

Orienteering Victoria Strategy Day 2017

25th February

In Summary

Strategy Day 2017 Focus: Bush Orienteering and the Victorian State Series

In Victoria a lot of time and effort has been spent on introductory series such as MelBushO, and innovations like Sprint into Spring. Meanwhile our State series and some other bush events have at best held their own. So the focus of the day was on bush orienteering and the State Series, how we see it today and 'Where to from here'.

These notes are intended to record views and suggestions from the strategy day but not to imply consensus or agreement or decisions on any particular items. Further consultation is needed.

How is Bush Orienteering viewed today?

This section was run as a brainstorming session, divided up into what is viewed as good, and then not so good.

The Good

The areas considered to be good basically fitted into three categories:

The events

Commentary was mainly focused on the items that go to making an event a good social occasion. This includes the involvement of the clubs; with a club teaming together to organise the day, and then on the day, all the clubs getting their members together in club tents making the whole day a social activity.

The cake stall had a special mention with the selling of home-made cakes for various orienteering fund raising activities, meeting competitor's taste buds as well as making it easy to contribute to the fund raising.

The use of technology at events, with Sport Ident, with its splits print out plus near real time results on the screen at the venue, has aided the social aspect with competitors' comparing times and checking on their position within the race.

To a number of people attending State Series means being out in the bush, and gaining some serious bush orienteering time. Also it has a completely different feel about it to events closer in – which appeals on the emotional level.

The maps / courses

The comments here focused on the quality of the events, with well-planned courses, maps of good quality being used, and a variety of terrain being experienced across the series. It was commented on that each event is like a new adventure with a different area and map.

State series events usually have experienced Planners and Advisors who know how to set courses creatively that provide competitors with a positive challenge. This has also been enhanced in recent years with Sport Ident, enabling courses to be set on smaller areas.

Competitors

Bush orienteering, including all of Victoria's bush series, is multi-generational and caters for multiple needs.

It provides both a physical + mental challenge that promotes healthy living (Brain + Body).

Within our series we have the flexibility that enables parents to aid their younger children around courses, and then compete against them when they get older – creating a positive twist to the parent / child relationship.

The not so good

The events

We keep putting barriers in the way of people coming to State Series events, e.g. pre-entry and Eventor.

It is perceived that the price differential between pre-entry & late fee are barriers to people coming along on the day. The contrast between State Series EOD fees of \$30 vs Bendigo/MelBushO/SIS EOD fees of \$10 was highlighted. Are there other ways to manage map numbers that do not discourage competitors from making on-the-day decision to come along to an event?

The pre-entry to an event often closing on the Tuesday night prior to an event is not viewed highly. The OV newsletter was moved from a Wednesday distribution to a Tuesday to provide a reminder to competitors that they only had a day (or two) left to enter. Some clubs have taken that to mean entries should close on the Tuesday which is too early.

State Series name and web site messaging

The name 'State Series' is seen as a barrier to getting newer Orienteers to attend as it implies that the series is aimed at a higher level of capability than what they have currently achieved. It is viewed that the name needs to be changed to one that is more encompassing.

In the same vein the current State Series messaging on the OV web site is off putting as it says 'State Series are at a higher level'. This needs to be altered.

The maps

There was wide agreement that the diversity of maps been used within the State Series has been shrinking and the series "keeps on using ALL the same maps – not much new". There are a lot of maps that clubs have stopped using for seemingly no particular reason and have stopped updating. What can be done to widen the pool of maps being used again and provide more diversity in terrain type?

As part of the above discussion, it was also commented that the map type and location should be taken into consideration when planning the event calendar. For instance do people really want to run on Sailors Falls in July when the weather is at its worst?

IOF mapping restrictions (use of 1:7500 not endorsed) and the fact that AUS is not prepared to buck them is considered a negative, and it is thought that AUS, or at least VIC should follow the path that has been followed by some other countries and map to suit terrain (NZ, SWE, Slovenia). This will provide a much more positive competitor experience. (Too much following rules rather than common sense decisions)

The courses

Both verbal and written input into the Strategy Day discussion was received prior to the event, and a view provided by multiple participants was that the "States Series is hardly a series, but a group of individual events". The "Series" seriously needs to be reviewed so that it is considered a series and has a common meaningful competitive thread such as a points system based on age class (The current points system is treated with disdain).

Variable course quality was considered to be large issue at events in recent years. This includes course planners focusing on the Elite courses and then designing the other courses as an after-thought. All courses need to be considered as a package. The use of bearing type legs, especially very long legs without much thought for the terrain and participant type was considered inappropriate

and another example of dubious course setting technique. This is of particular concern for the not so experienced participant as it can easily put people off the sport.

Difference between moderate and hard courses is too large a step, particularly the jump between M/W14 – M/W16. A more staged approach needs to be considered.

Ideas for ‘Where to from here’

Rename State Series

As outlined earlier the State Series name is seen as a barrier to getting newer Orienteers to attend as it implies that the series is aimed at a higher level of capability than what they have currently achieved.

Feedback received prior to the meeting, from some of our younger members, indicates that the name has passed its use-by-date and is viewed as old fashioned and not very inspiring.

As part of this discussion it was raised that it is important to keep the naming of all the OV series simple. Do not have two names for the same type of event, such as currently is the case with MelBushO and VicBushO. VicBushO should be rolled under the MelBushO name as it is part of the same series and if the name VicBushO is to be used then it needs to be a separate stand-alone series of a different nature. It was also noted that this is extremely important from a marketing and advertising perspective.

Tighten up event competition window

Change start window to 10:30am – 12:30pm with 2pm close. Specify the actual time and most importantly keep it consistent and predictable event to event. This was agreed to be a decision.

Welcome group entries

Allow people to enter all courses as pairs or groups as well as individually. Actively advertise this during the MelBushO season. MelBushO has a high number of family participants/groups who only come to MelBushO and do not currently try any other Orienteering format.

Encourage inexperienced navigators looking for a longer run

Introduce a score course option and make it clear that groups are particularly welcome to enter. This could simply use an All Controls map and have a time limit of say 2 hours (10.30 – 12.30). If all controls were worth the same score, as in summer MTBO, this need not cause any additional work for organisers. Advertise this new option to the Victorian Rogaining community as a training/recreational event.

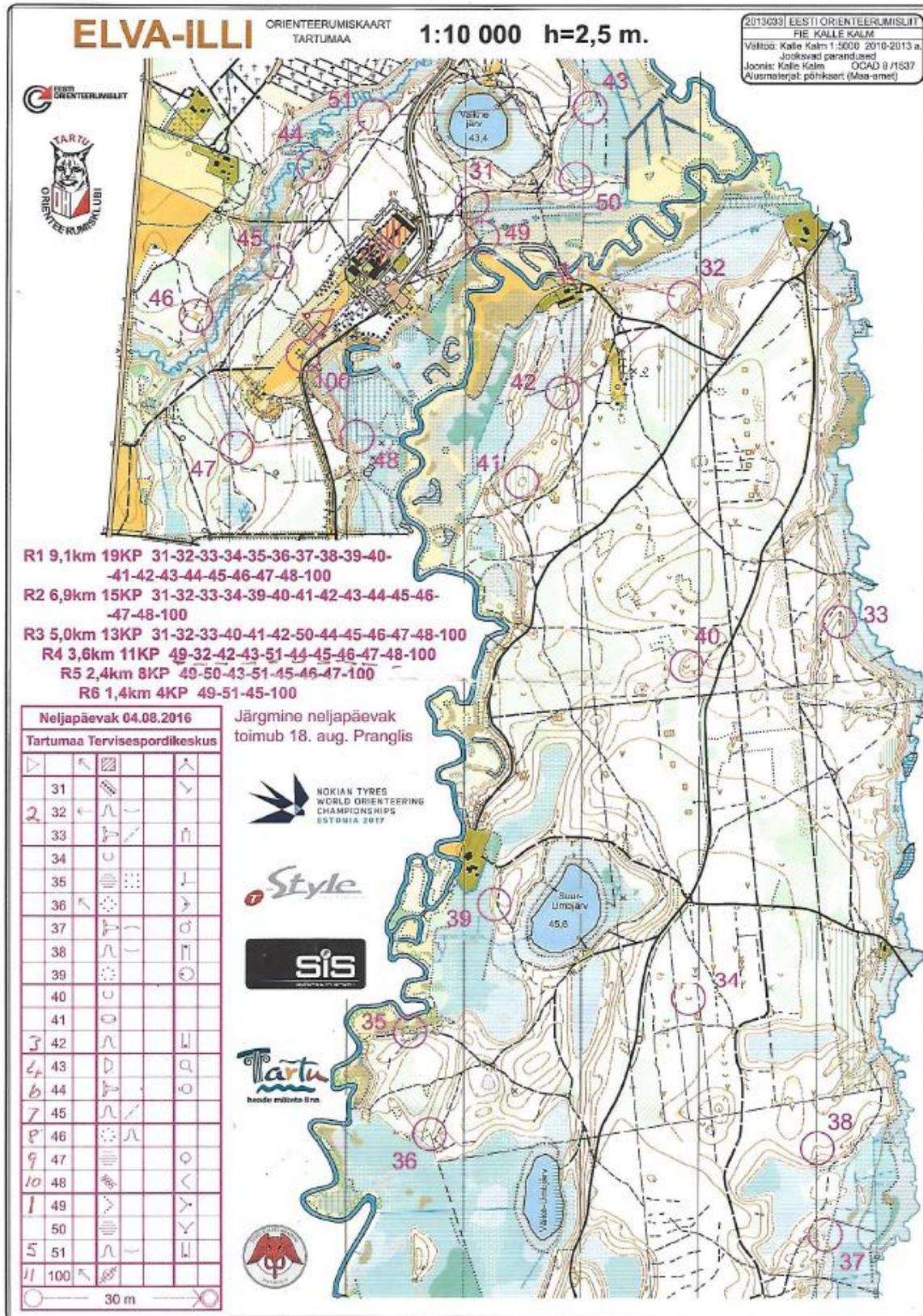
On-the-day competitors’ maps

Remove the price differential between pre-entry and on-the-day entry. Map printing uncertainty could be reduced by providing all on-the-day entrants with an all controls map which has the controls for each course listed on the map (or separately). This could be the same All Controls map as used for the score event. Each competitor would then join the relevant controls by lines to ‘draw their own course’. All that is needed is to provide some space near the start with some pens and a few rulers, maybe a small table as well, so people could draw lines between the circles for their course. “Joining the dots” could be done in race time.

If competitors do not like this format, then they have the option to plan ahead and pre enter for a map tailored to their course.

A map from a club event in Estonia was shown an example. This was a Wednesday after-work event attended by about 200 orienteers from all over Southern Estonia (see next page).

Map for an EOD orienteering event in Estonia. Organisers printed 250 identical maps. Competitors used red biro's and rulers to draw in the leg lines for their chosen course.



Consistency and Predictability of events

There was much discussion on how important it is to provide consistency and predictability across all OV series and within each series. This relates both to attracting new active competitors and retaining

existing ones. This was well summarised in Matt Schepisi's submission to Strategy Day as outlined below:

Segment of Matt Schepisi's Strategy Day submission

Consistency, event-to-event, year-to-year

When it comes to discussions about how to "revamp" an event or a series in orienteering, the suggestions of doing new/exciting/different formats for events always comes up. My advice is to approach this angle of "refresh" with a good dose of caution. There is a lot to be said about the strength a consistent experience brings to a sport. I address this on two fronts:

Event-to-event consistency

Different state series events get organised by different clubs. Absolutely nothing wrong with that. This 'everyone giving back' to the sport is part of what makes orienteering so great. The downside comes when the experience as a competitor varies wildly from event to event despite them being billed as being part of the same "series". If you are running a classic state series event then some things should really not differ from event to event. Examples of these include: cost to enter, entry procedure, starting layout/procedure, download procedure, quality of map. Ensuring consistency in these types of key areas is even more important to newcomers. If they attended one event and were exposed to one way of doing things they should be able to come to a second event and everything should work the same way. It should be familiar to them. Consistency here is also highly important when it comes to safety and knowing who is out in the forest. If your starting procedure isn't consistent you could end up missing competitors (or having random extra ones) in your check controls which puts doubts into who exactly is / is not still out there. In the years before I moved away, there was much improvement in this space (particularly entries) so this may no longer be a problem. But if there are suggestions on how certain things could still be improved then I see there being benefit in discussing them.

Year-to-Year consistency

If you are going to have/add a couple of different formats to events in the series across the year (a relay round would be a great addition) then there is nothing wrong with that (though personally I think the majority of the events should still be traditional classic orienteering for this series, it is the state level showcase of our sport). However what should be consistent is that if you are going to run some different formats (let us say 5 classics, a middle and a relay) then you should run the same formats every year and in the same order (and yes, even near enough to the same dates) every year. Now I'm not saying that things should never ever change, especially if something is not liked or not working. But this year-to-year consistency allows people to know what to expect from the series and makes it easier for them to plan their attendance. Looking at the XCR for example, they always open and close the season with relays and Jells Park and the Tan. Take our own NOL, always opens with eureka challenge (ok not so much anymore, but still the labour day weekend) and finishes with the national relays on that last Sunday. Not only does this help attendees plan well in advance but organisers and planners (sorry, course setters) too! When you are not spending time on deciding whether you should run a middle or a classic you can spend more time organising a better one of either. This year-to-year consistency is even more important, and drives more success with our non-series standalone events (but I mention that below). Orienteers are often quick to judge a series of events of the same format as being dull or uninteresting, but they forget that every race, even in the same format is completely different from any other race you run (even on the same map!). That is the beauty of our sport and the reason we keep coming back. But this is sometimes forgotten amongst the never ending list of possible new formats. Consistent spacing between events is something else that should be attempted. Regularly spaced events helps to maintain motivation and momentum between events helping to keep people coming back. Have long periods of downtime between events and people's interest can wane.

We could develop more detailed organisers' guidelines, e.g. like those for Sprint into Spring, to improve consistency between events. Don't be so flexible that we make it hard for ourselves and for competitors having to understand different approaches at every event.

Review Saturday event structure

This year the Bendigo club have flagged difficulty in obtaining planners for their entire event schedule and have opened it up to event planners from other clubs. A proposal was put forward to alter Bendigo bush to Saturday bush with maybe 1 event out of every 4 being on the Bendigo side of Ballarat, and utilise some of the Ballarat maps that have not been used in a while.

It was thought that:

- the name change may generate more openness for people from clubs other than Bendigo to set courses.
- this format could generate more interest in Ballarat and possibly act as a forerunner to a Ballarat based series
- reduce Bendigo club's course planner workload
- provide courses still reasonably close to Bendigo for local orienteers to attend

Event Scheduling

That challenging high quality bush events be run throughout the year although local series such as MelBushO be more prominent early in the year. The range, nature, quality and scheduling of these events should provide events that appeal to regular orienteers and events that entice newcomers.

Reformat season

As part of the planning for the 2018 Bush season, format the season so there is build up for both the Easter and AUS champs with a serious Bush competition. This could include Bendigo Saturday events as well as Sunday events. MelBushO does not constitute part of this build up as it is solely a series designed for newcomers with a simple level of orienteering. Have key markers during the year so that competitors can plan in advance and know when to expect key events. (See Matt Schepisi's submission above)

Inter-leave MelBushO with some show case events at start of the year.

Arenas and Car Parking

Orienteering has to focus not just on what the current competitors are happy with, but look at what will help attract new participants. Creating a club atmosphere and a meeting hub at events has never been more important. "Bring back the finish chute into the arena" and provide guidelines to clubs on how they can create an arena / activity hub at events.

Don't make parking such a big deal – parking along road attracts people to set up at the arena rather than go back to car. (Note: Oceania and WMOC 2017 provided good examples of this).

Sub-Competitions

We need to look at how we can attract younger members (e.g. 13 – 30 year olds) along to the State series. Sub competitions such as the Southern Cross series or city vs country, common leg competitions, jerseys similar to Sprint into Spring – finish chute leg competitions should all be considered including bringing someone on board to post the results and advertise these competitions.

Margi Freemantle
Vice President
Orienteering Victoria