Orienteering using QR codes

QR codes appear in adverts and information leaflets, and are most often used as a quick way to get to a particular web page. You install a QR code scanner on your smartphone, then scan the code with the camera's phone! Scarily simple, or just plain scary to those of us who remember punch-cards for both orienteering and computing.

There are now a few phone apps that allow you to use these QR codes for orienteering, thereby opening up all manner of opportunities with very little effort, and making the sport instantly more attractive to the many people who love their electronic gizmos.

At Glenmore we have set up a couple of trial courses using **iOrienteering**, which works on both iPhone and Android devices, and can be downloaded free of charge via their website www.iorienteering.com or through the Appstore or Googleplay. The planner puts some information about the course on the website (basically just the sequence of control codes), then participants use a QR code to download the course details, usually when they get the map. At the start, and at each control, participants just scan the QR code; similarly scan to finish, at which point the app asks if you want to upload your time (with splits) to the results page that was automatically created when the course was set up.

iOrienteering doesn't rely on mobile signal while you're out there, if you're out of range it will store your times and you can upload when you get back within range.

You can get a set of plastic markers (40 controls plus start and finish – currently free of charge) which are 7.5cm x 10cm, and 0.5cm thick, with holes for screws or wire, or you can print your own, perhaps laminate them – depending on how durable you want them to be.

With iOrienteering, participants still carry a printed map, so the originator has control over its use – if you want to make a PDF widely available, you can, but you might prefer to sell your own printed copies.

This contrasts with **Mobo** (http://mobo.osport.ee/), where the map is downloaded as a PDF to the smartphone; you then navigate round the course as usual, with the phone's built-in compass on display in the corner of the map. As with iOrienteering, you "punch" by pointing the phone at the QR code, but in this case it sends a message to the web immediately – meaning that this system requires web connection all the way round. MAROC have piloted it in some of their semi-permanent courses.

These apps open up great opportunities for participation on permanent (and semi-permanent) courses, and for low-key events, races or training. Results are generated with no human effort, and might cover participants over several days or even weeks, not just on one particular day.

Users will undoubtedly want to invest in a waterproof case for the phone, preferably one that protects it from knocks too. A "Lifeproof" case has shown itself to be up to the job for 2 years.

Hilary Quick, Scottish Orienteering Association - May 2015