

JROS Tour M16 to Czechia (near Liberec)

Tommy Rollins

This summer I went to Liberec, Czechia (about 80km northeast of Prague) with 17 other M16 juniors for the annual JROS tour. We were going to the north of Czechia near the border with Poland and in this area the orienteering terrain is one of two main types: sloping hillside covered in boulders and rock, with lots of veg changes and thickets or the faster and more technically challenging sandstone forests. These forests are fast and runnable with the only vegetation being bilberries. What makes these areas special are the sandstone rock features that run around the hillside. These features can vary from large cliffs to 10m tall pillars of rock. These rocks, when close, form narrow alleyways and junctions making for some very technical orienteering.

We spent the first 3 days training in both these kinds of areas, and I learned to love the sandstone terrain especially. One training exercise that we did involved a group of athletes choosing different route choices on the same leg even if some of the routes were thought to be slower. The purpose of this was to test out lots of approaches to orienteering in this new terrain. My group was me, Ben Perry, Laurence Ward and Lyra Medlock. We all took turns doing different routes and discussed them at the control afterwards. What makes these rocky hills extra hard to negotiate are the steep sides as well as the sandy, loose ground. As anyone who watched the World Cup in Czechia this year, knows the sandy ground makes it very easy to slip and slide down the hills and makes climbing them even harder.

Anyway, on one of the legs, I took a very straight route, which involved scaling a large spur covered in sandstone. There was a gap, which was in between two of these large rocks, which I intended to use but when I got there it was much steeper than I expected. But not wanting to be last to the control I decided to go for it anyway and started to scramble up using trees to pull myself up. I eventually made it up and ran along the spur and spiked the control having arrived second there after Ben but I'm not sure it was the optimal route choice for a race!

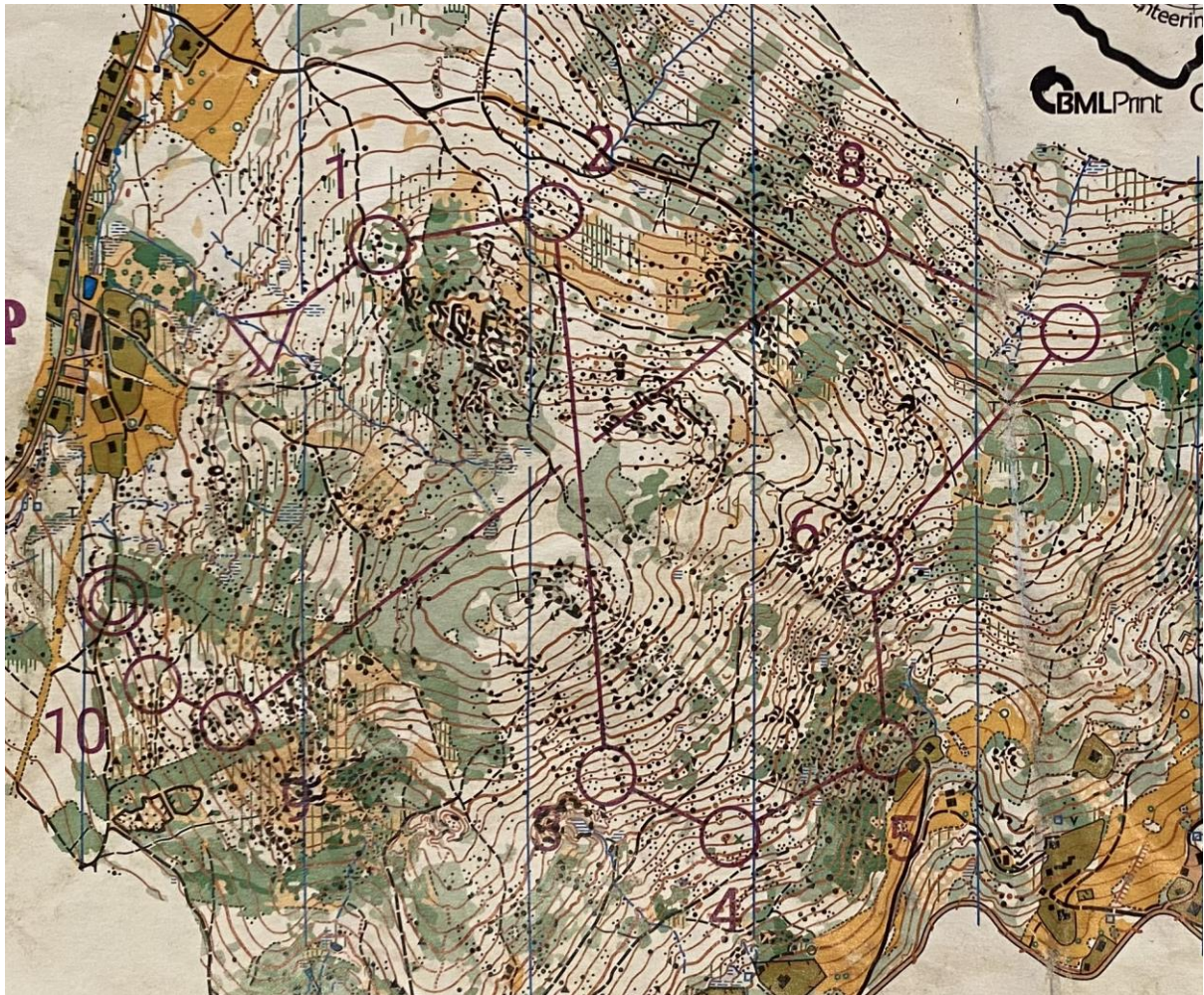


At the end of the week, it was time for the tour champs, the first of which was a Middle race on a sandstone area. This race was really fun, and I had a reasonably clean run making only minor mistakes - maybe in total around 2 mins. So not perfect, but after a weeks' training it was not a bad race. Credit to Jo Sunley for planning a good course.



Picture: Middle Race

The Long race was in the mountain terrain however and this race did not go so well for me. First, I made a large 2 min mistake to number one after misreading an open area and attacking the control from an attack point that didn't exist, then on the way to number two my shoe came loose. I tried to ignore it at first but decided on the rock slope I valued my ankle more than the minute I would lose. 4 and 8 had similarly big mistakes as to number one and I was losing focus on my O. At 9 I was clean and getting back into it but then at 10 I read my control descriptions and saw north side of boulder. In my oxygen deprived state, I decided north must be up the hill (which was in fact south) and I ran away from the control on the boulder, only to return, confused, a minute later. After that I pulled myself together slightly and managed to finish the race in second to James Bryant.



Picture: Long Race

The tour was great fun and a fantastic opportunity to train in some amazing Czech terrain. The coaching team was brilliant, they put on the best training, I loved it and can't wait to go back there again.

Finally, I want to say thank you to South Central Orienteering for supporting me again. These tours are such a great opportunity to experience new and different terrain and to expand your Orienteering knowledge.

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