

Report on Lochaber Orienteering Development Project

September 2021

Plans for orienteering development work in Fort William, linked to the Lochaber Scottish 6 Days, were inevitably impacted by restrictions on activities through Covid-19. Despite this, however, some very successful work has been able to progress and this is now holding promise for the future growth of orienteering in the area.



Thanks to the award from Orienteering Foundation, along with match funding from Scottish Orienteering, a set of 7 maps has been produced in Fort William, including 5 schools and 3 areas of park / community land. An online Introducing Orienteering course, also supported by SOA funding, trained up 12 teachers and youth group leaders in Nov 2020. This led on to some in-school orienteering opportunities once schools returned in Feb 2021.

Active Schools Co-ordinator, Bridget Thomas, took a lead in running a block of after-school

orienteering sessions for two groups of children over 4 weeks in the summer term, using the newly mapped Kilmallie Community Park. This was then followed up by several half-day orienteering camps in the summer holidays using the new map of Old Inverlochy Castle as well as Locheil Outdoor Centre.

With restrictions on numbers, late entries and entry on the day for the Lochaber 6 day event was not going to be feasible, however the

6-day company agreed to set aside a block of (subsidised) entries for local folk to have a go at Day 2 on the new Inverlochy map. This was advertised through local social media as





well as directly targeting those that had already participated in the after-school / summer camp opportunities. In the end, eight locals came and had a go on the day with a number of others having expressed interest but unable to make it in the end. Those that did participate definitely appreciated the opportunity.

To continue to build on this interest, Scottish Orienteering funded two coaches to deliver

3 Sunday morning training sessions at the end of August and into September. These sessions were primarily aimed at family groups and would take participants into some “proper” orienteering terrain to get a better flavour of the sport. After an introductory session at Old Inverlochy Castle they progressed on to use the nearby Poll a Chaisteall area and then part of the forest on the new 6-Days



Inverlochy map. The sessions were coached by Roanne Lilley (EckO) who took a lead in planning, with support and mentoring from Sarah Dunn / Hilary Quick. Roanne was then able to complete her L1 coach training through delivery of the sessions with Hilary acting as her assessor. Bridget Thomas also helped out at each session. Nine families signed up for the Sunday sessions, with in total some 25 people participating. All were very enthusiastic and appreciative of the opportunity.

This block of 3 Sunday sessions led on to further local orienteering opportunities on the subsequent 2 weekends with a “Come And Try It” style taster as part of the Skyline Scotland running festival in Kinlochleven, followed by local events to be hosted by EckO,

using an updated map of Glencoe Lochans, and (slightly further afield) a Basoc event at Loch Vaa by Aviemore.

It is hoped by this stage that some of the families will be happy to join either EckO or Basoc to continue with their orienteering. Several of them live close enough (in Ballachulish / Glencoe) to attend regular EckO activities, but for others this would be rather more distant. A survey is shortly to be circulated to establish how keen the various participants are to do more orienteering, and to figure out how best this can be supported through facilitating activities within reach of Fort William. The longer term success of the project is likely to depend on the degree of interest generated with the participants and their enthusiasm and support to facilitate more activities.

Scottish Orienteering is grateful to the Orienteering Foundation for being prepared to back this project with input to the mapping fund. We are also extremely grateful to the support received from Active Schools Co-ordinator, Bridget Thomas, throughout the project, without which it would have been very difficult to facilitate any of the initial local activity.

We hope that the success achieved, against the odds, might inspire others to have a go at similar development activity in other locations.

