

Orienteering - But This Time Different

by Benno Schütz

As everybody knows, or perhaps not, I am doing a year exchange programme in England to become familiar with the language and culture of our weird neighbours.

Obviously they do have orienteering, but it differs quite a bit from what we know as Orienteering. For my first event here, I went to a SMILE competition on 30th September. But in this case they didn't mean that the whole world was grinning, but that SMILE is an abbreviation for *Saturday or Sunday Morning Introductory Low-Key Event*. They love abbreviations as much as we do!

The competition had about 40-50 participants and the first difference was that one could choose the course you want to run. They have colour codes referring to their difficulty, like Karate belts.

First I had to register. Then I got a blank map as well as a control card, and I was told to copy the route. We had to change our clothing outside and unfortunately there was no British Tea afterwards! Then the clock started, but before I could start my run I had first to copy the route, then it was checked thoroughly! As the area was not that big I decided to take the most challenging route. This was a normal course at first, and after further copying there were additional Score controls later on, which formed a very similar course.

The whole event was organised by one person, who had a lot to do! As there is far less forest than in Germany, which might be because of former industrialisation and higher population density, we ran through lots of parks. That was big fun as they are not comparable to German parks - they are bigger and have beautiful lawns - nice stately homes, churches and ruins, endless hedges and extremely tidy botanical gardens.

The next real competition was on 7th October, in a proper forest. I first had to copy the route again, but this time I was not checked, presumably to guarantee that I lost my way! I took the Brown route, which was the toughest - 9.5 km long and 70m climb. The forest was really interesting because they changed the legend of the map and you could run only on the trails because the wood was brambly. In the end it took me 108 minutes, and therefore I was last, but the best foreigner!