

## Walton Chasers Orienteering Club: Cannock Chase

As part of the Forestry Commission England and Sport England 'Active Forest' programme evaluation a meeting was set up with members of the Walton Chasers Orienteering Club at Cannock Chase Forest. The researcher joined the club at one of its weekly running sessions and afterwards at the social event in a local pub. The researcher was able to talk to 14 members (10 men and 4 women) of the club ranging from 13 to 80 years of age.



### Motivations

Motivations to participate in orienteering were to undertake a challenge, test the ability to navigate and concentrate, be competitive and due to a love of maps. Participants started orienteering via school, university, because of parents and in order to improve navigation skills.

### Benefits – challenge, camaraderie and transferable skills

Benefits included the physical and mental challenges associated with orienteering; it was seen as de-stressing and as a sport for all ages. The skills developed while undertaking orienteering were felt to be transferable life skills including problem solving and teaching self-reliance and this could lead to greater confidence. It was also viewed as quite a technical sport with a good variety of options in terms of physically long or short runs combined with technically difficult or easier routes. There are also newer options such as urban orienteering and mountain bike orienteering. The variety allows opportunities for progression as well as for reducing difficulty if needed when members get older.

#### Benefits of orienteering

*'It's challenging every time, it is not something that is repeated; the challenge is to do something different every time'.*

*'I like the physical and mental challenge' 'It's fantastic for mental work and you have to concentrate for long periods of time'.*

*'One of the guys daughters came along to a training evening years ago and did a blood pressure test on us before we went out and when we came back, and it dropped for everyone'.*

#### Social connections

*'We have just made friends up and down the country... when I moved job [from one part of the country to another] I started work on the Monday and on the Tuesday went to this club and straight away I had a group of friends'.*

*'It's a family sport you can all have a go, it's not just watching dad or mum run'.*

*'Orienteering is a great family sport, my children got involved from the age of 8. My son is now 50 and still does it and my daughter and their children do it as well'.*

**Club challenges**

*'The club is totally volunteers, the age profile is getting older, we have a really good junior section but lose some teenagers going off to university.'*

*'Unless orienteering is very local you have to travel and that is where it gets pricey and difficult, you have to get the parents involved [for youth participation]'*

*'The biggest challenge is juniors and getting them involved, schools is probably the best route but you need enthusiastic teachers.'*

*'We have been running on the Chase for 50 years but we've never had so much difficulty of getting permission to carry on'. It seems that every now and then we have a new regime and we have to start again and convince people we are not going to destroy the ecosystem.'*

**Volunteers run the club**

The club is run by volunteers all of whom take on different roles and play a very important part in the continuation of the club. Having a core pool of volunteers was seen as essential, with three major roles needed for events the club organises – planner, organiser, controller – and a team of people to help these individuals. It is a sport where a high proportion of people are competing in events and where the majority of participants volunteer to help out with activities such as putting out and gathering in controls, creating maps, timing, car parking etc. This means being involved takes time and you need to travel to compete. Members of the club have in recent times been to Scandinavia, Wales, Scotland as well as taking part in urban orienteering in Venice, Porto, Paris and Brussels. However, there are a number of challenges the club faces as outlined above.

**Activity in the forest environment**

Running in the forest provides variety and varying terrain, and orienteering can take members to parts of the Chase they have not been to before. Participants have seen a variety of wildlife in the various forests they have run in, including snakes, capercaillie, and wild boar.

*'The wonderful thing about the chase is... it's such a great place we really appreciate it'*

*'I went down a path to a lake and mist was coming off the lake and I thought I've never been here'*

*I like being out in the woods you get amazing wildlife, you get birds, deer.'*

Orienteering was felt to be accessible for a very wide age range with official orienteering age classes running from 10 to 90 years of age.

Members were passionate about the sport; some had been in the club for decades (the club president has been a member for 45 years) and were very keen to get more juniors involved to ensure long term continuation.

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**Website:** <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/BEEH-A3HMKM> and to find out more about Walton Chasers go to <http://www.walton-chasers.co.uk/>