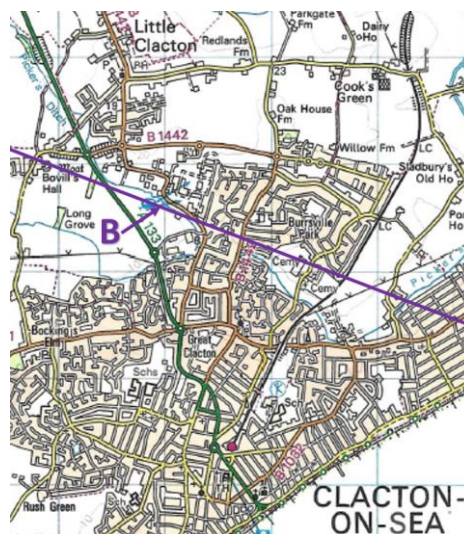
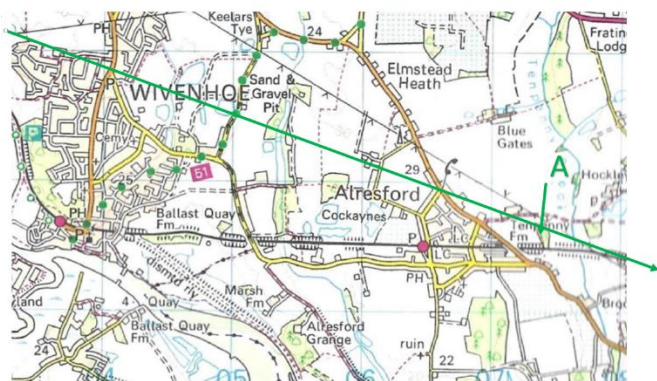


A National “Final” nearly didn’t happen this year. With two weeks to go we only had five entries and we were on the point of calling it off. Thankfully another three entries before the day made it worthwhile to put it on.

We chose the familiar Colchester 168 Map. We didn’t want the longstanding roadworks on the A12 south of the Stanway turnoff to cause problems during the event so we decided to confine the three stations to the East of the Fordham Heath start and out into the Tendring peninsula.

I (Tx B) had a previously found site in mind over at Brook Nature reserve in Clacton –not labelled on the map, but adjacent to the A133. A nice 6ft6 height barrier to negotiate too.

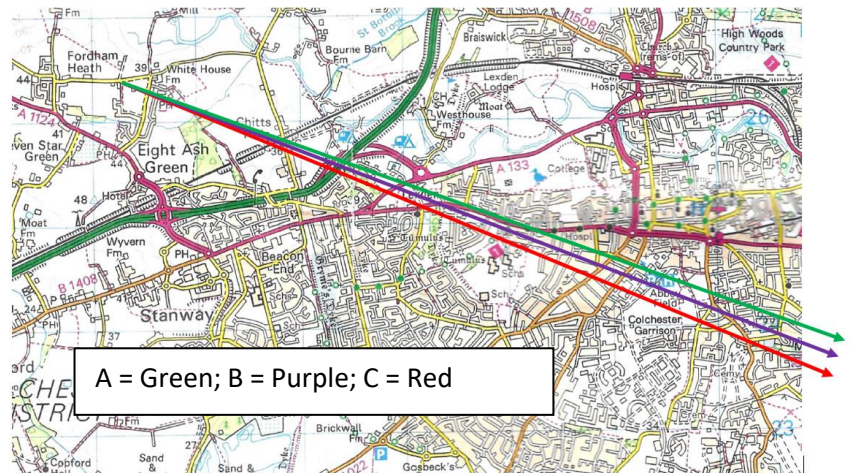


I suggested to Roy that he could use a site at Tenpenny Farm, Alresford on which he had already run a local event this year; none of the local entrants for the final had been on that event. He reported that his hide still bore the scars of that previous event, so he parked himself in a different bit of the wood this time. Still near two sets of power lines though.

I chose the third site for Gary so that he could come down from Ipswich on the day and set up with a choice of hides in Lexden Gathering Grounds Nature reserve – a small wood west of Colchester and E of the A12, about 2.5 km from the start. Nothing much to see on the map.



When plotting start bearings to create approximate bearing values I discovered that all three were about the same – 111 degrees. This could create a bit of confusion on maps ! In the end Gary had chosen a hide a bit further South in the wood than I expected, so I understand competitors start bearings were more like 125 degrees.



With the start at 1250, we had agreed to transmit at 1200 to check readability. I heard Roy, Roy heard Gary. Roy said I was weak. The aerial was quite high, and good dip and power readings were noted. A check with Ian at the start confirmed that my signal wasn't getting out. Various remedies were tried, but with time running short, I accepted that use of an approximate bearing would be needed, which would make my site rather more obvious (so I thought). At least the signal would be covering a reasonable distance if not the 24 km to the start.

After the start I didn't get any calls about signal failure, or at 1.30, so I thought that all was well.



So how would competitors approach the event ?

Try to snatch a quick find at C (Gary), strong and near the start, and return to the A12 to motor round the bypass, or use the time to travel distance and split

A and B, but then having to address how to get back to the W of Colchester ? Apparently the signal from C was strong but not blasting giving some doubt as to which side of Colchester it could be, or even in the middle.

All remained quiet at B until about 2.10. When what looked like a pair of competitors shot past close by about 5m away, coming in from the main path. At 2.15 someone took a direct line approach from a narrow path on the other side of me to crash through to my hide. Hello Justin ! I wasn't particularly well hidden and there wasn't a great deal of cover over to that path, where a lowish bit of aerial could probably be seen. Colin found me a bit later and yelled to Rosie to come over from the main path. On their departure I heard Peter tell Ruth that "Colin and Rosie came out just here", and so shortly after they were clocked too. Now I had also seen and heard Geoff and Phil go to and fro along the minor path near the reserve boundary a couple of times, but then it went quiet until a transmission allowed Geoff to hone in. He was looking a bit breathless and despondent, and handed me a soggy ball of cardboard clock card (why ? it was a dry day and surely he hadn't fallen in the small pond miles away ? No, he had found a ditch.)

A check with Roy and Gary that no competitors had been in to A and C suggested that the four in were the front runners.

Roy reported Bill in at Alresford at 1442, 20 min behind. I expected him to come over to me next.

Nothing much happened at my site, but at 1507 Ian had found Gary at C, unfortunately having gone the wrong side of Colchester and the River Colne.

Roy's next report indicated that the lead had changed and Peter was in ahead of Justin at 1520, with Geoff and Rosie narrowing the gap to less than nine minutes. Who would find the best way to the other side of Colchester ? Bypass or town ?

I was feeling a bit sorry for Gary, having only seen one competitor so far, but with four close times at Roy, at least he might get a grandstand finish !!

Graham found me as his first station just after 1530.

In consultation with the other operators I rang Justin 2 at about 1600 to check he was ok, as none of us had seen him. Unfortunately he had gone S of the River and had explored a nature reserve there whilst aiming for Tx A.

By 1624 Graham and Ian had found Roy, but there was no news from Gary.

Transmissions ended at 1630.

Gary then reported that he had seen Justin 1 run past within, but it was only Geoff who had clocked in by the final whistle. At the tea there were tales of looking in woods the wrong side of the A12.

As on other events we thought that finding three stations was “do-able” with good roads for transit. Back at the Cricketers PH everyone seemed to be in good spirits – it must have been that it had been sunny and warm and not the usual Essex rain.



Well done to Geoffrey, being the only competitor to turn his fortunes around and find all three at 1618, and win the Derek Newman and RSGB trophies. I hope he keeps his soggy ball of clock card as a memento. Or makes a trophy out of it (a bit like the “Ashes” ?)

Also to Peter, in second place, with two stations at 1320:32, to win the Trevor Gage trophy.



Thank you to my two co-operators, and to all who came along and supported the event, and all those who couldn't but sent their best wishes. I look forward to competing on next year's event. Joints permitting !!

Tim