

Virtual Deeside 2020 - Tour Report

Context:

An unprecedented year dominated by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Discussions between tour managers and JROS committee members took place throughout March-July to assess the suitability of tours given the rapidly evolving situation. Updates were shared via the JROS website and squad coordinators, and differences in opinion were voiced and considered. Although not flawless, I now believe that the actions taken were appropriate and reasonably timely. An important feature was to achieve consensus and co-movement between Lagganlia and Deeside tours (at least), and to ensure that all those involved were content with the decisions taken. Particular thanks must be given to Keith Marsden for his proactivity and reasoned thinking, to Steve Kimberley for his swift actions, and to Mark Saunders in his leadership whilst the JROS chairman Nev Myers was himself taken seriously ill with Covid.

It was decided that both Deeside and Lagganlia would put on independent programmes but share and discuss ideas throughout the planning process. This collaboration was effective, both in terms of programme development and in wider planning such as risk assessments for dramatically different tour activities.

The Deeside Team:

Iain Embrey and Zoe Harding acted as joint tour managers, whilst Helen Ockenden and Paul Pruzina acted as lead coaches, supported by Matthew Vokes who is experienced in that role. These lead one each of the 5 main sessions of virtual deeside, and together with input from Jon and Kathy Marsden developed the programme of activities. Nick Lightfoot contributed greatly to our lunchtime catching-features sessions and also to the wider programme, and Dom Dakin made a substantial contribution to all tour activities. Support was also gratefully received from: Ben Windsor, Fay Walsh, Jenny Rickets, Annie Ockenden, John Ockenden, and Graham Gristwood.

The Deeside Programme:

The concept was to provide evening sessions (19:30-21:00 Monday-Friday) as the main focus of the tour, and to support these with a variety of fun and beneficial suggested activities each day. We settled on using google classroom as our tour forum, discussion, and dissemination centre, and google meet as our virtual meeting software. The technical and security capabilities of each were investigated before tour, and

found to meet our needs, whilst the requirements to have accounts, download apps, etc were lower than for the other programmes considered. A particular feature of google classroom is the ability to send out editable documents, spreadsheets, and drawings to the athletes such that they all receive their own copy to edit and such that these are instantly updated within a drive accessible to all the staff. The technical aspects worked well, and the overall programme was well-received.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Post-Friday
<i>Evening session (19:30-21:00)</i>	<i>Intro/ice-breaker/?guest speaker</i>	<i>Route & methodology session</i>	<i>Stength & conditioning</i>	<i>Planning your physical training</i>	<i>Planning technical training</i>	
<i>Lead person</i>	Helen (Iain intro)	Iain+GG	Zoe	Paul	Matthew	
<i>Highly recommended activity</i>	n/a	Think about YOU orienteering (create template to facilitate this)	Follow-up from Tuesday: Virtual tour champs	Reflect on your current training: strengths, areas to improve, goals	Follow-up from Thursday: Draft out training plan - then schedule 1-1 discussion with coach	Plan your own training session
<i>Route choice of the day</i>	http://news.worldoforienteering.com/2020/05/16/route-to-o-season-2020-day-63/	http://news.worldoforienteering.com/2020/03/23/route-to-o-season-2020-day-9/	http://news.worldoforienteering.com/2020/06/12/route-to-o-season-2020-day-90/	http://news.worldoforienteering.com/2020/04/07/route-to-o-season-2020-day-24/	http://news.worldoforienteering.com/2020/04/19/route-to-o-season-2020-day-36/	List of many maps/legs: http://news.worldoforienteering.com/rtc/?year=0
<i>Catching features of the day (12:30 for c. 1hr)</i>	Intro	Torphantric	Birsemore	Sprint Theme	Catching features tour champs (glen dye)	

<i>Virtual O-related fun of the day</i>	Street-view O https://game.o-club.net/#/ Suggest a particular course	Contour interpretation challenge: https://octavian-droobers.org/od/quiz/3dtest/v8/	Map your garden/room/house - competition for the best map! (Set a course for a family member)	1) Sprint route choice R/L- create a 'competition' for tour https://www.routechoicegame.com/index.php 2) Sprint running-wild challenge http://3drerun.worldofoc.com/2d/runningwild.php	Labyrinth-O https://routegadget.net/labyl/ Suggest a particular course	
<i>Recommended suggested physical session of the day</i>	Dom's compass shape challenge, or GPS trace picture challenge	Make an OpenOrienteeringMap of where you live + auto controls to make a score! https://oomap.co.uk/gb/#/new/streeto/8/-0.9000/51.8000/	S&C session +/- running drills	Map memory challenge	Intervals + map	Go orienteering :)

Logistics and operation:

Following an excellent suggestion by Keith Marsden, we decided to organise tour tops this year: advantages being the inclusion and motivation for the athletes. Lots of positive feedback was received from the athletes about this!

The mainstay of the programme was our daily briefing sheet which was sent out via the classroom and via email at 08:00 each morning. Zoe masterminded and compiled these, and also lead on the devising of the overall format and identification of fun and beneficial games and activities to recommend. These were truly excellent, and they can be viewed here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/15nrAFYhLzuUtTb3GLmWb_nmOH0cQ2XPEjtS3H8jMHQ/edit?usp=sharing.

Google meets were set up by Iain by creating events in Google Calendar, and we soon discovered that the same links could be re-used for all days by duplicating these events. In general the link alone was shared, which means that Iain generally had to admit athletes and coaches to each session. This proved challenging on the first day for breakout group meetings, because Iain had to enter each group and admit all participants manually, so thereafter breakout groups were scheduled with their members as invited participants, so that they could join automatically. In some cases, manual approval was still required where the email address used (eg. logged into the browser) was different to that provided to us, but this proved manageable. A few of the athletes seemed to be able to join in central meetings without approval, and I'm not quite sure why this was the case.

Feedback and reflections:

We gathered feedback from athletes, parents, and coaches here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1MOm4744EqHCxfB5cHgDPHMKsSTxZPVrwVQDJWQAEUlw/edit?usp=sharing>. This feedback was incredibly positive and demonstrates a strong appreciation for the hard work of the coaches that put the programme together and made it all happen.

[Monday's quiz](#) by Helen was absolutely brilliant with a good variety of challenges that lent themselves to team discussion. After Iain's welcome and housekeeping, the session started with a brief 'hello' from each athlete, which was important, and allowed most to figure out the technology etc. Unfortunately there were a couple of athletes who didn't have microphones, which hampered their involvement in the week. Most coaches very much took a back seat and let the athletes interact and discuss (As was intended), although there was one coach who was accidentally omitted from circulation of this briefing note, which led to a slightly less athlete-lead (although equally very fun) dynamic within that group.

[Tuesday's technique masterclass](#) with GG was very well received, with lots of the athletes (and coaches) stating that they learned a lot from it. It was well-placed towards the start of the week as it allowed other activities and sessions to build on this foundation. The concept was to pick a selection of interesting courses from major competitions around the world, let Graham explain how to orienteer in that terrain and to describe his full approach, (where to go, what to see, and critically *how* to get there - ie. what techniques to use when etc), and then let pairs of athletes discuss a couple more legs in that terrain and feedback their thoughts to the group. The key idea is to go beyond route choice to emphasise methodology choice - what techniques will I use in what way at each stage of each leg. The session worked well and many participants found it very beneficial, although one coach noted that this format didn't allow the same inspirational effect that elite athlete motivational talks can provide.

[Wednesday's S&C](#) (motivation and practical) session by Zoe built on the strengths of previous Deeside S&C sessions. It was important that this happened before the 'planning your physical training' session, so that the athletes could understand what S&C is and why it matters. This message has been one of the key take-aways from Deeside tours for a while now, and we believe that it is an important learning point for this age group and stage of development. Many haven't experienced such sessions before, certainly not orienteering-focussed, and so finding the balance between introductory and fun exercises and 'correct' form is key. To copy the feedback from an anonymous coach: "Zoe's S+C session was the best S+C session we've had on Deeside so far - it wasn't too advanced nor too basic, it emphasized well that quality is better than quantity."

[Thursday's planning physical training](#) session by Paul also found a very good balance between high-level refinement and introductory accessibility. Paul repeatedly emphasised that the key to a successful training season is that it should be 'complete', so to avoid injury and illness from overtraining or inappropriate training are key. Opportunities were also taken here to re-emphasise the importance of embedding some S&C from the previous night. To quote again from the feedback: "Paul's physical session also got it just right, emphasized how to train sensibly and that more volume isn't necessarily better, and that injury prevention is massively important (which lots of juniors don't realise)."

[Friday's planning technical training](#) session by Matthew was an excellent round-up to the week. It started with an interactive reflection on the technical aspects of orienteering, partitioning techniques into Plan-Direction-Picture, and thinking about how each technique could be trained effectively, in the forest or elsewhere. The second part of the session sought to empower all the athletes to get started in planning their own training session. Considerable thought went into this aspect prior to tour, partly because of the current dearth of orienteering possibilities. Athletes were encouraged to contact their local club for access to maps/areas for personal training, and to get themselves set up with a computer and planning software, and then they were supported by a coach in smaller groups to use what they had learned to start planning their own session to develop a skill of their choice. We made efforts to encourage them to finish this planning and to go and try out their session with their family and with each other after tour. We had initially considered organising pairs/groups to plan for each other, but later decided that this added many more moving parts and that the main objective should be to enable each athlete individually as a starting point, and to then encourage them to build interdependence on top of this.

All of the above were supported by daily suggested physical, electronic, route-choice, and catching-features sessions. Zoe and Iain encouraged and fed-back on these activities through posts in the classroom, and Nick Lighfoot and Paul Pruzina organised an excellent, fun, and useful set of catching features events, including several in newly (and brilliantly) converted Deeside areas. These activities typically had between 10-15 of the 18 participants on any given day, and many of them were praised in feedback from the athletes.

Lessons to carry forward: (in addition to some operational points mentioned above)

1. Many of the sessions and activities that we used worked very well. Some remote sessions could therefore be incorporated into more normal times. Most of the consulted parties opine that virtual sessions would be better post-tour, once the athletes (and staff) know each other. Advantages could be to free-up time on tour, and to maintain motivation and learning. Disadvantages are largely volunteer-time. I, for one, am typically ready for a break after organising all the tour reports and other post-tour jobs, and often have other commitments coming up thereafter.
2. Zoe and I reflected again on the volume of physical load required on the athletes during a normal tour, in comparison with their typical training week. This further supports the effective 2019 tour direction of travel in reducing the length of days in the forest and in having Wednesday as a theory, S&C, and fun recovery day.
3. A lot of valuable theory learning (eg. route and critically methodology choice) can be done 'in the arm-chair', in some cases more time-effectively than in the forest, however the key contributions of the forest are: 1. To put theory into practice, 2. To generate experience in the terrain to learn/relate to future contexts, 3. For the coach to observe and identify areas for improvement. Normal tours could possibly benefit from a session along the lines of our Tuesday masterclass with GG session somewhere relatively early in the week.