

ORGANISER REPORT FOR THE NORTHERN CHAMPS

Ideas about CLARO hosting the Northern Championships alongside AIRE hosting the British Middles were discussed many years ago. CLARO's own areas are limited for a big event so the club was more than happy to borrow an AIRE area.

All really started almost 2 years ago when dates were fixed, CLARO agreed to participate, Kilnsey South was chosen and an organiser and planners were found. Kilnsey is complicated though with permission needed from Natural England, a landowner, 4 farmers, Long Ashes Caravan Park and Threshfield Quarry Trust. Natural England was the biggest worry and not until their permission was granted could other permissions be firmed up. And it was found that Natural England cannot give an orienteering club permission for an event. They can give landowners and farmers permission to allow an orienteering club to hold an event. So which comes first? It all took a very long time. Outline permissions were obtained from all, course planning was started, but it was only in September 2023 that it was possible to confirm that the event could take place.

Kilnsey is complicated for other reasons. We learned at JK 2016 that relying on a field for parking in March/April is not a good idea. Emergency arrangements were needed just before that event when it was clear that a nicely sloping parking field with top access and a lower exit used for maybe a thousand cars for the Kilnsey Show in the summer would just be too wet in March/April. Threshfield Quarry is massive and can swallow up lots of cars on hard ground. But it means a long walk to a start and from a finish. It was thought that this would put a lot of people off, though in the end it didn't. Cars for the event easily fitted into the quarry with hardly any hold ups even though much of the parking near the quarry entrance was initially taken up by Fellsman Hilke competitors returning from their event.

Kilnsey South rises to 450m. With a north wind and rain it can be a serious concern. Competitors were warned when the event was first advertised that a waterproof hooded top might be compulsory. A few days before the event all competitors were informed that such tops would be compulsory. It was very cold on the day when the start team went off to set up and early starting helpers went off at 10 o'clock. Later starters were a bit luckier.

The area is used for farming sheep and cattle. This gives two problems. There are lots of walls and fences to keep the animals where they should be, and where would the animals be on the day of the event? To a non-farmer, the latter seems simple, but farmers often don't know where their animals will have to be, as it depends on the weather, the progress of lambing and so many other jobs that have to be done.

Yorkshire Dales walls and fences are big and they need big stiles to cross them where there are no gates. Competitors on the longer courses were treated to a variety of ladder stiles, milk crate steps, a crawl through and a specially built step stile near the end capable of taking 700 plus competitors at a rate of 4 or 5 a minute.

The highlights of the day came as the first competitors returned smiling and giving very positive comments about their courses and the arrangements. At the same time the weather started to improve. And then when it improved further the ice cream van started doing business and it was warm enough for competitors to be standing around looking at results and discussing their courses.

CLARO is a small club and this was the biggest event the club had ever taken on. Some much appreciated help came from elsewhere, but members rose to the challenge and did an excellent job on the day. The planners created some great courses and the reassurance from the controller that all was well took some of the worry away.

Finally thanks to all of you for coming and for the many appreciative comments we have had about the area, the planning and the arrangements.

Mike Cope