

3 Days of Belgium 2022

La Gilleppe : Friday, 1 July 2022 to
Sunday, 3 July 2022

David Jukes / Martin Wilson



1. Report by David Jukes

To avoid potential damage to an 'at risk' knee, I have done very little orienteering (the 'Foot-O' type) for several years. During the Covid shutdown I decided that I could compete in a limited number of events and to again enjoy the challenge of orienteering. My running is more jogging but, now that I have reached the M70 class, that is likely to be rather common for many competitors in the class. Going slower could also mean more accurate navigation.

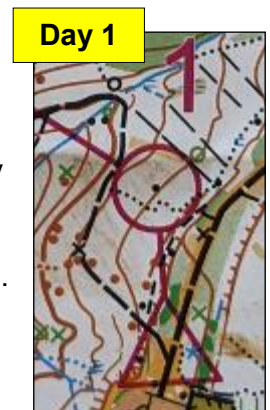
So, when offered the chance to join Martin Wilson on a 3 day trip to Belgium, I didn't take long to agree. I left the organisation to Martin. Getting to the eastern part of Belgium might seem fairly straight forward but there are various options including train with Eurostar, driving via the Channel Tunnel and flying from a London airport and getting a hire car. With the first event being late Friday afternoon, he opted for a flight out on Friday morning and, with the last event on Sunday morning, a late afternoon flight back that day was possible. Combined with an Air&b booking with self-catering, the logistics worked very well. And 3 warm sunny and dry days led to an enjoyable trip which felt much longer.

Competing abroad provides opportunities to experience different terrain and to compete against a wide international set of competitors. The terrain in eastern Belgium is not that different to some parts of England but each area is a new challenge. Being able to adapt to different mapping conventions is also essential. For example, in Belgium, there were quite a lot of patchy young thickets which were not consistently mapped and it needed care to identify which were the thickets that had been mapped.

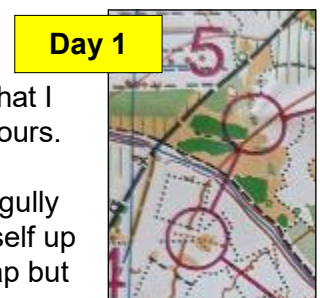
There follow some comments on a few of my legs from the 3 days – some which were pleasing and some which were not so good. *All maps were 1:10,000 / 5m. Extracts below are to scale if viewed at 100%.*

Day 1

- **Start to 1:** At any orienteering event, hitting the first control cleanly is always a relief but, when competing internationally, this is enhanced. Here the first leg was very short and required a short path run and then a left turn into the forest. I needed to identify what the black cross on the map represented but this was clearly a notice board and, turning left there provided a good attack point into the control. The control flag became visible quite soon afterwards but it was not obviously on a boulder. As it was in the right position, I ran to it and only then spotted the 'boulder'. It was probably no more than 30cms above the ground! This was a useful lesson and it became apparent that some of the mapped knolls and boulders were much less than the conventional minimum 1m designated in the International Mapping Standard.

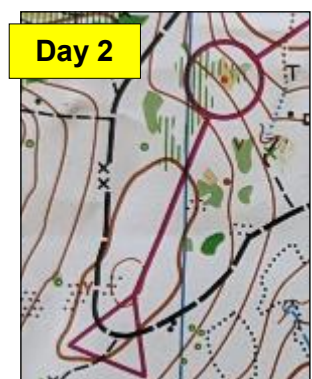


- **4 to 5:** The map appeared to show an uncomplicated leg out of the forest, across a track, cut across the open area and the control should be just beyond the end of the second thicket. The first problem was how to reach the track. What I hadn't spotted was the small stream and more importantly, the shape of the contours. The stream is actually in a deep gully. Looking at the map later, I saw that the contours have been bent to go a long way up on either side of the stream. The gully was probably 4-5 metres deep. I scrambled down on my bottom and pulled myself up the other side using various roots. On reaching the track I went to check my map but discovered that it was not in my hand. Looking back, it was in the bottom of the gully! So down I went for a second time. When I got back to the track, the vegetation was nothing like as clear as the map suggested but I decided to head in on a compass bearing. The marked thickets were not obvious and I feel quite lucky to have found the control on my first attempt.



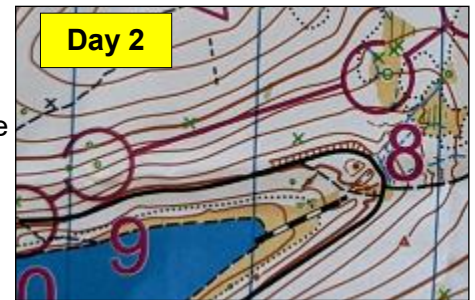
Day 2

- **Start to 1:** From the issues with vegetation on Day 1, the direct route looked a bit too risky. I opted for the left track and jogged until the path junctions on the bend. I then veered off right into the wood and, finding it a bit thick, drifted down the hill. Unfortunately I wasn't pace counting and kept going hoping to see



something that looked like a clearing with a knoll in it. I only stopped when, quite a bit too low, I hit the ditch some way to the north of the tower (T). I turned round and headed back up the slope. I eventually found it but it was rather obscured by vegetation. A bad start to the day!

- **8 to 9:** A classic orienteering leg. There was a temptation to drop down to the forest road and then climb back up the hill. However, that requires a lot of energy and there was no obvious attack point on the road to ensure an accurate climb up to the control. So for me the best route was direct - staying on the slope and counting paces to know when to expect the control. I measured the distance on the map - 3 cms. I do about 60 paces per cm making it 180 paces. Checking the contours showed Control 9 to be at about the same height as Control 8. When 'contouring', it is very easy to gradually slip down a slope so maintaining a constant height requires some attempt to edge up the slope as you cross it. As I progressed, I counted my paces in groups of 60 and attempted to ensure I stayed at the same height. As my third '60' was nearly completed, there, directly in front of me, was the control. A perfectly executed contouring task over 300m. I was very pleased!



Day 3

- **Start to 1:** Having experienced the vegetation at the 2 previous events, it was obvious to me that going direct was not a safe option. For this leg, the natural choice is to continue south on the path until you reach a suitable attack point and then turn west towards the control. But the path slowly diverges from the direct red line route which means that the control is quite some distance away from any selected attack point. To me, the most sensible route was to switch over to the path on my right (to the west), jog along the path to the junction near the road, turn left onto the path round the back of the control and then cut into the control on the left. And that is what I did. Finding the actual control was a bit trickier than I had expected but, once again, this was due to the extra unmapped vegetation. But I knew I was very close so a quick check round the back of some young trees revealed the control. A very good start - better than Day 2!
- **5 to 6:** Although a short leg, this is another classic orienteering challenge. Here the control is a short distance away across a gentle spur. If the area had been flat, it would have been a simple compass and pacing exercise but the leg requires an uphill run followed by some down on the back of the spur. This makes sticking to the bearing much harder. The only other features on the map are vegetation related - holly bushes, thickets and a small overgrown clearing. The only safety feature was that there was a path marked going north into the control. It was therefore safer to aim a bit high over the spur with the chance of catching the path. Pace counting would be a check on the distance. Despite that plan, my route took me direct to the control with the platform being visible as I approached.



Inevitably there were several errors which, with hindsight, should have been avoided. But looking at the results, out of the 25 competitors on M70, I achieved positions of 7th, 11th and 10th with an overall position (based on combined times) of 11th. So a steady 'top half' performance which I found very pleasing given my recent lack of FootO. Another British competitor in M70 was Mark Glaisher from Saxons who was second overall with positions of 2nd, 2nd and 9th; errors on the final day may have cost him the top position. Overall in M75, Martin achieved a very respectable 4th position - with the first spot being taken by the Belgian Freddy Sillien, a former M70 World Champion.

2. Additional comments from Martin:

David's comments are very valid. The trip felt like a 'stag weekend', with an 11.00 flight to make a 17.30 start time at an event very close to the German border (4 hours from Calais by car was the alternative). Return after Sunday's race got us home by 1900, so it was a practical approach. Other UK groups from GO, SN and SAXONS all used cars.

I found the mapping on Day 1 very dubious, and hard to follow at speed. They seemed to under-map green vegetation and

over-map knolls and boulders compared to UK maps. I was leading the MD race after 8 controls, but lost loadsa time on two later controls where I just couldn't make the map fit the terrain that I saw.

Day 2 was the best event, lovely white forest, rather like a very large and hilly New Forest area, I think one of Belgium's best areas. This was a 'Long Distance' race of just 3.4k and 30m climb, used for both M70 and M75. Freddie Sillien won this in just 28 minutes. I would have liked another 1-2k after all our efforts to get to the event. It required very good compass and pacing throughout. David shows his route for Leg 1, a safe route which went slightly awry. I decided to risk the direct route, and managed to use the strips of vegetation to home in directly onto the 'micro-knoll' control for a good time. Definitely a risky strategy, I'd no Plan B if I'd missed. A copy of the Day 2 map is shown below.

Day 3 was much greener and slower. This type of terrain always frustrates me as I can't maintain speed or direction as well as I should. On Leg 1 that David highlighted I took the path heading S, and used some nifty attack point work to head W onto the control for a good split time, but I think David's route was faster. On Leg 5-6, David did very well to get that right, a leg that looked simple but actually needed great care. I ran round the ridge assuming I'd see the kite, but got the height wrong and lost a lot of time, very hard to relocate here.

Belgian events are not too large, this had 600 runners, and they always provide good food & drinks (including beer) at the finish. On Day 1, each finisher received a free waffle sandwich after download. These were delicious (choice of cherry, apple, rhubarb flavour!) and we paid for one each at the other days, our staple re-fuelling after a hard run.

Belgium holds several major events each year, 3 Days in May and August, and a 'Sylvester 5 Days' between Xmas and New Year. Any of these can make an interesting short-term trip from the UK, ideal for first foreign O visits.

