

Norway 2016:

On the 18th of August, the North West Junior Orienteering Squad travelled to Fredrikstad on the Norwegian side of the Norway/Sweden border. We enjoyed 10 days training and racing (as well as having lots of fun!) in some of the world's highest quality orienteering terrain. Nine juniors from West Cumberland Orienteering Club joined twenty other juniors from across our region. We were able to do this because of the generous grant from Cumbria County Council and private donations that matched all the fundraising we had done ourselves, as well as the generosity of the local Norwegian orienteering club that permitted us to stay in their club hut (Skihytte) during our tour.

The main theme for the week was 'direction', meaning that we focused our learning on mastering really accurate compass bearings. This is an essential skill in orienteering and a skill which once mastered allows runners to orienteer more confidently and (usually) faster. The training exercises were all specifically designed to force us to use our compass skills and not rely on map reading and features we could see around us. For example, a control pick (many controls) exercise from the Skihytte saw us running short loops in the forest, stopping after each to review and consider what aspect of our compass bearings could be improved and what we needed to work on the next time. Essentially, we were looking at the processes within the skill of compass bearings to enable us to improve.

In addition to our technical training, we also enjoyed participating in the spectator races at the World Orienteering Championships that were being held on the Swedish side of the border during the course of our training week. This allowed us to test the skills developed in training in a more pressurised environment and at a higher intensity. I think that this was an eye opener for many people because in the training they had practised taking compass bearing but either didn't take one, or did it in a rush in the races; it emphasised the need for good technique even when we race.

My favourite parts of the week were getting the opportunity to watch the World Orienteering Championships (WOC) races, getting to sample world class terrain and all the relaxing swimming which we did. I was particularly inspired by the WOC races; it was really exciting cheering for GBR, especially in the relay events when the GB teams were fighting for medals and it was a really tense battle! Not only were the elite races inspirational but racing ourselves in world class terrain allowed us to test our navigational techniques and compare ourselves against some of the best juniors in the world.

As a consequence of the trip, I have gained confidence in my abilities to perform at the highest level and feel motivated to train even harder so I too can achieve the level of orienteering competence that the WOC elite competitors have. I know that lots of individuals made this trip possible and that we couldn't have done it without them. Thank you, I hope our future performances will show it was worthwhile.

Alastair Thomas. (M16 – WCOC)