

Portugal Part Two

Following my first truly international orienteering event at the 4 day Portugal O Meet held in the superb Mira and Vagos sand dune systems I was really looking forward to the 2 day 3 race event up in the mountains of North East Portugal close to Spain. I was not disappointed. The organisation and friendliness of the organising club Clube de Orientacao de Minho was outstanding as were the maps. Despite the complexity of the terrain and vegetation they were clear and representative of conditions underfoot. The event itself was held over a weekend, and as a World Ranking Event it attracted many top class orienteers from around the world. Scandinavians and locals dominated the 650 strong start list with nations as far as Canada, Russia and Bulgaria also being represented.

Despite being high up in the mountains in February we were lucky with the weather conditions. Rosie and I arrived in the area on the Wednesday and went to a local area tourist office where the organisers had left us maps of 3 training areas. In each, controls had been placed out to allow for familiarisation with the terrain and maps. I spent the Thursday and Friday making full use of these, quickly realising that the actual competitive events would be very physical indeed.



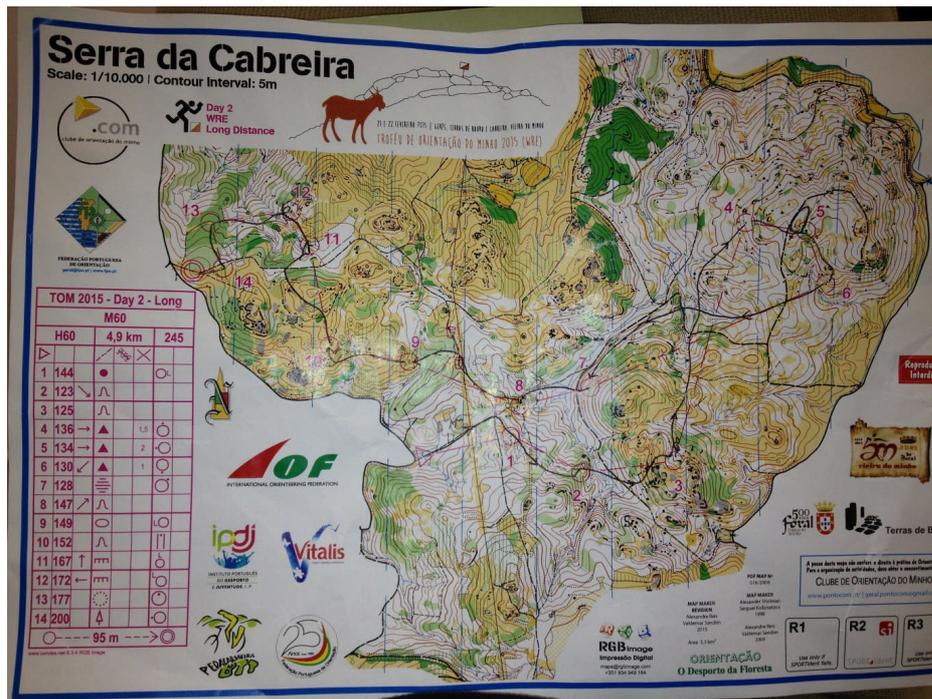
The terrain typically was very steep granite covered mountain sides. Many control sites were placed beside boulders or crag foots. In between the exposed rock would be found very short but sharp gorse. To make matters even more demanding was the absence of a path network. Over this I found the quickest way between

controls was to go where possible in a straight line sticking to the exposed rock. Progress was going to be slow for everybody and straight climbs and descents rather than longer contouring seemed to make more sense.

The first competitive event on the Saturday was a medium distance race which seemed initially ridiculously short – 2.7km, 120 m of climb and 13 controls on a 10,000 map for my M60 race against 25 other runners. From a timed start it was straight into a complex ravine followed by a series of climbs up the mountain side to controls that all required micro navigating to. All went exceeding well until perhaps the easiest control of the course, a mere 100m of contouring around to a rock pinnacle. Unfortunately I decided to go over rather than around an intervening spur gaining far too much height and losing contact with the map in the process. This one control cost me 5 minutes and

probably as many places – most of my times on the previous and subsequent legs were the fastest on the course. Some excellent planning allowed the 2nd half of the course to be run on flatter, less rocky and mainly vegetation free terrain . Despite the short course the winner’s time was 30.15. I finished 6th at 37.13.

Later on in the day the sprint was held in the small mountain town of Geres. With over 70 runners in a very broad Male Veteran II class it was going to be very competitive. As usual haste overcame speed and midway around I failed to punch the first of 2 controls situated at either end of a tennis court as did 25 other runners! Taking into account extra time needed to have punched correctly I could of finished 7th on this event just behind James Crawford of Guildford.



The area for Sunday’s event was similar in many respects to the Forest of Dean. Steep, runnable with lots of vegetation changes and rock detail. With more focus on this day I finished the 4.9km 250m course 3rd with a time of 1.03.43 4 minutes behind the winner from Switzerland. This placed me 6th

overall with 1721 points for the 2 WRE distance events compared with the winner’s 1910.

Like Phil and Adele, I will be back next year. The total cost for entry to the 3 races and the 3 training maps was 33 euro – outstanding value for some outstanding orienteering. The cost of getting to Portugal via EasyJet was £75, car hire 20 euro a day and hotels on a BB basis ranged from 30 to 60 euro a day . Evening meals averaged about 10 euro . The only negative experience was getting fined 55 euro for going through the wrong lane at a motorway toll gate. My top tip is to but a decent road map of Portugal before you leave the UK – we couldn’t get hold of one in the country and as a consequence there was quite a lot of blue air generated inside the car arguing with the wayward satnav.

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