

SOUTH WEST ORIENTEERING ASSOCIATION

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MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING Tuesday 19th May 2026

PRESENT:

Christine Vince KERNO (chairman); Helen Kelsey BOK (secretary); Steve Robertson QO (treasurer); Rob Mills WIM (fixtures); Arthur Vince KERNO (cttee); Neil Fraser NWO;(cttee); Kevin Pickering WIM (cttee); Rich Jackson DEVON (cttee); Julie Astin WSX (cttee); Roger Hargreaves KERNO; Ian Jones NGOC; Richard Hudson BOK; Liz Yeadon SARUM.

1. Apologies.
Pete Maliphant BOK (cttee and SWJOS)
2. Chairman's update.
Christine attended the English Orienteering Council AGM on zoom, nothing major to report. There was a request for a slightly larger financial contribution from associations.
3. Approval of minutes of last meeting.
Approved
4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda.
Nothing.
5. Treasurer and Membership Secretary's report.
The positive news: very few outgoings since last meeting, there is currently £13,000 in the bank account, a few grant requests are expected in the next few weeks.
Membership: receiving one or two notifications of new members per month. Comparing 2026 membership with same time in 2025, membership units (measurement used by BOF), are down by nearly 7% at 722 units. Seniors make up about two thirds of these units and they are down by 8%, families down by 4%, juniors unchanged, young adults down by 7%. Then looking at the membership purely in terms of individuals, we have 1045 individuals which is about 6% down on last year, seniors down 6%, juniors down 8%, seniors make up 80% of the total individual membership. This is reflected in Pete's SWJOS report, indicating that not many younger juniors are joining the squad. This downturn is perhaps a bit surprising given BOFs focus on advertising particularly through social media. There was a general observation that members are travelling less and the hardcore that are happy to travel to events is reducing. Rich commented that DEVON had put on some events specifically to attract families (and hence junior members) which started off being weekly events and attracted a lot of interest, but as soon as it stopped being every week the numbers tended to drop off, it seems that people are looking for a weekly activity (like ParkRun) but clubs simply don't have the volunteers to offer something every week. Kevin asked whether national trends reflect the SWOA situation. Steve doesn't currently have that information but will endeavour to find out. **Action: Steve Robertson to investigate national membership trends.**
Rob commented that families seemed to be tied by organised weekly sport commitments and anything that doesn't happen weekly takes second place. Comments were made about the increasing cost of fuel and that travelling is not as common as it was (particularly pre pandemic) and the need to include car sharing opportunities in the entry system at more events.

There seem to be campaigns at national level to attract members but nothing seems to have been really successful.

6. Fixtures report.

British Sprints weekend: Richard reported that everything is now coming together for the weekend of 27/28th June, which is now only 5 weeks away. He will be contacting other local SWOA clubs (QO has already offered) to ask for support as a lot of marshalls are required to ensure that OOB are observed. Helpers will be offered a discount on their entry (or refund if already entered).

JK2028: BOF has been unable to get permission from Forestry England to use the Forest of Dean at Easter; "With the JK currently fixed over Easter, it now appears very unlikely that it could take place in the South West".

(Note that there is further information in that BOF email regarding access to the Forest of Dean at other times.)

Mike Forrest has talked to Kerina Lake WOA and BOF now has information on Welsh forward planning; however, the Spring calendar in 2028 is very busy.

The matter is now with the BOF Board.

Mike Forrest has put a lot of time into looking for a solution to JK2028 in the South West, to no avail, and SWOA is very grateful for his work.

Post meeting: Christine received an email from BOF concerning JK2028 on 5-6-26 see appendix 1

QO had offered Bridgwater or Taunton as a venue for the Sprint day JK2028, but in the light of above have requested release from that offer as they are now looking at using Taunton for an urban event on Saturday before the Southern Championships in 2027.

Next fixtures bulletin is due to come out in the next week or so.

Introduction of Very Short Green for the next SWOL season Responses had been received from QO, NGOC and KERNO see appendix 2

DEVON has only 4 members eligible for the VSG and the conclusion was that they felt whether they could cope with a course depended much more on the terrain than on the length of the course.

SARUM members responded very positively and said they would do a VSG if it was offered. Kevin reported back on the army events closest to the SW, each event having no more than 6 or 7 participants.

Ian Jones said that NGOC had thought it was a good idea, but not enough competitors in that age category currently.

Christine reported that older people who found short green too difficult could do the Orange course.

Rob Mills summarised the discussion that there is not yet a significant number asking for that change for us to support it for the coming season (26-27) but could revisit it again in a few years.

Julie said that planners need to be aware that orange may be used as alternative by older people and to consider that when planning the course.

7. SWJOS report. See appendix 3
8. Recorder of Controller's Report nothing to report
9. SWOL Trophies we have had no takers to from the request for somebody to take over collection, maintenance and redistributing of SWOL trophies, so need to ask the clubs again. Helen suggested that regular recipients of the trophies could be targeted to ask if they would take on the role. Arthur wasn't prepared to do that.
10. Volunteer exhaustion Rich reported that DEVON was now being much more careful about what they agree to do. Whereas previously there had been a tendency to take on everything, the club is now focussing much more on key events, they have an active group of volunteers but not enough to put on more events. The club is focussing on managing the expectations other groups, such as schools, scouts, fetes, open days etc.
 Steve Robertson reported that QO splits the membership into 3 teams, so each team is asked to help at a specific event, which possibly puts a bit more pressure on them to agree. Currently mapping is well supported by retirees and ex cartographers who are very keen, also lots of interest in planning, but finding it more difficult to get people to agree to be organisers, so this is the area QO needs to focus on at the moment.
 NGOC puts on a lot of league events, with one person as planner and organiser, the club is now looking at having assistant planner/organiser for each event, sharing the load and training up less experienced members.
 NWO seems to have a core of people that are always the officials at events, so are now asking newer people to get involved and mostly they are agreeing. All helpers are entitled to 50% off their entry fee and officials get a credit to enter a future event, which seems to keep people happy.
 Generally the committee was satisfied that the SW clubs are managing the volunteering issues.
11. AOB.
 1. Ian Moran chair of SE and Neil Crickmore chair of SC, had been in touch with SWOA to discuss trophies for the southern championships and were asking whether there should be a generic medal for this, particularly for juniors. Liz Yeadon said that she felt the medal should at least say what the event was, the year and the age class. At a previous event she had bought gold, silver and bronze medals and then had stickers printed out with the age category on, which were stuck onto the back. She is planning to go back to Ian Moran to discuss this. Kevin Pickering showed a MTBO medal that had been produced in a similar way and he said that he had sourced generic medals from a contact at about £1 per medal. Steve Robertson asked whether SWOA would be prepared to fund the purchasing of the medals (he is dealing with the accounts for Southern champs in 2027)
 The committee was generally in favour of looking at this further to investigate how much it would be likely to cost.
 2. Rich Jackson said that DEVON had been looking at including a SWOL event in the club's schedule, but the planner of the event that seemed most appropriate was not keen as it meant that he would not be able to run in that event, so was questioning whether any points are awarded for planners/organisers of SWOL events.
 Arthur said that this wasn't necessary because only 5 events out of 9 were needed to score.
 Steve commented that QO does give a nominal point score to planners and organisers of their league events and Kevin confirmed that the same happens for the Western Night League events.

3. Christine noted that we still had no one to take over the SWOA secretary role, so this should be added to the report to clubs
12. Club reps report to clubs.
- Planners of SWOL events should be aware that as there is no Very Short Green at these events, some of the older orienteers may choose to do Orange instead and so this should be considered in the planning.
 - We are still looking for someone to take over the responsibility of the SWOL trophies from Arthur Vince. If no one comes forward the trophies will be retired after this season.
 - The SWOA secretary will be leaving the committee at the next AGM as she will no longer be in the SW region, so we are looking for someone to take on this role.
13. Date of next meeting. July 28th 2026

Appendix 1

Email from Peter Brooke, BOF received 5-6-26 concerning JK 2028:

Board meeting feedback

The Board met on 11th May and had a long discussion on the JK, reflected on the current situation and set out some further actions to follow. The Board are very grateful for everyone's efforts so far in working towards a solution.

The Board agreed that the JK should remain at Easter and be one of the premier events in the calendar. The format was to continue as it is, but we are to investigate areas which could reduce the workload on the organising regions.

Actions followed up so far/ being worked on:

SCOA (JK29) approach – We have approached South Central with a view to see if they could bring the JK forward a year. Understandable for a variety of reasons, they wish to remain hosts for 2029.

SWOA discussion – Alison and Rob from the Board are going to speak to SWOA and discuss their wider concerns with a view to seeing if the event could take place at a future date.

BOF approach with Forestry England (FE) – Our Access Officer Gracie has been working with FE with the approach of FE identifying areas we could use. So far two positive conversations have taken place, one with regards to Cannock Chase (not Beaudesert) and the other relating to Twyford and Morkery in Lincolnshire. We feel this has been a very positive step and has engaged FE at a national level. Principally now we are working to see if Cannock could be a viable option. Andy Yeates has highlighted progress with WMOA and initial feedback is positive for their support pending a meeting coming up. Should the JK take place at Cannock, there would be a knock-on effect that BOC 28 would need a new host and date as it was due to be held in the West Mids. This is in the back of our minds during discussions with FE too, but it would also help reduce the number of major events in a tight timeframe as identified earlier.

Our next steps are to approach the council and discuss potential available of the parts of the area they own, and we are aware of various environmental restrictions to discuss with them.

We are hopeful that we could commence a discussion at the council before the summer break should everything go to plan.

There will clearly be a need for much more central support in making JK28 happen. Once we can get the forest days location locked in, we can move forward quickly with the next steps.

Best Regards

Peter

Appendix 2

Responses from orienteers in the M/W 75+ age classes, received prior to meeting regarding the possibility of introducing Very Short Green to SWOL.

NGOC

– two positive responses:

Yes, I might be interested.

Yes, we rarely orienteer these days, but that could rekindle our enthusiasm since we find course lengths are daunting as we get older. Thank you for investigating this possibility.

QO

Here are QO's comments:

- There are a couple of people in QO who would take up the offer. But the main problem older competitors have is with the physical difficulty, not the distance. So if short green is a problem, then very short green may be too much as well. Consider also the physical difficulty getting to a distant start.
- As competitors get older the willingness to travel throughout the region diminishes, so the SW League may not be very competitive.
- Keen orienteers would choose a lower Technical Difficulty course such as Orange rather than not compete at all.
- There is a concern about the extra burden on planners. It is very difficult to plan for both the right length and technical difficulty. Also, it is disappointing for planners to put a lot of effort in to a course if take-up is low.

KERNO

I have carried out a survey of club members in the age ranges for a VSG course. Of those eligible probably only two Ws would possibly go to a SWOL and enter a VSG. Generally, the feeling was if the event was not a SWOL event most would stick to a ShGr.

Appendix 3

SWJOS report 19th May 2026

SWJOS will finish training for the season at NGOC's May Hill event this Saturday. The squad continues to be well-supported though we can see a shortage of MW12s & 14s looming, for which there are no easy fixes. This is reflected in SWJOS only having one MW14 at Lagganlia this summer, the first time that has happened for many years. The number of young SW orienteers coming through who are willing to travel widely for their orienteering continues to fall and is now very small

– every junior who appears in the SW League final tables is active in or already associated with SWJOS.

Steve mentioned grants for summer camps, so here are the SWJOS names that have been selected for the five JROS summer training camps, 10 in total from six SW clubs:

Lagganlia – Evie Brown BOK

Deeside – Daniel Wareing BOK, Ceci Knight Kerno, Alice French WIM

Czechia – Finley Goddard QO, Hannah Agombar NGOC

Stockholm – Marcus Perry BOK, Esk Medlock WSX

Gothenburg – Not yet announced but we expect to have two athletes on the list

In addition, Marcus and Finley have been selected to run for GB at the European Youth Orienteering Champs, whilst ex-SWJOS member Lyra Medlock has been selected for the GB team at JWOC.

SWJOS continues to increase the number of qualified coaches assisting the squad, young and old. We are already planning next season's training, which will kick off in late August/early September, with 25-30 active SW juniors.

If you have any questions, or have any up-and-coming juniors in your club that might like to find out more about SWJOS, please do let me know.

Pete Maliphant