

Community Orienteering and Protection of the Environment
Final Report
Produced by Sarah Dunn – 1st Nov 2018

Project Objectives

Two major orienteering events were to be hosted in upper Deeside in 2017 (Scottish 6 Day Festival) and 2018 (British Championships) together bringing around 4,500 visitors to the region. The events provided an opportunity for developing orienteering skills and participation in the local community where, due to geographical constraints, fewer introductory activities are usually staged. Learning generated through introducing people to a recreation that has environmental appreciation at its core also offers a robust long-term strategy for promoting protection of the national park. The project aims were to be achieved through working with school and youth groups, not only to stage activities, but also to develop resources for continued use and to train leaders who can help to deliver future orienteering activities.

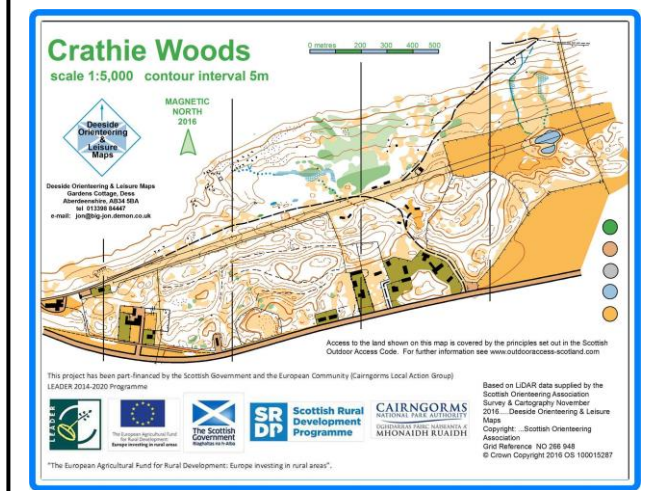
Overview of Activities and Highlights

The project delivered a wide-ranging set of opportunities for participation in orienteering as well as various workshops and one to one sessions to train teachers and other youth leaders. An overview of all the activities is given below with some of the highlights picked out in inset boxes.

Mapping of three small new areas close to Braemar, Crathie and Strathdon schools was commissioned through the project and in addition the project officer updated maps of 5 school playgrounds and produced a new map of the Braemar Games park.

Several opportunities were facilitated for teachers and other leaders to obtain basic training in introducing orienteering to a school playground setting. The first workshop was held within the first few months of the project with a further two opportunities during the final year. In addition, workshops on course planning using Purple Pen software and taking orienteering beyond the playground were also offered to those that had attended the basic course. Uptake of the courses was less than hoped, but included representatives from each of Braemar, Crathie, Logie Coldstone and Strathdon schools as well as an Explorer Scout leader.

The small area of woodland adjacent to Crathie school was one of the new mapped areas. The terrain is beautiful forested moraine with enough paths, fences and other line features to support beginners sessions in a compact enclosed area. The map has now been used for several in-school sessions and two low-key club events.

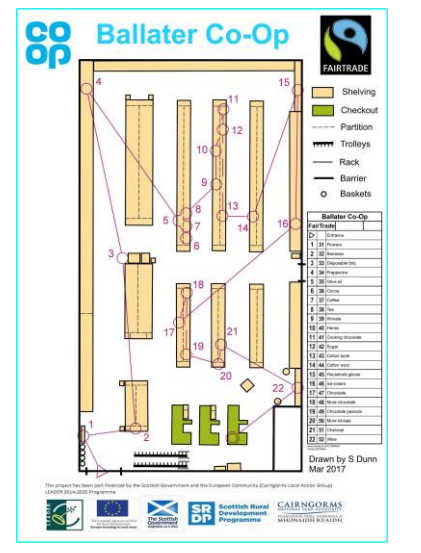


The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.

Taster sessions were held in each of the five primary schools within the area. These were targeted at the P5-7 age group and introduced concepts of maps and map setting indoors, before doing some simple exercises using orienteering maps of the school grounds. In the second sessions pupils had the opportunity to use electronic timing equipment. The sessions also gave teachers an overview of what is involved in orienteering and sparked ideas about how the sport could be successfully used to meet curricular Experiences and Outcomes. An unexpected bonus of the taster sessions was that they were found to be very inclusive and particularly beneficial for some youngsters with special needs.

For younger children the project worked with Outdoor Woodland Learning School (OWLS) to deliver a series of sessions both in school time and also linked to other orienteering activities out-with school. The OWLS sessions enabled the children to engage in a positive, challenging and exciting way with woodlands and initiated learning of sustainability and environmental issues. Environmental awareness was also imparted through involving the children in designing pictures to use on theme-based string courses at some of the introductory events. The string courses at orienteering events are designed for younger children to be able to follow a trail of string to follow a map and find marker points.

Strathdon school integrated orienteering into part of their FairTrade project by constructing a map of Ballater Co-Op. The children were provided with a blank map of the shop and mapped out the locations of the various products onto it, adding a legend of what each one was. They then used their maps in class to make simple computer games.



Several of the boys who had attended the Braemar after-school club subsequently joined a group from the Aboyne school cluster to attend the Scottish Schools Orienteering Festival near Glasgow

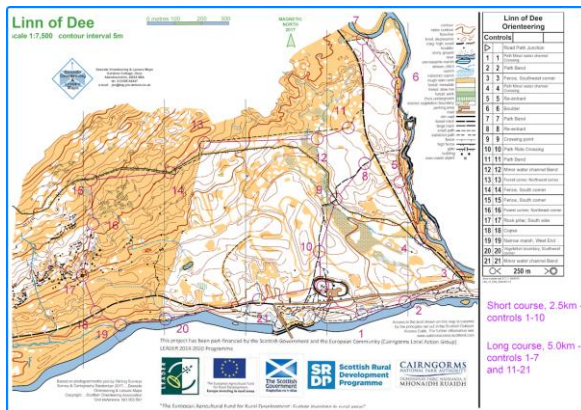


Children who particularly enjoyed the school taster sessions were given the opportunity to participate further, through running two 4-week blocks of after-school club in Braemar and Ballater. The sessions took them out into woodland near the schools which offered more challenge and adventure, and enabled the children to develop their confidence in navigating in a less familiar environment. All of the schools were also invited to participate in a schools festival organised in conjunction with Active Schools. The festival was held near Ballater in 2017 and in Braemar in 2018, with both attended by ~30-40 children from Upper Deeside. The “score” format allowed for differing abilities whereby pairs were challenged to find as many control points as they could in a given time. For many youngsters the experience was the first time they will have been allowed to explore a remote unknown area without adult supervision.

The COPE project also worked with other groups interested in learning navigation skills. In particular, Braemar scouts and explorers participated in a number of sessions including honing compass skills in the Games Park and a night orienteering challenge in Morrone Birkwood. They also completed a “Story O” where clues at each checkpoint filled in the gaps in a narrative about the natural history and environment around them. As well as working with young people the project identified an interest from adults in taking part in some introductory orienteering sessions and ran a series of Monday morning sessions for six ladies in Braemar.

Adults were introduced to the basics of map and compass work before having a go at some simple exercises to practice their skills. The exercises were gradually made more challenging over the 4 week block of sessions. Three of the ladies subsequently joined MarOC and one has now become a regular participating member together with her family.

The Linn of Dee permanent course follows a scenic route along the banks of the River Dee and Lui Water before traversing a beautiful area of heather moor and pine forest.



A key partnership in the project involved working with NTS at Mar Lodge to develop and install a new permanent orienteering course. The Linn of Dee was selected for the location and a new map commissioned. After further discussion and consideration by the NTS ecologist, the map was extended further west to allow a suitable route to be planned avoiding sensitive habitat areas. The permanent course was launched as part of the Cairngorm Nature Big Weekend in 2018.

In addition to the “traditional” style course with fixed markers installed at Linn of Dee, recent developments in smartphone technology have enabled “virtual” orienteering courses to be set up. The MapRun app offers a facility which can be used for orienteering at any time and has been used to create some extra resources as part of the COPE project legacy. The app uses satellite positioning of virtual controls which are shown as a normal course on an orienteering map. When the user reaches a control point their phone will register an audible “beep” to confirm that they are in the right location. Four different courses have been developed using the new COPE maps at Morrone, Crathie and Strathdon as well as one on the pre-existing map of Ballater village.

Mar Orienteering Club hosted a number of low key events through the duration of the project. These were widely promoted through the schools and to other people that had shown interest in the project. In 2017 a series of four mid-week events was linked to each of the schools, using the newly mapped areas. The PTAs at each school were encouraged to offer refreshments and this was

taken up at three of the events. Involvement of the PTA was found to be invaluable in terms of encouraging participation by the school pupils. In 2018 two events were hosted in conjunction with OWLS, giving older family and parents a chance to try out a proper orienteering course whilst younger children were suitably entertained. This combination was also found to be an excellent way of attracting new families to have a go at orienteering.

It was hoped that the COPE project would facilitate local participation in the Deeside 2017 and BOC 2018 events. Both events were widely promoted and advertised

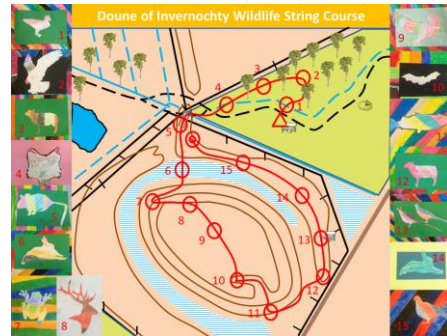
Children from Crathie School were able to participate in the British Championships being held on the Balmoral Estate, where many of their families live and work.



through a range of different

media including leaflets, email communications, posters and social media. With Deeside 2017 falling in the school summer holidays it was difficult to support and coordinate local participation. Although there was a number of “on the day” registrations for the event it is not believed that many of the youngsters from the local schools took up the opportunity to participate. To try and improve on this the following year, a small grant was obtained from Marr Area Committee to cover entry fees for children from the local schools to participate in the British Orienteering Championships. Eight youngsters took up this opportunity, with several coming to both the individual and relay championship events.

In addition to 3 courses of varying difficulty a string course was also set up at each event. These used wildlife pictures created by the children in school as the images at each control point.



The legacy planning for the project revolved around training teachers and leaders to enable them to deliver orienteering sessions in the future and leaving a set of resources that would help facilitate this. A [web page](#) has been set-up within the Mar Orienteering Club website with links to these resources, which include: self-help lesson plans, schools maps, neighbouring orienteering maps, permanent courses and MapRun courses.

Challenges

While the overall COPE project was highly successful, achieving the vast majority of its objectives, there were inevitably some areas that proved to be more challenging than anticipated. These are worth documenting for the benefit of learning and carrying forward to future projects:

- Engaging parents is difficult when activities are delivered through schools. In other circumstances after-school clubs have proven to be useful in this context, but in this case the short duration of the blocks wasn't really enough to establish a relationship.

- Engagement of parents is essential to participation beyond the school setting, to get youngsters to come to events and indeed to get parents participating themselves.
- Some schools had rapid staff turn-over during the project (e.g. probation teachers) which required additional training effort and gave less direct / immediate return. However, this may help to spread expertise wider in the longer term.
- It is important to focus on the training aspects from the outset of a short-term project in order to give enough time to support consolidation of learning and continued development.

Conclusion

Scottish Orienteering are grateful to Cairngorm LEADER for funding the COPE project thereby facilitating an opportunity to promote orienteering within the communities of upper Dee and Donside. The project was highly successful in reaching all primary age children living in the area, through successful collaboration with the local schools. Through this, general awareness and understanding of orienteering has been greatly enhanced. Furthermore, the experiences gained by participants will stay with them and may help to underpin future interest both in the sport and other outdoor recreation opportunities.