

ISF World Schools Orienteering Championships 2008 Edinburgh

Who would have thought that anything good would come out of a cold, wet, windy, 7 hour minibus trip to Dorset and back? At the British Schools Orienteering Champs there was a selection race to try for the England team at the world schools orienteering champs that were happening the following April, in Scotland.

Towards the end of November both my sister Katrin and I got letters saying that we had been chosen as part of the junior girls select team and would miss a week of school to go to Edinburgh during the week the 21st - 27th of April.

After the British Champs at Culbin on the 19th/20th of April, we drove down to Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel, where we were told what was happening in the coming week and given our kit (matching jackets and gigantic O-bottoms, but the tops were OK.) On Monday all the people from foreign countries were arriving so we had a rest day, bowling and shopping in the city centre.

Tuesday was the model event at Beecraigs Park, where there was examples of what the start lane would be like and controls to get used to the terrain. After that we headed back to New Lanark youth hostel to shower and change before the opening ceremony, which was being held in the Scottish Parliament. This consisted of lots of bagpipe playing, a flag parade, Scottish country dancing and lots of speeches made in 3 different languages.

Wednesday was the Classic race at Devilla, It was wet, windy and cold, and so the last thing you wanted to do was run around a disgusting forest and get yourself ripped to pieces. There were loads of brashings on the forest floor that made running extremely difficult (especially if you had short legs like me.) It was Katrin's birthday so she got the embarrassment of being sung Happy Birthday to over the tanooy. There were good results for the England team; individual golds went to Jonathon Crickmore and Charlotte Watson. Katrin came 4th and I came 7th, which I was pleased with. In the evening there was a disco at meadow bank sports centre along with the prize giving.

On Thursday there was the cultural tour where we walked around Edinburgh learning about the famous people and sites. Then we moved youth hostels, again, to Sterling.

Friday was the middle distance race held at Barr Wood, which was a scout camp with a mix of open and wooded areas with lots of paths and big features to navigate by (my sort of area.) Charlotte and Jonathan took the double to win both races and Kristian Jones beat the Swedes in H1 select. To my surprise I came 3rd and ended up with a rather nice trophy, but what was best was beating my sister. The team prize was done on combined times of your 3 highest scorers on each day, so we were trying to do some mental maths (surprisingly difficult after not being at school for 3 weeks) and realised that we had beaten the Latvian team in our age class by 23 seconds, very close over 2 hours and 24 minutes combined times. That evening there was a cultural fair, where each country had a stall with things like; leaflets about the country, example orienteering maps and some food from that country. There was also a show where each delegation performed something to show their countries' culture.

Saturday was the friendship relay around Arthur's seat in Edinburgh (a bit too steep for my liking.) The format was a bit strange as you were in a team of 3 and there were 32 normal controls and 3 meeting controls that you had to punch together. The aim was to get them all in the quickest time possible. You had your map for an hour before to plan and then you all started at once 600 runners all inside a big triangle painted on the ground. I was in a team with a Slovakian girl and a boy from Belgium Flanders and we came in exactly 100th.

The week had gone so quickly it was then time for the closing ceremony and team prize giving, outside the houses of parliament (more speeches, more bagpipes and a samba band (?)) After that we had our dinner in Pizza Hut and headed bank to meadow bank for a shower and a celidh. I'm not kidding but that was seriously more tiring than the orienteering and was a great end to the week.

It was an amazing experience competing against other countries and I met lots of new people, and had an absolutely amazing week.

In 2009 it is in Spain near Madrid, so the selection race will be in November and I am hoping to be selected again.

Zoe Harding

