

Who would be a controller? Mike Chopping

For those of you who have wondered who is that person stood around, not doing a lot at registration, near download or at the start (sometimes already wet and dirty before the event has even started) well most of the time that is the controller of the event. So who or what is the controller? They are an experienced orienteer who tries to ensure your event goes smoothly by checking what all the other officials do at an event.

I have been a controller for about 20 years now and every time I say 'yes' to a new event I know it will be totally different and with a new challenge. I am going to try and enlighten those of you who are not a planner or an organiser and let you know what a controller does.

Firstly they do not tell anyone what to do; although some of you that know me will now be laughing out loud, a controller is there to try and make sure that nothing is missed by giving a second pair of eyes to all that goes on during and before an event. Check the organisers ideas for such things as parking, is the start and finish in the right place, is the risk assessment complete, the list goes on.

So how does the controller know what is needed. Well to become qualified you need to have been an organiser and planner, once qualified you need to keep up your experience by continuing to organise and plan. When you are silly enough to want to become a controller you have to undertake a course, which covers the duties and responsibilities of the role of controller and the rules and guidelines. Then once all that is done your area association (for grade C colour coded events & B regional events) will decide if you are ready, then you become an expert! No, that is when you suddenly realise that everyone thinks you are, but you start to learn how other people do it, and then hopefully navigate your way around a forest without a flag to show you where to go, looking for features that may not even exist but the planner wants to use. Every planner no matter how experienced will get something not quite right and needs to be checked, to ensure that what they want to do is possible and safe. You also have to remind the organiser of any problems that you see while out checking the area, doing this without offending them.

Long before the event you need to check the map and any areas that will cause you a problem; road crossing, dangerous areas and where the planner wants the start and finish in relationship to the car park etc. Once the planner has the courses sorted, you need to check the courses; in the days before computers that would mean checking hand drawn master maps. Are the courses the right length and difficulty, are all the control descriptions right compared to the centre of the circle, i.e. if the course is using written descriptions is it a fair representation of the actual feature. Once that is done you need to go to the forest/wood/city and check every control is in the right place and fair, is it correct for the technical difficulty, i.e. is that track junction too far from the last one on the white course and will it lead the competitor down the right track for the next control. This is normally done by the planner tagging (small, sometimes very small piece of tape hopefully with the control number on it) the place the control will go and which number or code this control site will have on the day. This can be fun going to where I think the control should be to find no tag, then try and get inside the planners mind and find where they have put the tag; providing the local wildlife have not eaten the tag, if there is no tag or I think it is in the wrong place I have to tag where I think it should go the planner checks me out. We sometimes have to meet up to sort it out. Once all of the courses and controls are agreed then the maps can

go off to the printers. At big events a proof map of each course is sent to both planner and myself so we can agree they are still right.

On the day of the event and after the planner has placed the controls I have to check every site. Is the control where we agreed and tagged, is the right number in the right place, is the right box on the right stake? Then I need to check the start and finish are set up correctly, then once the SI kit is up and running, download all the my dibbers (that used to mean at big events up to 3 dibbers, but now I have one of the new version 11 dibbers I can get 150 plus on one dibber). If all are ok I can let the organiser know the courses can start.

I like to watch the first starters to see if the start team are ok with what is needed, also to see which way everyone goes just to see how well the planner has done at getting the competitor's thinking right from the beginning of the courses. Then off to relax for a little while before making myself available for the hopefully nice comments, but more often than not to help out with any issues at the download. At a major event it can be necessary to pass a complaint or problems over to a jury of fellow controllers to sort out any rule problems.

If we as the event team have got it right everyone goes home happy. There are the odd occasions when I am asked to sort out complaints; we are in a sport where there are a lot of very knowledgeable competitors who on occasion feel the need to explain the rules to say a less experienced organiser. This is a very difficult thing to get right, as firstly if something was wrong mostly this is genuine mistake and hopefully sorted on the day. Secondly if someone has spotted an issue it is only right that the event official is given the chance to explain and more importantly learn from that error. We all have to start somewhere, so how about having a go at planning and hopefully after a few events move on to controlling. You will learn a lot about maps, navigating in the forest without a control flag to help and how courses are put together to challenge you and others.