Plantroller report for the 2010 SA O Champs : Grabouw Klipdrif

Kobus Coetzee and Martin Kleynhans

Well this report has been a long time in coming. Perhaps partly because of the hecticness of putting on a champs and the time it took to recover but also just because we both are master procrastinators and when put together we make a world beating team. This explains why at about 4 weeks before the champs only about 10% of the mapping had been done. Luckily though we seem to be fairly efficient once we get going and in the space of under three weeks we went from practically no map to an SA Champs that was hopefully of a good standard and really enjoyable.

Certainly it was fun doing the mapping. Kobus did about 80% of the mapping after a 19 year break from new forest mapping and Martin the rest, although it is debatable whether Martin really did as much as 20% as his areas had nothing in them to map, well not much anyway. And there is a history. A large part of the same area was mapped by Ruedi and Kobus in 1991. That map proved extremely useful to give an indication of where the interesting areas could be found. Most of the area has been felled and replanted at least once since the original map. The planting is now done in a different pattern to previously and the fewer rides make for more interesting orienteering. Only one small portion is unchanged from 1991 and that is the area that was used for the relay. When we visited the area in December we identified a wonderfully complex and runnable forest block near Sir Lowry’s Pass for the middle distance event. In July on a mapping visit Kobus was greeted by the howl of chainsaws and the realisation dawned that the area identified for the middle distance event would be gone by September. Martin at about the same time and independently, spotted the decimation from the air on a flight to PE and it certainly spoiled his day there!

Times have changed and we now have OCAD and GPS to make life a lot easier. Digital contours and rectified colour photographs, supplied by the Directorate of National Geo-Spatial Information, made setting up the base map easy compared to the old days of tracing from black and white ortho-photos.

Martin mapped some peripheral areas with less detail without a GPS (this means mapping slows down to a crawl as you quadruple check every feature's position), whilst Kobus got the whole walking-around-with-a-GPS-and-pencil-necklace thing down to a T, as can be seen in the photo. Note the GPS mounted on his hat for better reception and 5 m accuracy. The Ruedi and Kobus map of 1991 was remarkably good but also shows at the same time how far mapping has come in SA in the last 20 years. The 2010 map contains far more detail (thanks to the influence of the Swedish mappers who visited our shores) and also thanks to the GPS which probably makes it all somewhat more accurate.

So with all the surveying going on right up until the very weekend before SA O Champs, the real course planning only got going on Tuesday evening, for Friday. This resulted in a muddying of the traditional planner/controller waters, with us almost swapping roles. Hence we became ‘Plantrollers’ a superb term we think first coined by Paul Macy and Alvin Ward.

At this stage the stress was reaching epic proportions but luckily we work very well as a team and amazingly not one word was spoken in anger. With Carol’s lifesaving cooking, we had a middle distance planned and staked out by the Wednesday. At this stage an angel in the form of Giso von Petersdorf volunteered to hang the controls flags and EMIT blocks for the middle distance event which gave us some more breathing space to finish the planning for the Classic. Having spent most of Thursday stuck in traffic getting to Grabouw we needed every second of the day, which became a rather late night or early morning depending on how you view it. The final map corrections and staking was done on Friday and finished just in time for the Classic event on Saturday.
The grand finale was very grand, with the Relay map only being ready to plan on at about 1AM on Sunday. The whole thing was planned, printed and set out by 9AM after sleeping in shifts during the night while planning and printing. (We also got this whole shifts thing down to a T). This was our first relay and Martin had a steep learning curve setting up the courses on OCAD. Luckily though OCAD makes it surprisingly easy. Hopefully though this is the last time we do it like this because we may just die of stress next time, but then procrastination is not a curable disease.

But some nice words for future SA Champs planners, although SA's is a big job it was surprisingly not nearly as epic as we had imagined, and boy but is it fun to plan champs courses! It was a very enjoyable week of planning for both of us and the mapping is addictive too. So don't be shy to take on an SA's one day, but it will help a lot to have a map complete well in advance and preferably mapped by someone else.

The area as you all experienced is pretty good, lots of superb open super-runnable forest with loads of runnable white and not too much climb. As we were staking out on the Wednesday the mood went from despondency to excitement as we realised that not only did we have a really good area - Martin had had sleepless nights that the area was devoid of features - but that we had an awesome map once all the mapped bits were tied together on a piece of paper. Not that the map is perfect. We ran our respective courses after the fact the next weekend and found various issues here and there. Generally it is good practise to do this before your event but being master procrastinators, after will do. The main issue was inconsistency in the mapping of the thicket areas. Hopefully they weren't too bad though to upset anyone's runs too much. We acknowledge for example the unmapped extra bank in one area that had some people justifiably confused. Good news is that we are hosting Western Cape Champs here next year in April and you can look forward to an improved map plus some extra bonus white forest too.

Control 46 on some of the middle distance courses was hung on the wrong rootstock 30m from where it was shown on the map. Our apologies for this and thankfully nobody felt upset enough to lodge an appeal.

When the first finishers started coming in on the middle distance courses we were worried that the courses were too easy but in reality the finish times were close to what is required. There were very few disqualifications and we would like to think that the quality of the map and the fairness of the course setting had something to do with this.

Some stats: we had 147 controls out over the 3 days and a total of 84 competitors took part. This is down from the SA Champs of two years ago which had over 100 competitors. Perhaps this is a symptom of the current economic situation?

The event centre concept used, as standard overseas, seems to be a real winner. We were both very sad not to be able to mingle with all of you at Oak Lane and by all accounts it was a very successful and enjoyable way to get the SA O community together over drinks and a braai. This is after all surely half the reason we do the sport.

Many thanks are due for putting on the event. Firstly of course thanks to all the competitors who came from all over, even overseas we are honoured to say, and who are the very reason we go to all this trouble. Then thanks to everyone who helped. Now this is a long list. From PenOC, thanks to Bernelle Verster and Margaret Archibald for loads of behind the scenes organisation including start lists, event centre, loo, trailer for all the PenOC stuff etc etc etc. We can guarantee that it is a long list. Thanks to Carol Scrooby for making the lovely note holders and also to her, Helen Kleyhnans, Margaret Archibald and Bernelle Verster for packing the registration packs. Then to helpers on the day: starts by Neville Stocks and Jean-Louis, finish by Tim Berwyn-Taylor, Ruedi and Bruce Meier. Emit which was very ably run by Bruce Meier especially under pressure when things were not going as smoothly as we would have liked and also for preparing the results so efficiently. Thanks also to Ricky Raine and Neville Stocks for helping out with the relay area (we were either very clueless or else just plain exhausted by then), then to everyone else who collected controls on the various days (Ruedi, Ake, Mike Hall, Brett Robinson, Mike Sands, Zig, Benjamin van Wyk and Tim Berwyn-Taylor). Thankfully all these volunteers are good at picking up the ball and running with it, without you SA Champs would not have been the success it was and your help was sincerely appreciated.

A grateful thanks also to MTO for allowing us to once again run in their superb orienteering forests and to Oak Lane for hosting us as the event centre. Then thanks to the National Lottery Fund and the SAOF for funding the map, without the funding it would be infinitely more difficult to get new maps drawn.