

## Portuguese Orienteering Meeting 2015

Adele and I had had this event in the diary for some time, having sorted out accommodation and entry at the back end of last year. The only other Kerno member present was Chris Moncaster and his wife Rosie (not running), taking advantages of Chris' recent retirement freedom, although we were joined by a very strong Brit contingent of over 180.

Our previous experiences of foreign orienteering had both been in France, and these had been excellent. What attracted us about POM 2015 was that it was on forested sand dunes (imagine Hayle Towans covered in trees!) in western Portugal, and was a World Ranking Event and therefore attracted a very strong field with the majority of the 2,300 runners from Scandinavia – this was going to be a true test.

The event format was a Model event in the forests on the Thursday and Friday to allow competitors to get used to the terrain, then a Sprint Relay on the Friday around Mira, followed by Long, Middle, Long, Long distance events Saturday through Tuesday, including a Night Sprint on the Sunday evening, which we didn't do as the weather was atrocious!

Due to my usual work travel restrictions, I didn't get back into UK from South Africa until the Thursday morning preceding the event, so Adele drove up from Cornwall, picked me up and we got the early Easyjet



flight to Portugal on the Friday morning into Lisbon which unfortunately meant we missed the Sprint Relay. However, we managed to get to the Event Centre in Mira to pick up our bibs and get a map to check out the forest – wow! – long linear dunes, mapped on a 2.5m contour with generally fast runnability – what was not to like? The downside of this terrain was that it was going to be fast and errors would send you plummeting down the race order.

We took turns to navigate to the various model controls, then headed off to our B&B near Vagos just to the north. A quick freshen up was followed by a short drive to Aveiro for dinner – a really pretty town, built on canals, and yes, they do call it the Venice of Portugal!

Next day (Saturday) we were up early, breakfast (mostly bread, cheese and ham – where was the porridge!) with the other orienteers staying in the B&B (two Swiss couples) and off to the event in the forests around Mira.

Parking was a little haphazard, ie park where you liked along a road through the forest, but this did mean that our 800m walk to the Start ended up being 2.8km. Still, the real beauty of this sport is that you can turn up at an event anywhere in the world and it all looks familiar, 4 minute call up, control descriptions with 2 minutes to go, maps in boxes by age class, go on the beep. Best of all is that a map is a map wherever you are, and in the case of POM 2015, these were superb – the fine contour detail really brought the map to life. To hear Adele even say she could "see" the map was music to my ears.

The Portuguese style was very laid back, friendly and all seemed to work. Race commentary was in English, drinks were given out at the end and there were the usual Traders (including Ultrasport from UK) as well as a large food marquee present every day.

The format for each day was similar, with Day 2 being a Middle distance which proved to be very fast! However, the forests of Mira (days 1 & 2) were very different to the Vagos forests (days 3 & 4) in that the regular lines of dunes at Mira were replaced by a much more subtle landscape with more vegetation. Not surprisingly, most people made more errors on the Vagos runs, but consistency was the key.



One of the memorable things about the event was being able to literally run with the World's best – the speed some of the Elite runners came down the run in after more than 20km in the forest was staggering! Mind you, they are a bit younger than me.....

So how did we do? Well, both of us had set targets of trying to get into the top half as these were the strongest fields we had ever run in. The good news is that we did, and I even managed the top third! Needless to say, the best in my class (M50) were still about 20 minutes ahead on the Long distances and 10+ on the Middle distance. I was really pleased because I avoided major errors throughout the event, just suffered from the usual dithering near controls – there is hope for me yet!

Phil struggling up the very sandy run in, Middle distance race

However, in terms of position, Chris was definitely the star with two top ten finishes in a very competitive class.

|         |          | Phil   | Adele | Chris |
|---------|----------|--------|-------|-------|
| Day 1   | Distance | 9.1km  | 5.5km | 6.8km |
|         | Climb    | 155m   | 130m  | 140m  |
|         | Time     | 75.47  | 64.14 | 58.27 |
|         | Position | 42/92  | 30/61 | 19/83 |
| Day 2   | Distance | 5.2km  | 3.6km | 4.5km |
|         | Climb    | 95m    | 65m   | 80m   |
|         | Time     | 40.59  | 37.58 | 40.16 |
|         | Position | 33/99  | 25/61 | 32/85 |
| Day 3   | Distance | 9.2km  | 5.6km | 7.4km |
|         | Climb    | 105m   | 65m   | 80m   |
|         | Time     | 77.16  | 70.07 | 57.35 |
|         | Position | 40/91  | 32/60 | 7/83  |
| Day 4   | Distance | 8.2km  | 5.2km | 7.0km |
|         | Climb    | 145m   | 90m   | 125m  |
|         | Time     | 81.44  | 65.10 | 64.36 |
|         | Position | 40/89  | 27/58 | 10/83 |
| Overall |          | 37/101 | 29/62 | 12/84 |

Apart from the orienteering, we managed to do some bird watching with the highlight being seeing a pair of Ospreys and a flock of Flamingos which were apparently just “passing through”. On a cultural note, we visited the main museum in Coimbra within the World Heritage listed University which has a Roman Forum preserved in the basement – absolutely amazing! The rest of the museum was also superb with incredible sculptures from Roman to present and the remarkable Terracotta Apostles.

In summary, would we go again – absolutely! Next year is in the mountains to the east, so we shall see.

If anyone is interested, the organisers produced a daily video which can be viewed at:  
[http://www.pom.pt/en/pom\\_2015.141/videos.167/day\\_4\\_-\\_pom\\_2015\\_long\\_distance\\_chasing\\_start.a315.html](http://www.pom.pt/en/pom_2015.141/videos.167/day_4_-_pom_2015_long_distance_chasing_start.a315.html)

Better get some sleep now as I'm at 35,000 feet on my way to Kazakhstan, hopefully just back in time on Friday to drive up to the British Night Champs on Saturday, but that will be another story....

Phil Newall