

Planner's Report: GMC 2023

When Dave asked me if I wanted to plan the 2023 GMC, I thought that it might be a fun thing to do. I assumed that an October event, with increased daylight hours and a fair chance of good weather, would take away some of the worries associated with the usual November date. I set out with grand plans for expansive courses across the Cairngorms. However, the usual constraints started to impose themselves: start and finish locations; restricted areas for birds or deer; area boundaries and, vitally, bridge locations. Even so there was scope to cover an eastern loop around Carn na Drochaide and over Beinn Bhreac on Day 1 and a western loop round Sgor Mor and back via Derry lodge on Day 2.

Given the size of some of the rivers it became obvious early on that bridges needed to be considered in the planning. Bridges had issues from the start: too many on the OS maps; not enough on the Harvey Map (thanks to Chris and Holly at Harvey Maps for the map updates). Also, the Derry Dam bridge, north of Derry Lodge, was out of action due to previous flood damage. Courses constrained by bridges didn't give the long legs with varied route choice options across the high mountains that I'd hoped for. As you may have experienced, courses end up at an altitude where the heather is brutal (sorry – but it was either heather or lots of track running and because it was a mountain marathon the heather won!). In the end I planned seven courses for the first day: A, B and C with the freedom of the hills (you may have spotted unused controls to the north on the map); A, B and C constrained by bridges and a shorter D course as a backup bad weather option.

I thought that Day 2 would be less constrained by river levels and bridges so kept it to A, B, C and D courses. Trying to keep all options open meant that there were many controls spread out over a wide area; just tagging the hill controls took me three full days. Falling off my bike whilst out placing controls didn't help matters and I'm very grateful to Ian, Tim G, Tim N, Dave and Helen for tagging, placing and checking controls during the build up to the event.

The forest section, whilst small, is quite a fun area and conveniently close to the overnight camp. The control location for 239 (Day 2, A&B) was suggested by Jon Musgrave (Maroc). The cave under the boulder has the remains of a wooden floor, apparently it was used as accommodation back in the 50/60/70s by climbers getting a late bus up the glen before heading further into the hills the next morning. I hope that you noticed! I didn't send the C course this way as the slog from there directly up the hill to the last forest control may not have been appreciated.

You all know what happened. A yellow weather warning and a forecast for persistent heavy rain on Saturday meant that we used the shortened B, C and D courses over the bridges. Whilst people got round on Saturday it

was fairly tough going for many. Even minor streams became treacherous and some of the Day 2 control locations near streams became a concern. When the weather warning was upgraded to amber in the area with heavy rain forecast to continue through Day 2, we decided that drastic action was necessary and the hill section was considerably shortened. What you may not know is that one of our intrepid hill marshals (Tim G) was sent out to check conditions at some controls on Sgor Dubh (part of Sgor Mor). The stream level near one control was so high that he couldn't reach the control! Also, the estate rangers later informed us that the bridge at Derry Lodge was inaccessible due to the high water. Had we gone ahead with the original Day 2 courses this would have left competitors stranded in the middle of the Cairngorms.

Even with the atrocious weather, I saw lots of smiling faces so I hope that you enjoyed what was on offer given the conditions. The hill marshals (Donnie, Mike and Tim) were out in the rain for an impressive amount of time making sure that there were no lost competitors and collecting controls in the areas used – thanks! However, if anyone does want to see more of the area (when the river levels have dropped) there are still plenty of controls that need collecting: any volunteers?

Gareth