

## John Warren - His Orienteering Life

John always enjoyed walking, mountains and travel but had never got into organised sport as his school had an elitist games culture which resulted in John hating all sports.

John, then at the age of 39 reading an article about fitness for the middle aged, decided to run one and a half kilometres around the block! When he came back, he was so exhausted that it frightened him, and he started to look for a way to get fit.

Soon after that, he read an article which mentioned the 1976 Wimborne Orienteers Boxing Day Canter at Udden's Plantation, near Ferndown.

John attended the event with his son, Richard. Like most newcomers, they turned up late, with no compass and with little idea of what to do. They did at least catch the tail end of Trevor Bridle's pre-race briefing before setting off.

They returned an hour later after a lap of the forest, a lot of fun and an experience that would change John and the family's life forever.

Things picked up pace after that first event; In 1977, the family orienteered once in January, every weekend in February and at least twice a month for the rest of the year!

As a family, they started travelling all over the country and eventually abroad in pursuit of their newfound sport.

Only a few weeks after their first event they were asked by the club "*Could you help on the start at the next event please?*" They were terribly flattered, as newcomers, to actually be asked to help, not knowing that manpower was desperately short!

They did their shift, found that they really enjoyed the club, the people, and the atmosphere.

In 1979 WIM were the club running the JK relays and John, having become a key member of the club by then, was an assistant organiser at the aptly named Bramble Brook near Exeter which involved all the messy jobs including, setting up control sites, clearing thickets and brashings for the Relay changeover area. John described it as a "baptism of fire."

After this he was regarded as 'an orienteering expert' so there was no way back from volunteering!

He felt he needed to learn more skills of the sport.

Mapping was first. He was asked to go and have a look at the Godshill map, and if he wanted to, have a go at mapping an area in the New Forest called Avon Water.

This proved to be a major challenge. There was no base map, no ariel photographs, just a blank piece of paper. But map it he did!

It entailed hours of work, including dragging Alison out in freezing weather to hold the other end of the measuring tape. He did such a good job with the map that the event got upgraded from a club run to the 1981 Southern Championships.

Unfortunately, the event was then cancelled due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak that year. Re-arranged for December. It was successful, but only because everyone survived it! Unfortunately, a blizzard hit mid-morning that day - only a third of 1700 entered made it to the event.

John was a WIM mapper for many years and was responsible for countless local events.

Orienteering was certainly a family affair, with many happy weekends enjoyed by John, Barbara, Richard and Alison. John was extremely proud, when in 1978 and 1981, Richard and Alison were both Wimborne's Junior Men's and Junior Woman's league champions respectively.

He was also a very proud husband when Barbara became British Relay Champion at the Championships in 1986 and at the JK relay 1987.

A memorable occasion for John himself was his first medal at the British Relay Championships at Brown Clee in 2016. He was extremely chuffed to win a bronze medal with Martin and Gillian Cross in M/W70. Barbara was the one who always won the medals he said!

Next came committees! John had joined the Wimborne Orienteers Committee in December 1977. He became WIM secretary in 1981 and Chairman in 1987 and again in 1993, then taking on the role of Secretary

again in 1998, a post he held for 19 years until 2017. Little did he know, when he started, that he would serve on the committee for nearly 50 years!

He joined the South West Orienteering Association committee, which he also chaired, and which got him involved in much larger events.

John had also qualified as a Grade One Controller.

JK89 was held at Longleat, Stourhead and Stock hill and saw John as the controller at Stourhead, one of the largest\_ever\_orienteering events to be held in the UK. Prior to modern technology, bagging and heat sealing of maps was a massive, and time-consuming job, so the whole family was brought in to help out.

Next, was international orienteering! In the summer of 1984, the family experienced their first Swedish O Ringen competition in Gothenburg with John stating that it is one of the greatest experiences that you can have in the sport and doubles as a superb holiday as well. Multi-day events followed, including Orienteering in the Swiss Jura. John attended every Scottish six days event from 1979-2023, spanning an incredible 44 years, only missing the very first Scottish Six Days in 1977.

John took early retirement in 1996, bought himself a new computer and a copy of the mapping software, OCAD, and between 1996 and 2020 he produced maps of at least 30 different areas for the club, some of them running to 3 or 4 subsequent editions.

John was the chief planner for 2 individual days of JK97 at Penhale. The process of planning an event like this took nearly two years. This was the last major event that used manual punching where there were over 3400 entries on day 1.

14,000 maps for 25 courses all hand checked.

“Working in teams”, John wrote, “meant that you got to know your fellow club members which we appreciated”.

Although not all things ran smoothly, on the day a small wet depression was found to be dry. The solution was to place a washing up bowl in the depression, fill it with water and float a plastic duck on the surface!

This was the event where I first met John. I was moving to Dorset and after my run asked someone about local clubs, I was pointed in the direction of John,

“Excuse me are you, John Warren?”

“Yes, what do you want?”

replied John obviously thinking I had a complaint!

“Well, um, our family is moving, and we were thinking we would like to join Wimborne Orienteers”.

He brightened up immediately, said we would be very welcome to join the club and has been a friend ever since.

John often talked about the Penhale event in his later years as his biggest orienteering achievement and had the map of the area framed.

Following on from the success of this, John was then asked to assemble a team from Southwest Orienteering Association and organise the Relay event at the World Championships in Inverness, Scotland, in 1999. He made several trips by sleeper train to the event area. This was also a success with the world’s best orienteers taking part and was viewed by over 3000 spectators!

Moving on a few years, John also planned the British Orienteering Relay Championships in 2005 at Penhale with WIM being heavily involved.

Mapping and controlling became an ever-present pastime of Johns. He was responsible for mapping numerous local events, controlling several SOC November Classics, BOK Trots, Compass Sport Cups and Midland Championships before being asked to control Day 1 of JK 2013 at Hambledon, near Henley.

Moors Valley Country Park was very close to John's house and for many years he mapped the park, built up a good relationship with the rangers there and as a WIM coach delivered orienteering training courses for the staff and the public. He was also responsible for setting up the permanent orienteering courses at Moors Valley and Avon Heath Country Park.

John and Barbara also hosted Club evenings at their home in Post Office Lane, St Ives for several years as well as hosting the club BBQ. Their drive and garden became a car park when John and Barbara organised a coach to the British Championships in Inverness that departed from their house!

John was a very keen supporter of the Wednesday Army events and latterly he, Richard Brightman and Keith Henderson regularly travelled together and were sometimes referred to as 'The Last of the Summer Wine' crew.

As most of us know, John was always one for a chat... before, during or after a burger at Toms van! I'm sure many of us will remember him for his kind, familiar and friendly mannerism of strolling up to you with his hands held behind his back at an event and asking about your day, how your run went or asking after your family.

As you have heard John was involved in all aspects of orienteering spanning 50 years and in 2016 Wimborne Orienteers recognised this remarkable contribution by making him a life member of the club.

He was also awarded the prestigious British Orienteering Silva Award in 2018 for his significant contribution to the development of orienteering over a period of years.

Afterwards John said, "any organisation is only as good as its members, and I believe that one of the joys of orienteering is that it is an almost wholly amateur sport. Volunteering hasn't been so much of an effort, it has mostly been a real sense of satisfaction, and I hope that in a small way our volunteering has contributed to a lot of people having enjoyable experiences, taking part in a sport we love."

John, as fellow orienteers and friends, thank you, we will miss you.