



Normandie O' Tour

We hadn't planned an additional trip across the channel this year, but then publicity for the Normandie O' Tour - 3 urban events in Harfleur, Etretat & Montivilliers in late September, organised by COBS - popped up on my newsfeed & I was hooked..

I'd never competed outside the UK before & there seemed to be various practical difficulties, the first being how to pay the entry fees as, unlike Fabian4, the entry website did not have a built-in payment facility. So - how to transfer 30€ to a French club's bank account? Most options involved paying a hefty fee or weren't available for small sums, but a little research turned up TransferWise, which did the payment rapidly for a tenth of the fee my own bank would have charged. The next hurdle was the medical certificate you need to orienteer or run in France, but someone from the Facebook Urban O group provided a link to a downloadable form which my doctor could sign. Everything appeared to have been sorted - but then I discovered that my multitravel insurance specifically excluded competitive/timed sports events. A bit of searching on Nopesport (it does have its uses!) turned up a company called SportsCover Direct which was willing to provide top-up cover for that specific weekend for just under £14 - problem solved!

The Normandie O Tour coincided with our Ickworth event &, in the days leading up to our departure, the Met Office was issuing severe weather warnings for the weekend. There was a chance that the National Trust would request the cancellation of our event, and, if so, I'd have to place a notice on the frontpage of the website. Leaving my contact details with Simon, our organiser for Ickworth, we set off for the tunnel on the Thursday & settled into the municipal campsite in Etretat the following day.



Both Harfleur and Montivilliers are small towns adjacent to Le Havre. The Saturday afternoon sprint event in Harfleur had its headquarters at La Forge, an arts and exhibition centre which provided welcome indoor shelter from the light rain and space for the inflatable 'Arrivée' in the paved area outside. The 'Départ' was in an adjacent park and I took in enough of the map to know I had to head over the bridge & bear right at the junction. Soon there were blocks of flats on my left and water on my right - what the..?? - they're not on the map! Retracing my footsteps to the bridge I realised I'd taken an earlier right turning, partly obscured by the start triangle on the map. You can't afford to lose even a couple of minutes in a sprint, but the path was used later in the course so at least I benefitted from already knowing the layout! The rest of the course was a pleasant run around the town centre with old buildings, paved streets and floral displays much in evidence. The streets were relatively quiet but at one point I was aware of a group of people in formal attire and little girls in 'posh frocks'. I was told later that they were guests arriving for a wedding and that the men in uniform were the local gendarmes - I'm not sure what they made of us running through their midst, but they seemed unconcerned!



The weather deteriorated during the afternoon so by the time the night event started at around 22:00 in Etretat there was steady rain blown by an equally steady wind. The event had been advertised as middle distance, 'sur le front de mer, en ville et jusqu'au golf' which I took to mean sea front, town & up to the golf course. The event actually started by the golf clubhouse, then it was straight out onto the very dark course, into the driving rain. My head torch, which had been fine for the night events I'd done at the White Rose a couple of times, seemed to only penetrate a few metres in front of me in those conditions. The first control was fine but I

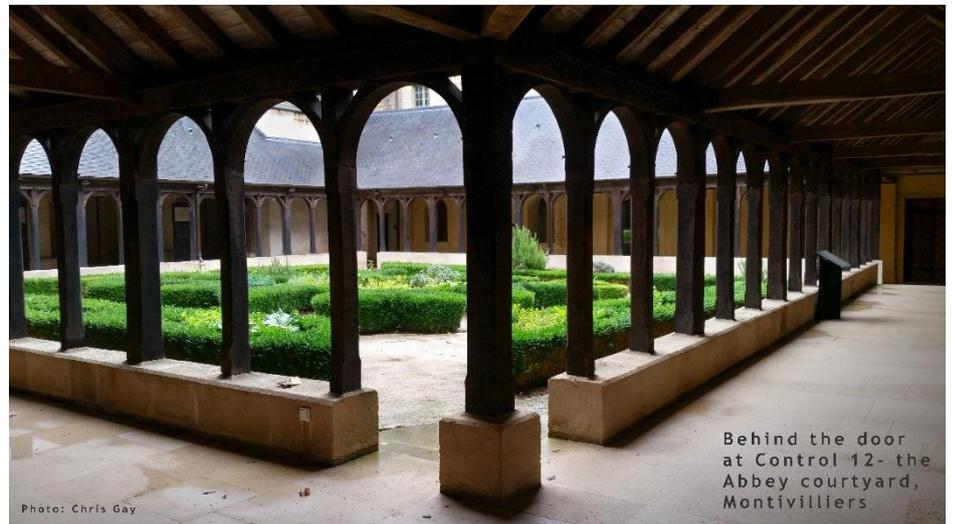
veered too far to the left for the second, eventually finding a high fence which enabled me to relocate. The greens were OOB and taped off, so every so often I'd come across the edge of the tape or a small clump of



trees which meant I somehow found controls 2 to 5. After that I seemed to settle into the way of doing things - it wasn't possible to take a bearing towards anything in the distance so the only way was to walk resolutely, holding the compass in front of my chest and watching the needle continuously. I've orienteered on moorland in fog in South Wales but this was something else - and using skills which were totally opposite to those you expect to need for an urban event! Approximately two-thirds of my course was on the golf course, finally dropping down a slope through scrub onto a slippery track which led down into the town. I could see head torches descending through the scrub but I was intent on self-preservation by that time (and I was wearing road shoes, having expected tarmac and short grass!) so found a more gentle descent on a path. The map was at a scale of 1:10,000 so it was difficult to see the detail on the town section - and my wet glasses and map didn't help. The course took us up to the top of the municipal garden then down onto the sea front - I guessed correctly that there would be steps linking the two but couldn't see them on the map until afterwards. There was one further control in the virtually deserted (by normal folk!) town centre and a final sprint on the sea front. I have to admit I did accept the piece of chocolate offered at Download.



The final event in Montivilliers on the Sunday morning was classified as 'long distance urban' - the course was in two sections and involved a map exchange partway through. The weather had improved slightly - there were still light showers, but at least the wind had dropped and it was quite warm. The event started in a square by the abbey and involved the usual urban mix - the mediaeval town centre, residential estates, small parks and a river. It seemed strange to be running over parts of the same area twice, but at least I knew where the slight inclines were and could pace myself accordingly! I ended up 4th in my age category in that event, and closer in time to those ahead of me, probably because I'm used to entering courses longer than those normally specified for my age group.



This was the first time that COBS (Club d'Orientation des Boucles de la Seine) had put on the Normandie O' Tour and they hope to make it a biennial event. There were just under 400 entrants - mainly French, 9 from the UK (I believe there were large events in Lancaster & in the West Country that weekend, otherwise there might have been others nipping across the channel to compete). The whole weekend was extremely well organised and sponsored by a range of local businesses. At the end of the Montivilliers event the top 3 places for combined performance over the 3 stages for each of the age categories was calculated and announced. Unfortunately I hadn't read my Final Details thoroughly enough and had returned to the van to change into some dry clothes by that time. I hadn't expected to ever win anything, but I was actually 3rd in my D65 age group - mainly because only 3 out of 8 of us had turned up for, and completed correctly, the Etretat course! I missed out on having my photo taken on the podium and being presented with some local produce - cheese, cider, potatoes, that sort of thing, by courtesy of the sponsors. Ah well, that's life..

Chris Gay

15 November 2018