

SWOA AGM 2020 – chairman’s report

This year’s report will be quite unlike its predecessors. There will be no list of events held or expected – although I do thank those clubs who staged various high-profile and popular events in the early part of the 2019/2020 season. Coronavirus has devastated orienteering along with much else of our former lives; we pause to consider those whose families have been gravely affected by Covid-19, where life will not ever be the same again.

JK 2021

The South West’s major event, JK 2021, has unfortunately had to be cancelled by the coordinators, Roger Hargreaves KERNO and Christine Vince KERNO. This is a cancellation, not a postponement; as the permissions situation is not likely to change for some considerable time, moving to 2022 is not worth considering. On Wednesday 9th September, I (as SWOA chairman) sent the following message to Peter Hart, BOF CEO:

“It is with great regret that the South West Orienteering Association has to withdraw its offer to host the JK 2021. We have found it impossible to obtain confirmation of the necessary permissions to use appropriate areas of the South West for an orienteering event of the standard and popularity of the JK.

We have found that landowners are bound by Government restrictions and are unable to commit themselves until the Covid pandemic has resolved itself; therefore, it is currently impossible to plan for and create a safe 4-day festival of orienteering. “

JK 2021 has been in difficulties since lockdown on 24th March, and the restrictions have just got steadily worse. We lost permission to use Hayle Towans early on (which affected the Middle race and the Relays). Roger looked at using Davidstow, despite its relative unsuitability for a relay but something else could have been done on the area; however, we were not going to get permission from the Commoners due to lambing time. Plymouth City Council were surprised at what they considered was a very early application for use of the Hoe for the Day 1 Sprint (and we were not happy about putting 1000 people on the streets anyway) and the application was withdrawn before completion. That left us with using Penhale for the Middle and Long races – two days of the original four-day weekend. Meanwhile, Covid-19 was getting worse and the government restrictions showed every sign of being long-term. Re Penhale training area, the Army are only permitting 30 people for a civilian event, at re-started events. We could not expect any internationals to come, so no extensive elite class; accommodation could possibly be limited; people could be prevented from attending at no notice for no fault of their own (due to self-isolation). In short, we would not be able to put anything resembling a full blown JK. We had been talking to Helen Errington (Major Events Manager) to see how far we could cut down the JK, but it really was not looking like a JK any longer.

The final straw was that on Tuesday 8th September, Perran Sands denied permission to use the Holiday Park for the Saturday Middle Race as they’ve got a Government cap of 75% occupancy - and expect to be fully at that capacity at Easter - the effect of this means no other people could be on the site. On the Wednesday morning there was an emergency Zoom meeting with Roger, Helen Errington and myself, at which we decided that we had run out of options and that we should cancel; we could not stage any of the four days for completely open entries. Once permissions at Perran Sands were limited, there was no option but to cancel. I formally emailed Peter Hart and he asked us to keep this under wraps until Friday 5pm while they worked on a cancellation statement. In due course, BOF emailed every member at 5pm on Friday 11th September; at the same time I sent out a copy of Peter’s announcement, plus a message of thanks to the JK Team.

However, following the BOF survey, we found that many people had already booked at Penhale and so efforts are being made to give those residents an opportunity to race on Penhale - this only applies to those orienteers resident on site. KERNO propose to arrange some events in the week following Easter.

SWOA Committee Meetings

After March it became impossible to arrange face-to-face meetings for the committee so we took to Zoom. This has turned out to be amazingly successful, to the extent that we shall continue using Zoom. Meetings now take place once a month, and we have regular attendance by several club representatives. All this means that SWOA business is now dealt with more efficiently, and there is a wider range of views expressed at meetings.

I wish to express my appreciation to those who keep SWOA ticking over:

Thanks to Nath Fernandes for keeping our website up to date.

Thanks to Spencer Modica QO for continuing to score the SW Regional League; this has now been suspended for at least a year.

Thanks also to James Crickmore who co-ordinates and scores the Summer Relay Series – we may see some action in this in 2021.

Lastly, thanks to Katy Dyer BOK who is standing down from the committee this year. She has been on the committee for a fair few years, preceding Helen as our Secretary.

My thanks to Helen Kelsey for her work as SWOA Secretary, Richard Sansbury as Fixtures Secretary and Steve Robertson as Treasurer. Also to Jeff Butt, Peter Maliphant, Ben Chesters and all those who keep our Junior Squad working so hard.

Christine Vince, chairman 2019-2020