

EYOC Tour report

I was lucky enough to be selected for EYOC representing Great Britain in Velingrad, Bulgaria at the start of summer 2023. After a day of traveling with flights delayed, we arrived in Velingrad in the early hours of the morning on the 21st June. We had a leisurely start to the morning due to the very late arrival the night before. In the afternoon we went to some forest training in a local area called Strazata. The area was nothing like anything I had experienced before, with the steep sided forests and giant ridge lines a new orienteering experience for me. We spent the afternoon doing long legs across the map and checking out sections of the map. After the training we returned to our accommodation for a debrief and relaxation.

On our second day in Bulgaria, we carried out a sprint training in the morning in a section of Velingrad. This section of the town was on the side of the hill which made for a very hilly sprint course. There were many 50/50 route choices during the course. This meant that it was a very fast area. It was interesting to see what the town looked like on the map, which was a good insight into what to expect in the sprint the next day. In the afternoon we carried out a forest training on the model course. The M16s jogged round in a group due to the sprint race the next day. We were just identifying how the areas were being mapped so we could be more prepared for the long and relay.

The next day was our first race which was a sprint in Velingrad in the town centre. We had to go into quarantine before the race which was an experience I was not use too. I had an early-middle start, so I didn't have to sit around for too long. However, being in such an intense environment does increase nerves before the race. I started the race and over my first few controls I lost time due to hesitation, not wanting to make an early mistake. I made a route choice error between 6 and 7 which meant I lost a bit of time and was bit scrappy in the later sections of the course. I ended up finishing in 32nd which on reflection I was pleased with.

On our fourth day, we had a long race in Staria Chark. This was a forest area on the side of a mountain. The first section of the map was through lovely runnable forest. However that quickly changed to steep sided forests which were very slow running in places. This made running fast very hard, and the large sections of the forest were very similar which made it hard to relocate at

times. This meant after making a mistake I lost a lot of time as I struggled to easily relocate and meant I had considerable time loss. I ended up finishing in 81st which was not what I was hoping for. However, it was a good learning experience.

On our final day in Bulgaria there was a relay in the same area as the long. Due to my lacklustre performance in the long I was put in an ad-hoc team with a Swiss M16 and a French M16. I was put on 3rd leg. Our French teammate came back in the middle of the pack. Then our Swiss teammate had a great run and came in 4th position. When I went out, I had no pressure on me due to being ad-hoc, so we were non-competitive. This lack of pressure helped, and I was able to hold onto our 4th place and be the first ad-hoc team back.

I had an incredible time in EYOC where I gained lots of experience from racing in new terrain as well as learning a lot from my teammates and the amazing coaches. Many thanks to SWOA and Devon for their contributions to help cover the costs of the trip.

