

Grampian Mountain Challenge 2016 – Organiser's Report

Firstly, many thanks to everyone who came along, either as a competitor or to help.

Taking over as Organiser, following Sean's excellent run of three fantastic events, was somewhat daunting. Especially as I knew that regardless of how well planned and organised the event might be, the Scottish November weather makes it own decisions. Still, we had an experienced Planner and Controller in place, in Ian Searle & Ian Hamilton, and other experience available to draw on.

Starting a year and a half before the event date, I couldn't see any problems getting permission for a suitable area in time. Decision making can be a slow process within Estate Management. So it was, six months later, now investigating the third possible area, I finally got a provisional Yes from Dinnet & Kinord Estate. The Morven / Mona Gowan had some great things going for it: a varied selection of excellent orienteering areas to the south and east; a great potential event centre at Dinnet; several small glens to the north which are hardly ever visited which could do as the mid camp.

On the volunteer side, things had started more positively. I had Mike Winn and Donnie Mann (along with Sean again) happy to help once more with the Scout marquees, tables, benches etc.. Dave and Alan, the Catering team from previous years were also happy to keep the potential dates free. Rachel Scott agreed to do the IT stuff, and we had Helen Rowlands and Iain Barraclough on board too for whatever was required.

There were some challenges with using the Morven area. Three estates, plus a small privately owned area come together in that hill region, meaning I needed to seek permission from them all. I would also need permission from the Forestry Commission if Campus O May was to be used, and from SNH, as the route back to Dinnet would be through the Muir of Dinnet NNR. Finally, we would need agreement from Mar Orienteering Club, as we would be using their mapped areas.

A day spend exploring the northern and north-eastern sides of the area unearthed a small selection of possible mid camps, none absolutely perfect. This area was part of Candacraig Estate and they were very enthusiastic about the event. They gave me the details of the farmer who rented the field at the end of the Glen Conrie – a bit slopy, but my preferred area, with a good parking / turning area. Farmer John Anderson was more than happy for his field to be used as the mid camp, and I started to breath a sign of relief – things finally started to be coming together.

As the winter of 2015/16 progressed, things slowly developed. Tillypronie estate agreed to their sector of the hill area (the north east area) being used. FCS and SNH agreed too, with a few provisos. I had a bit of trouble contacting Dinnet Hall, but finally managed, and made the booking (I thought).

By Easter, we went public on the event, and opened entries via SI. At this stage, we identified that there might be a possibility that some of the orienteering areas might be embargoed due to the British Champs in 2018. Due to this, we could potentially loose some of our recently signed up competitors. Luckily, the area chosen was just to the south of the Dee, at Inchmarnoch.

As summer came, the planning started in earnest, and Ian & Ian got cracking out on the hill. I managed to get out with my son and spent a pleasant day and a half spotting their tags, and enjoyed a high camp on the side of Morven. Finally I could send the completed routes to the Estates. They again were very supportive, with the Dinnet & Kinord Estate Factor also allowing us parking for the event if needed in front of their office in Dinnet. We also approached the Sporting Tenant on Dinnet & Kinord Estate, and they were equally supportive, allowing us to take a land rover onto the hill tracks to be used by the Hill Marshalls.

Through the Autumn, the e-mails flew around amongst the team. We even managed a team meeting – in a pub. Minor final problems such as getting enough potable water to the area, and the fact that Dinnet Hall didn't have our booking after all, were overcome.

And so on the evening of 11-11-16, I found myself in the wind, rain and dark, with the start of the snow line just 100 feet above, holding onto a flapping marquee. Luckily Mike, Donnie & Graham had a much better idea than I did about pitching such things, and soon the two main tents for the mid camp were up, and the tables, benches, lighting, generator etc. all stored inside. One small marquee still had to go up. With my new knowledge, there would be no problem in getting that up on the Saturday, while the other three were off being Hill Marshalls – or would there? It still proved a (Grampian Mountain) challenge for the team involved.

From an Organiser's point of view, the weekend itself went great, and everyone did brilliantly to make it all work. I include all the competitors in that statement too – all the enthusiasm, smiles, thanks, and positive comments have been very encouraging. The banter, craic & blether in the marquees on Saturday evening was excellent.

The Catering team once again did a fantastic job. We had food and hot drinks virtually on demand at practically all times. They were last to bed and first up. They got packed up after Sunday breakfast and away to Dinnet to set up the barbecue in time for the earliest competitors coming in.

So to finish off, on behalf of Grampian Orienteers, I'd like to thank the following:

The Factors & Owners of Candecraig, Dinnet & Kinord, and Tillypronie Estates.

The Sporting Tenants on Dinnet & Kinord Estate.

Mr John Anderson.

FCS & SNH.

Tisos – for providing voucher prizes.

Mar Orienteering Club.

Aberdeen Scouts.

Maryculter Scouts.

Dave, Alan & Ross – The Catering Team.

Mike, Donnie & Graham – The Heavy Kit Team.

Mid Deeside Community Trust.

The Dinnet Hall committee.

Brandon Hire & Heilan Loos.

Most importantly – all the competitors!

And personally, I'd also like to thank Ian S, Ian H, Rachel, Helen, Sam, Tim & Josie G, Iain B, Tim, Ali, Kate, Sean, and all the competitors who also became helpers at some point during the weekend. A final thanks to my wife Liz for putting up with my 'project' over the last 18 months, acting as event Base Contact, and managing to come up with a GMC Prize Cup (in chocolate).

Dave Kirk

GMC 2016 Organiser