoor space just in case the weather was wet.

Early in 2024, we looked at moving everything NE of the Arts Centre – onto the Senate Lawns where the tents of the protest camp are now situated – and I replanned courses to finish here. It had good options for spectator controls and commentary would not be an issue. The Finals start could be directly from the Arena if we wanted that option.

The protest group - 'Warwick Stands with Palestine' – established a camp in the Piazza so it was good that we had moved to the Senate Lawns.

We looked at the Arts Centre for indoor space but the Oculus building was considered a better alternative. For the courses, I investigated if I could move the Arena over to the Oculus Field which had good spectator "seating" although no option for commentary due to the close proximity to Halls of Residence. There were some compromises for the shorter Far Start courses which all migrated towards the upper end of guideline distances to allow the courses to get to a Finish/Arena 400m further NE than the original intent.

Control sites and a full set of courses were approved. It was now 31st May and just over a week to the late entry closing date.

Earlier that week, a site visit discovered that the protest group had moved from the Piazza to the Senate Lawns and protest activity ramped up. The Finals Start, always situated West of the Senate Lawns looked in jeopardy. Organiser, Phil met with University Security and concluded the whole area around the protest camp needed to be Out of Bounds. We needed to move the Finals Start and keep the courses away from this area.

In hindsight, putting the Arena in Oculus Field was a good move as I had already re-planned the courses to use this Arena before the protest camp relocation would have forced the move.

After some planning investigation and another site visit by all concerned, the Finals start was moved to the SW of the Arts Centre. For Finals courses, it wasn't a big deal. It made the first controls much easier and it was a cramped pre-start area, squeezed between the bus stops and the Arts Centre. Waiting competitors could also see where runners went from the start line.

To ensure all runners stayed on the NE side of the Faculty of Arts building, away from the protest camp, more controls were added to guide you safely to the road crossing.

In the next week, courses were revised & tweaked ready to send maps for printing on Monday 10th June. As expected, we had a spike in late entries over the weekend and with 850 entries, we sent 2000+ maps to BML for printing. They delivered the maps in person on Saturday 15th June.

On the Monday before the event (17th June), we heard that the protest group had over the weekend occupied a building on the central campus. After a late evening constructive meeting with University Security, we added a new large OOB area to the map. We had lost access to 10 control sites in the middle section of all Finals courses.

Discussing with BML on Tuesday morning, we established that a map reprint was possible, so the alternative options of event cancellation, postponement or only having Qualification races were quickly ruled out.

In about an hour - in the middle of the night - the Finals courses for most classes had been cut down by between 0.5 and 1 km. Many courses were tweaked to make sense of the new cut-off and - if possible – regain some distance. Open courses F1 and F2 had enough overall distance with a re-plan to run around the new OOB area. M/W 18 and 20 A courses were moved up to run the same as the Open classes.

Using OCAD "Route Analyzer 2.0" to automatically remeasure optimum routes on all the courses saved a lot of time and effort. Anyone using this on a relatively flat area with many legs should note that the height climb had to be calculated manually as the software typically adds 50% to the course climb!

After careful checking and some minor tweaks, on Tuesday (18th June) courses were ready to send to BML for a reprint. New Finals maps and control descriptions were safely delivered by BML on Thursday afternoon.

There was just enough time to concentrate on preparing the 120 controls for hanging on Sunday…

Planner and Mapper - Bruce Bryant