

Kent Night Cup, Reigate Priory Park, 1st February 2024

Mass-start score events are not to everybody's liking, but they do have advantages for evening events, when you need to allow people time to arrive after work, but still want to pack up quickly and get home / down the pub.

In planning this event, I was trying to cater for several different categories of people. At one end, I wanted a simple route that novice night orienteers could follow without too much difficulty. At the other, I wanted to keep fit and expert orienteers occupied for the full hour.

I tried to achieve the first objective with a 10-control Yellow/Orange standard course, numbered consecutively to make them easy to spot. This seems to have been successful; several people did all 10 in sequence, and I'm pleased to see that they all picked up some other controls on the way too.

Common practice for Kent Night Cup events is to divide the controls into two sets. Visit as many as you choose in the first set, then swap to the other set; no mixing. This would require two loops of the park to get maximum points, but Priory Park is so small that this wouldn't have taken the top people a full hour.

So instead, I opted for "dumbbells", whereby the controls were in pairs. You could still get points for each control visited in any order, but there were bonus points for visiting both ends of a dumbbell consecutively (without punching another control in-between). This also allowed me to plan something you don't normally get at score events – legs with route choices! 90-100, 92-102 & 95-105 (each in either direction) all had an element of over-or-round route choice.

After a lot of thought, I came up with a route of "only" 7.8km with all the dumbbells. I'm most impressed that Mark Ford, with only a few seconds glance at the map, found a route that was nearly as short; 7.9km along the purple line, which he managed to execute with 94 seconds to spare!

The eagle-eyed will spot that the clock for control 101 has gone awry, leading to some strange split times. This has no effect on the overall scores, so I refuse to worry about it.

I'd like to thank:

- Reigate & Banstead Borough Council for the use of their park
- Mark Glaisher for his help with the computer, kit, map printing, and indeed for running the Kent Night Cup series
- whoever organised the weather
- all the competitors for turning up and claiming to have enjoyed it

Priory Park is an exceptional area, combining easy parkland with runnable and heavily-contoured woodland. Ideal you might think for the summer GLOSS series – see you on 23rd June?

Ian Ditchfield