

Day 2 Planner/Mapper Report – Roger Thomas

It was many years ago I first visited Bessyboot and came across something akin to a lunar landscape in places. I thought it might have potential as an orienteering area, especially as there seemed to be no bracken and the area was well grazed by Herdwick sheep, resulting in runnable terrain.

Years later in 2021 I went on a beginners mapping course and asked the Club mapping officer how to get a base map for what I thought was this promising area in Borrowdale. Thus started the fascinating process of producing the Bessyboot map; interpreting LIDAR data and examining aerial data to pick out marshes and prominent boulders.

The field survey over many visits was mainly pleasurable (I tried to choose good weather days!), but it was an hour plus from the car and a steep climb before the days work could begin. In parallel with the mapping I was thinking about the logistics of holding an event on the area and sketching out ideas for courses, particularly some interesting long legs.

During 2024, Bessyboot was proposed as a possible area for the WCOC day at Lakes5 2026. A process 'evolved' over many months to confirm whether the option was viable, particularly in relation to finding suitable parking and a manageable access route onto the fell. It was clear early on that Bessyboot fell itself was not suitable for TD4 and below given the absence of line features. It was also clear given a steep ascent to a high start and a steep descent to a Finish that it probably wasn't an option for older senior courses.

Several options were considered for the shorter courses including existing WCOC areas lower down in Borrowdale, but all suffered from heavy summer bracken. One day mapping high up on Bessyboot I had a good view down into The Combe and thought it might have potential for the shorter courses. So started a second, linked mapping project.

In August 2025 at the S6D I approached Trevor Hoey (FVO) and asked if he had any Controller projects lined up for 2026 and if not, would he like to be Controller for Day 2 of Lakes5. Maybe I didn't fully explain the complexities of the logistics and area(s) before he accepted! In September Richard and Ann Cummings agreed to be Organisers. By early 2026 we had the outline of the event in place; permissions, parking, assembly, draft courses and Bessyboot and The Combe maps nearing completion.

The split of courses between Bessyboot and the Combe was subject of much debate. The 19 Courses and Class combinations and CLR ratios were set by the Lakes5 event. We decided to set the cut off at Course 12 for Bessyboot. We felt it was very important to give you as much information about Day 2 at the entry stage so that you could decide whether to run up or run down a class based on the description of this new area.

My initial plans had both the White and Yellow courses in The Combe trying to make use of the limited line features and taping to create appropriate courses. This wasn't ideal so an alternative option of using an area down near Assembly was explored. With the support of farmer Richard Weir we were given permission to use some of his fields. So the third area; Low Buck How came into play and a third map produced. Whilst these two courses were a bit contrived, we hope the youngsters found it an enjoyable challenge and the parents were relieved they didn't have to supervise taking them up the long walk to The Combe.

I had plenty of time to craft your courses with a very good knowledge of the area from hundreds of hours of survey and cartography. I hope the quality showed and by some of your kind comments it seems the challenges were appreciated. On Bessyboot I aimed for at least one long leg on each course with multiple route choice options. Varying leg length and changing direction a lot was also my aim. Those courses with long first legs across to the east side of the map probably had the most fun challenge!

My planning options in The Combe were much more limited, not least by the need to only cross the central watercourse at the top end of the valley. There are much wetter days in the valley than you experienced on Monday! Hopefully The Combe courses gave you a suitable challenge and the atmospheric location surrounded by towering cliffs was enjoyed.

Watching the event unfold during the day was a strange experience; as years of preparation was coming alive. The team heading out on their 'wake up courses' from 0700, the Red Start team cheerfully plodding up the hill with the heavy maps and clocks from 0800 to allow helpers to run from 0900. And then the steady procession of all the competitors heading up to Blue and Red Starts.

Waiting at the Finish for the first runners is always a bit of a nervous time for a planner. Tired orienteers who have had some issue with a control or their course or the map tend not to be shy in expressing themselves – me included! It was

very pleasing to receive so many kind comments from you at the Finish and at Assembly later. As this was my first attempt at producing a map (3 as it turned out!) I am particularly grateful for the feedback that I largely succeeded in producing a clear readable map with an appropriate amount of detail shown.

It was my idea to try and run an orienteering event on Bessyboot, but that could not have happened without the support of many people within WCOC prior to the event and seemingly the whole club and others coming out to run the show on the day. I am particularly indebted to Richard and Ann Cummings for bringing my ideas to fruition, to Trevor Hoey for polishing my courses and his meticulous attention to detail and to Pete Nelson my mapping tutor.

Finally, many thanks to you all for coming to experience a new area for orienteering; something that is all too rare in this country. I hope the long walks were worth it and you might be tempted back again sometime!

Roger Thomas (WCOC)