

## EYOC 2023 Bulgaria Report

I was very excited to tick off another new country for EYOC this year. Preparation went well after the JK and was really looking forward to experiencing new terrain in Bulgaria. I joined Ben Perry from DEVON on the train, and we both headed up to London and onto the underground (which was my first experience since I was 5). We arrived at Stanstead airport to collect the new GB kit and we proudly wore our jackets. At around 2pm, we found out that the plane was delayed by over an hour, and as we reached the gate, it was clear we would be waiting for a lot longer. We played Orienteering dabble to pass the time and the coaches had a nap! They would have to drive for 2 hours when we reached Sofia.

We arrived at 12:45 am and attempted to sleep on the drive through Bulgaria to the hotel, arriving at 3:45 am, tired but excited. After waking at 11am, we headed down to the pool for a swim which would shortly be followed by lunch; a three-course meal with lemon pasta for pudding! We would then venture into the forests for our first proper taste of Bulgaria. It was lovely terrain and I think we were all really excited to be let loose in the forest. Another swim and LIDL shop to end a tiring but great first day.

Day 2 was a taste of the sprint area having had a game of volleyball in the swimming pool in the morning, as well as our second taste of the forest (even better than the first!). We headed to our new hotel which sadly didn't have a working pool as it was out of order until the day we left! A relaxed and distracted evening before the racing began the next day!

I approached the sprint race with a calm head, arriving at quarantine a good hour and a half before my start. I chose a late start as I didn't feel the heat would have that much of an effect. Having checked the startlist the night before, I found that a Swiss girl, who is due to stay with us in September for a month, was starting a minute after me. That added some nerves before the start!

The race was great fun, I was quite surprised by the technicality of it, and I had one bad route choice that cost me between 15-30 seconds. Nevertheless, I was very happy to download in ninth and stay in that place for the rest of the race. We headed back to the hotel for lunch, before wandering down to the swimming pool. One pool was freezing, which I enjoyed as it was incredibly hot by now, and I wanted to cool down. Whilst the other was boiling. After relaxing in the pool, we headed to the opening ceremony and the prizegiving in the sprint arena. Because I had the best British result for the sprint, I was awarded flag bearer, which took some practice to perfect, but I think I got there in the end.

Day 4 was the long, we arrived at quarantine nice and early and had a long wait before my start at just gone 11. The race was great and the forest was lovely. Sadly I lost quite a bit of time on number 9 which was a diagonally downhill leg on a steep slope. The last tricky control! The rest of the course felt clean and I really enjoyed it despite not the result I would have wanted. We arrived back at the hotel for lunch and spent the afternoon chilling in the rooms and on the balcony. That evening was the friendship party, however, I was not feeling that great with a headache and one of the 16 girls had badly hurt her ankle, so we wandered back to the hotel for a relaxed evening.

The relays was my favourite event, Ruth Gooch (MAROC) went off on first leg and had a great leg, coming back in the main pack through spectator. She then handed over to Anna Todd (SYO). I was not aware of her position when she came in (14th) . The Danish team

handed over a couple of metres before me so I was racing her up the hill to 1 and 2. I managed to overtake her at 3 and at 7 I met the French girl who had won the long the previous day! That gave me good confidence and I was happy with my run. I made one 30 second mistake heading down the wrong alley with a few controls to go and the Danish girl got ahead! We finished in 12<sup>th</sup>. The boys team in M16 came 7<sup>th</sup>, missing out on the podium due to a photo finish.

Overall it was a brilliant weekend, the weather wasn't too hot and the terrain was lovely. Thank you to all the coaches and support I received from SWOA and WSX to allow me to travel out to Bulgaria.