Report on the MTBnav Metro – Sunday 25th Oct 2011

This event covered the Hobart eastern suburbs and took in Government Hills, the Meehan Range and the northern tip of Rokeby Hills. The Lindisfarne Scout Hall on Ford Pde was the Hash House – it is a long way NW of the centre of the map but is a great venue. It could work well in rain as maybe 200 could squeeze in for cakes and briefings.

Team

Darryl Smith and Mark Hey gave direction to first-time course-setter Jeff Dunn. Darryl also did the vetting, enlisting Adam Potito and Grant Dixon to help with that and control setting and collecting. Adam also organised the hash house. Martin Bicevskis set up the control boxes and chains, and handled all equipment and computers, software and the whole scoring system. Mark Hey did all mapping. Jeff set the course in Condes, prepared a spreadsheet of control locations, and had overall coordination on the day. Sally Salier and Jeff also placed and collected controls, and Richard Walker placed controls. Gayle West organised excellent refreshments, assisted on the day by Kim Nankervis and Zoe and Anna Dowling. Ross Kelly did his best to balance the books, and John Dawson kept on the ball with RT communications. It would have helped if there were a couple of extra helpers at the start and particularly at the end when all are finishing simultaneously, and there is great pressure to answer questions as well as get the results correct and distribute prizes in a short time period.

Promotion

Adam Potito, sponsored by and in conjunction with Adrian van Loon from RideBellerive, produced a flyer and poster for the two events. These were distributed statewide to bike shops, advertising went out on OT, RT and several bike group e-bulletins and websites, and cars were leafleted at Winter Challenge and a major MTB race.

Entries

Entries were via EntryHub. We had queries about cost of young children (a family with 3 under 5 – all free), primary age kids (I made up some rules about kids with parents, - free), and discounts for college students. It would be helpful to have some guidelines here, if they do not exist.

EntryHub had 2 glitches: it shutdown entries when the early-bird period expired, and afterwards did not apply the late fee (I think). Bernard corrected the first problem remotely from the outback, and if I had paid more attention during setting up it might not have happened.

We had 42 teams, 105 entrants, 3 kids, 3 withdrawals.

Payments

I brought a float of 30 $10 notes to refund online payments of SI stick deposits. With entries open until noon Saturday there were likely to be some late payments which could not be verified, and some cash and cheque on-the-day payments had been arranged. (As it was, 40/42 entries were before the Wed midnight early cutoff.) I did not record deposit returns – it was simply $10 if you give

me an SI stick. I recorded a couple of payments on the score cards but didn't have a system and lost track. Ross did well to sort it out and as of 8 days later a bank transfer is still outstanding.

Controls

- Flags: being MTBO, where all controls should be on or very near tracks, navigation becomes an easier one dimensional problem. Also the urban setting increases the risk of theft – a control in a very public location was stolen last year (v soon after end of event, and with a fair bit of effort involved in the theft.) It seemed reasonable to only use flags in settings where a rider who was alert and keeping reasonable map contact might ride past the control, but not such that a rider could just get on the right fire trail, switch off their brain and ride until a flag hanging in front woke them up. I conveyed this philosophy to the control setters, obviously in a vague way as it widely interpreted. I got a fair bit of stick for controls which were never found or only found after pace counting tracks twice! Some said the "no flag" experiment should be buried. I think it could be ok if we had a rule that the control should be between .5 and 1.5m off the ground and facing the track, and if it needs to be on the ground or not immediately adjacent the track then a note on the map should indicate this.   Having flags and controls very visible is good for competitors but does increase the security risk from potentially malevolent passers-by, as per last year. If there are to be no flags next year then it may be useful to have VERY specific clue sheets. eg hanging from lowest branch of gum tree closest to fence corner; on the ground around the base of electricity pole on west side of street. Good communication between course setter and control distributor is important.
- Number of controls: I intended initially to keep the number of controls down, but when we switched to the 2 SI stick idea I added some. I felt the controls were still very sparse for walkers, although heard no complaints.
- Selecting locations: I had a phase of getting to know the whole area, deciding the event domain, and selecting rough control locations. If I had been more decisive and experienced I would have decided exact locations and probably taped many during the "rough location" phase. That would have made less work for me and also avoided a couple of misplaced controls.
- Keys: we had two sets of locks and keys. One of the keys did not matches it's set of locks on the morning, so check this beforehand. OT had 40 sets of chains, locks, and security wire loops. 20 more loops were ordered. Rather than buying more chains and locks, Martin used the chains and locks on the old school punches, with the actual punches and numbers blanked off. These had different locks and keys to the others, and the keys got mixed up. OT will be buying more chain and 20 more locks and keys identical to the previous 20. So this issue should not occur next time.

Manual punching

We used manual punch as backup, and two groups felt the need to use them (in one case they reckoned the control squeak sounded dodgy so they didn't trust it.) The numbers of the punched controls were not recorded or on the control cards and I thought they could be identified from the

patterns, but we had 4 controls with the same pattern!   In retrospect, it would have been possible on the day to interpolate a competitor's route on the map from the order of punching as downloaded from the dibber, and reduce the ambiguity of which missed punch was which, but we were a bit stressed out at the time to think of this. We know that we had no failed control boxes; some competitors may have interpreted a very weak beep in bright sunshine, or swiping rapidly liked a credit card rather than insert and wait as a failed response. The solutions would be better start briefing about dibbing, and also a punch card that has been hand lettered if necessary with boxes for all controls, or to ask competitors to carry a pencils to record which controls they hand punched on a generic card.

SI sticks

The event was run using Autodownload, a relatively new orienteering based software. This automatically calculates and adds the various points per control, and subtracts points for time penalties. This was easy to set up. Because of pre entry, cards were prepared for each team, in numerical order based on their unique Entry Hub number, with their loaner stick or sticks taped to them. This enabled sticks to be issued quickly when teams arrived.

The OT loaner SI5 SI sticks hold 30 controls with times recorded, and another six controls with no time. This is a potential problem with 45 controls that the elite teams may get. Orienteers with their own private SI9 sticks can hold up to 50 controls so they have no problems. The choice was to use 36 SI control boxes with the rest manual punching and have one SI stick per team. Or to have all SI controls and issue two sticks to 6 hour teams and ask for them to use the second stick only when the first was full, as shown by no beep or flash. The latter was chosen. All number one loaner sticks were Red and number two sticks yellow. Launceston and Hobart loaner sticks were used. Two separate notebooks with autodownload were set up, with all downloading the red SI stick on the first computer, and those using the red yellow downloading on the second computer.   There were 6 of the 23 in the six hour event who used the yellow second stick. The intention was to manually add the points from both computers for each team. Overall, the software performed very well, adding up the points and deducting penalties. In theory, the top finishers could have theoretically separately travelled and simultaneously recorded on both red and yellow sticks. It was intended to check for this, though unlikely. Time did not permit this to be done.

There were problems with the first two finishers, Kris Clauson and Justin Wooford. Kris finished early because of domestic commitments. There was a finish SI box under the finish banner, but neither dibbed in the finish box before downloading, thus recording a DNF! A DNF in a score event was a problem that Martin had not encountered before and it took a while to sort out just what had happended. Unfortunately this involved the top finsher in the 6 hour event, Justin Wooford. Because it took a while to figure out his score, his finish time was initially recorded as that of a later repeat download to check his result, which meant his finishing time was erroneously reported as being after that of John Whittington. At the presentation, John correctly said that Justin was first home.   Both won their class. It was not until later that day that the correct times were sorted out and posted on the web site results. Martin phoned Justin that evening and apologised for the mixup, which overshadowed Justin's magnificent effort. Justin didn't seem to mind.

Autodownload has relatively simple printout options. It was possible to print out the points and times in descending order of those in the three hour and those in the six hour event. It was also possible to print out the points order in each class. But it required manual transcription of the class result onto the teams score to enable the usual rogaining oral result to be provided, of all teams in ascending order.

Overall, the same system could be used next year. Only the 6 hour MTB teams would be likely to need two sticks, and not the 6 hour foot.

Categories & prizes

This is where the wheels fell off – my apologies to all affected. We previously debated whether to allocate prizes to all categories (potentially 48, hence at least 96 people, but actually only 19 had entries) or to only give prizes to event/gender/mode categories (12 categories, only 10 entered). After choosing the former it was too much for my fried brain to determine on the fly, so we just gave prizes in categories with 3 or more teams, (only 6 categories.) This approach would have been better if we'd chosen categories with 2 or more teams – it would have added 3 more worthy winning teams. It would have been easier if there were a couple more people around to help with this very complicated task.

So, make sure you know how to allocate prizes beforehand, and have a no-brain way to compute it!

Spot prizes

And then it got worse. I never thought through how the spot prizes would be allocated.

Injuries

My main concern was of traffic accidents. Jarrah Day rode into a parked car, and Justin Woolford crashed on rough ground. Neither was badly hurt, but Justin was bloodied. Kim Nankervis burnt her hand badly on the faulty oven at the hall. I had my own minimal first aid kit but not an RT one.

Checklist

Mark sent me a checklist – if it hadn't been swamped in my hyperactive inbox, so I instead used one from a previous event, then several mistakes would have been avoided. Maybe Mark's list can go on the RT website as a sample.

Jeff Dunn & Martin Bicevskis 4/10/2011