

BEGINNINGS OF ORIENTEERING IN TASMANIA

Warwick Moore¹

In Tasmania, the sport of Orienteering appears to have begun somewhat contemporaneously in the school system and the wider community in the late 1960s and the early seventies.

In late 1971, Robin Hood², an officer of the National Fitness Council of Tasmania³, organised a meeting at the Travelodge Motel, Hobart, to bring together people who might have an interest in Orienteering. A comprehensive list of attendees at the meeting is not available, however teacher, Bill Stewart (Taroona High School), and Clive Roper (YMCA), who was, at that time involved in athletics, did participate. At the meeting, Clive offered to organise an event, but the meeting decided that this was not feasible at that time and it did not proceed.

The first evidence of orienteering taking place in Tasmania comes from the government school system, where a number of young teachers, who had graduated together, became interested and spread the word amongst their friendship group. Malcolm Wells, at the time the Physical Education teacher at Riverside High School in Launceston, conducted an Orienteering teaching unit at the school. Then, Malcolm, together with Roger Bradshaw, taught orienteering at Claremont High School in Hobart between 1970 in 1973, with Roger continuing after Malcolm had left the school. Prior to 1972, Graeme Cooksey and Bill Stewart, also Physical Education teachers, conducted Orienteering at Taroona High School (Hobart), where the staff were introduced to the sport by Iain Barnes of the National Fitness Council.

The interest in orienteering at the school level did not lead to orienteering becoming a sport at community level. However, at around the same time, members of the general community became aware of Orienteering.

Former Tasmanian, Tom Andrews⁴, witnessed the Swedish Championships in 1968, while on a business trip, and played a major role in starting Orienteering in Australia. However, it was the Melbourne bushwalking scene that led to the first event in Tasmania. Rod Harris, a leading orienteer in Victoria, and a member of the Monash Bushwalking Club, travelled to Tasmania to visit his bushwalking friend, Karen Alexander, and to fly over Southwest Tasmania. On the flight Rod noticed bushland south of Hobart that might be suitable for orienteering and he encouraged Karen to get orienteering going in Tasmania.⁵

Subsequently, on 9 September 1972⁶, Karen, together with Janet and Simon Stephens and Greg Hodge, all bushwalkers at the University of Tasmania, organised a public event at The Lea Scout Camp. Karen went on to organise the first 5 events in Tasmania.

¹ The author of this article, Warwick Moore, has been involved with Orienteering since he attended his first event in 1977 at a farm next to what is now Peter Murrell Reserve.

² Robin Hood was later to become the Tasmanian Government's Sport and Recreation nominee on the Organising Committee for the 1988 Orienteering World Cup race held at St Helens, our first major event in the area.

³ The National Fitness Council of Tasmania was a non-government, voluntary organisation, set up as a result of the Commonwealth Government's desire to improve the fitness of Australia's youth. In Tasmania, it was a very effective organisation until it was eventually subsumed by the Tasmanian Department of Sport and Recreation.

⁴ George Andrews (Tom's brother) and his wife, Alison, lived in Tasmania. In 1991/2 through their company, Gintaras, they managed the promotion of the Veteran World Cup (now the World Masters) in Tasmania in 1992.

⁵ Moore, W. *Orienteering in Tasmania*, 1988 World Cup Orienteering (Programme), 1988, p17.

⁶ Kelly, Ross. Personal Email to Warwick Moore, February 22, 2023. Ross suggests this date may not be correct as the date was a Saturday.

The First Orienteering Event in Tasmania

David Hogg writes in the History of Orienteering in Australia (currently unpublished):

Tasmania's first event was organised by Karen Alexander and other bushwalking friends at the University of Tasmania. Karen came from Melbourne, where she was an active member of the Monash Bushwalking Club, which had strong links to MUMC. She had competed in several 24 Hour Walks, but had not participated in the early Victorian orienteering events.

During 1972, she was visited by a fellow club member, Rod Harris, who was a leading orienteer in Victoria. Together they took a charter flight over some areas in South West Tasmania, which Rod wanted to see. On their way back to Hobart, they flew over some bushland south of Hobart which, Rod remarked, appeared to have good potential for orienteering.

Following Rod's suggestion, Karen, together with Janet and Simon Stephens and Greg Hodge, all bushwalkers at the University of Tasmania, organised an event in the area based at The Lea Scout Camp on 9 September 1972. They chose the venue because of contacts with the scouting organisation and the opportunity for some captive participants among scouts staying at the camp. The event attracted about a dozen people in total including some scouts and some members of the public. The maps were photocopied from a Hobart street directory, which happened to show contours and were ideal for the purpose.

The event was considered to be a success and the same group organised further events at The Lea at about monthly intervals, with relatively short courses (3 to 8 km). The organisation was very informal, with no club or association formed, and entry fees went into a pool of money to cover the costs of the events.⁷

Establishment of the Orienteering Association of Tasmania

Tuesday March 6, 1973

An Interim Committee was formed at a meeting on 6th February, 1973, at the Long family home to establish a name, constitution, and fees for a future Orienteering Association of Tasmania. The committee comprised Karen Alexander, Nadene Hansen, Ross Kelly and Ray Long.⁸

Inaugural Meeting

The inaugural meeting of the Orienteering Association of Tasmania (OAT) was held in the Union Building, University of Tasmania, on Tuesday, March 6, 1973, attended by about 40 people (according to the Newsletter), including A R Billings, R Elliot, Greg Hodge, Greg and Sheila Bond, Ken Thompson, David Bagley, Bob Stewart, Karen Alexander, Janet Stephens, Ross and Jenny Kelly, Nadene Hansen, Steve Wilson, Elizabeth Clemes, Ray and Jill Long.⁹

A motion moved by Ross Kelly and seconded by Rod Tabor was carried unanimously and established the **Orienteering Association of Tasmania**. The committee elected by the meeting included the following:

President	Ross Kelly
Secretary	Karen Alexander
Treasurer	Greg Hodge
Committee	Nadene Hansen, Greg Bond, Steve Wilson

⁷ Hogg, D. *History of Orienteering in Australia*. (Yet to be published) Chapter 9 Tasmania.

⁸ Kelly, Ross. Op cit.

⁹ Long, J. *Hi Orienteers!* Orienteering Newsletter, #5, May 1992, p11. Jill's article draws on personal recollections and unpublished notes lent to her, at the time, by Sue Mount. (Ross Kelly, Op cit, concurs with this.

Newsletter Editor Janet Stevens joined the committee shortly afterwards.

At the meeting, 24 initial members joined up and paid the membership fee. Membership fees were Adult \$3, Family \$5, Junior (U17) \$1.50.

David Hogg, in his History of Orienteering in Australia writes:

The Orienteering Association of Tasmania (OAT) was formed as the State's first 'club' rather than serving as a state body. Karen Alexander was inaugural Secretary, Ross Kelly President, Greg Hodge Treasurer and Janet Stephens (and later Steve Wilson) Newsletter Editor. The OAT became affiliated with the OFA at the June 1973 Annual General Meeting.¹⁰

First Event conducted by Orienteering Association of Tasmania Sunday March 18, 1973

On Sunday, March 18, 1973, the newly formed Orienteering Association of Tasmania held its first event at Summerleas in steady rain. Rod Tabor won the Senior Course (4.6 miles) in 2 hours 15 minutes.

Following this event the same group (Karen Alexander, Greg Hodge and Janet Stephens) organised further events at The Lea and also early events at Blackmans Bay and Richmond. Entry fees were 40 cents!

Orienteering Newsletters indicate that a large programme of events was held during 1973. The full list is reproduced at the end of this article.

Prominent in the early results were Peter Shaw and Ross Kelly, who are both orienteering today. Clive Roper, later to become prominent in the development of Australian orienteering, attended his first event in May, at Colebrook, and he soon became heavily involved in the early development of Orienteering in Tasmania, and had significant roles in Tasmanian and in Australian Orienteering.

Later in 1973, Karen Alexander attended the Australian Championships as the sole Tasmanian representative and took out the women's senior (open, W21A) title.

On September 1, 1974, the first Tasmanian Orienteering Championships were held at New Norfolk. Hilary Cane and Peter Shaw became the first state champions.

On October 1, 1974, the first orienteering event in the North of the state was conducted at Relbia, with 57 competitors (with 12 travelling from the South).¹¹ Red Kangaroos, the first club was established in the Launceston area, in December. However, it folded at the end of the year, owing to lack of support.¹² The first orienteering event to be held on the Northwest Coast, was conducted at Hampshire.¹³

Origins of the Schools Competition and mid-week evening events.

In 1973, a move was made at OAT level to encourage schools to become involved in orienteering. School events began to be conducted by teachers who, in most cases, were also

¹⁰ Hogg, D op. cit.

¹¹ Moore, W.

¹² Long, J. Op. cit., p12

¹³ Moore, W.

orienteers. Initially, these events were conducted “outside” the auspices of OAT. They were advertised through personal links between the various teacher/orienteers involved, with results circulated directly to participating schools and not published in the OAT Newsletter. For these reasons it is difficult to pinpoint the date of the first event and who (and which schools) were involved.

Teachers/orienteers involved in the early stages included Alan McCreary, Darryl Smith, Clive Roper, Ken and Ros Walsh, and Jim Laver.

The first Tasmanian Schools Championships were held on 10 October, 1975, and continued to be held every year thereafter.

Programme of Orienteering Events in 1973¹⁴

The Orienteering Association of Tasmania conducted the following programme of events during 1973.

All the maps were black and white only.

Start times on the early events were generally between 12 noon and 2 pm, with course closure at 4 pm.

Only three of the locations have been in use in recent times, due largely to land subdivision over the years and, perhaps, a reluctance to re-use some of the rougher areas.

Organisers of the events are shown in brackets. All events were standard orienteering events, unless specified.

January 7	South Arm	(Organisers: Karen Alexander, Greg Hodge). This event was attended by Swedish orienteer Roland Offrell
February 4	Gunners Quoin	(Stuart Graham, Karen Akexander)
February 25	Broadmarsh	(Ross & Jenny Kelly)
March 18	Summerleas	(Steve Wilson, Greg Hodge)
April 8	Kempton	(Bob & Penny Tyson)
May 27	Colebrook	(North and South reversed!)
July 8	Forcett	(Ross and Jenny Kelly)
July 29	Nugent	(“Farmer Swan’s”)
August 19	Mike’s Hill	New Norfolk
September 9	The Lea	(Ross & Jenny Kelly) Line orienteering event
September 30	Conningham	(Organisers not known)
October 9	Domain	(Organisers not known) Tuesday Night Score event
October 30	Elderslie	(Greg & Sheila Bond?)
November 18	Gunners Quoin	(Organisers not known) Score event
December 9	Leslie Vale	(Steve Wilson)

¹⁴ Kelly, Ross. Op cit. This list of events was gleaned from the newsletters of the Association.

Article by Ross Kelly, Australian Orienteer, 1991.

The following is a copy of a page in the *Australian Orienteer*, written by Ross Kelly in April, 1991. In the article “today” refers to the status quo in 1991. Ross comments that “circumstances were significantly different to today, particularly in regard to participation numbers which were at a fairly low ebb in 1991.” (See paragraph 7.)¹⁵

THE EARLY DAYS OF ORIENTEERING IN TASMANIA

Ross Kelly

It is September 1972. High in the hills above Hobart a small group of individuals is gathered around a battered, orange Morris Minor panel-van. Each is given strange instructions together with a black-and-white photocopy from the Hobart Street Atlas (those of you who've seen Hobart's Street Atlas will realise this is not as odd as it sounds), and disappear into the rugged bushland. The mysterious search begins for elusive orange cloth bands tied around 'something' (tree-trunks if one is lucky) with colour-coded pencils attached.

Eventually, again if one is lucky, the old Morris van is again sighted. Crouched inside the tailgate is Karen Alexander.

So began orienteering in Tasmania. Almost single-handedly, Karen as mapper, course-setter, starter, novice instructor, timekeeper, treasurer, and publicist introduced 'the thought sport' to the Apple Isle.

Slowly orienteering was discovered, firstly from bushwalking circles, shortly followed by the car-&ial fraternity, including nine-times State .Champion rally driver Ray Long. The navigators had a field-day at first, until it became apparent that it was easier for athletes to learn to navigate than for car-bound navigators to become athletes!

The early events were held every three weeks, with Senior, Intermediate and Novice courses of approximately 5,3, and 2 miles offered. No need for age groups! Event fees were 40 cents per head (how's that for inflation compared with today's event fees — which no longer include a drink of 'Refresh' at the finish!)

Maps were basic black-and-white but perfectly navigable (usually...!). Navigational emphasis was very much on contour features, while orienteers were cautioned by the ominous warning 'not all roads, tracks and fences are shown' on the map legend. The legend also stated 'Magnetic declination 13° 30' E', since the grid was true rather than magnetic (now, do we add or subtract ?) One map even had north upside down, but that was the least of anyone 's worries!

March 1973 saw the formation of the Orienteering Association of Tasmania as the State's first 'club' rather than today's role as a State body. Karen Alexander was inaugural Secretary, Ross Kelly President, Greg Hodge Treasurer and Janet Stephens Editor.

Numbers at events reached 130 by July, and 140 attended the first birthday event, back at 'The Lea' Scout Camp, complete with suckling pig roasted by Brenton Wheare. It is interesting that these numbers are seldom exceeded even today (something to do with too much emphasis on training, technical standards and elite competition at the expense of family participation?) Tasmania's presence on the national scene came quickly, with Karen Alexander winning the Women 's Australian Championship at Camp Hawkesbury, NSW in June 1973. Her finishing time of 2h 31 min, with several competitors taking more than 6 hours, says something of the greater challenge of early events.

In those halcyon days, before technical O standards were heard of, some of the courses were pretty rugged, and controls often hard to find. One memorable event in the rocky hills of East Bagdad saw a winning time of 3 hours 23:16 minutes—by Clive Roper, now National Coach.

Navigation on the early events was also a little more difficult due to control numbers not being identified on the clue sheets — the onus was firmly on the competitor to be sure he was at the right control (it wasn't unknown for several similar controls to be placed in close proximity!)

Some lessons were learned the hard way. On one occasion Karen spent countless hours mapping and planning a new course on the outskirts of Launceston, only to find when eventually approaching the landowner that some parts of Tasmania were destined never to become O-courses! Another time, one competitor who even now must remain nameless (my wife would never forgive me!) strayed slightly (!) from the course and found herself having to be ferried back at duskfall 18 miles by road by a sympathetic local!

The first State Championship was held in 1974 at New Norfolk and was won by Peter Shaw (men) and Hilary Cane (women).

1974-5 saw the first OOO competition, closely contested with Clive Roper scoring by a 1-point margin from Peter Shaw, with Jenny Kelly third. This was a uni-sex contest with no age divisions and scoring was on a simple consistency basis (we didn't have computers then).

1975 saw the collapse of the Tasman Bridge, with several 'nearby' courses suddenly becoming 11 hours more distant, depending on which side of the Derwent you lived. Numbers fluctuated more, but still new faces appeared, including some of today's stalwarts such as Sally Morris, and Greg Hawthorne. Also arriving on the scene from Victoria were Tony and Sue Mount, with plenty of new ideas (—which still keep coming!) The other highlight of 1975 was the introduction of ... the toilet tent. While orienteering flourished in the south of the State, early attempts to promote the sport at Launceston and the North West Coast were shortlived, although several events were held in 1975 in the pine forests of the Northwest by the newly formed Burnie Cross Country and Orienteering Club. It is interesting to see that the 19 events in

southern Tasmania in 1975 involved the production of 15 new maps (8 black & white, 6 brown, black & white, and a 5-colour map for the Championships). Also interesting that only four of these locations have been used in recent times. While some are no longer available due to suburban encroachment, many good areas remain unused, apparently because of today's emphasis on five-colour maps. It seems ironic that there is less variety in courses used today than 15 years ago — could this explain falling participation?

By 1976, school minibuses were a regular feature of the scene, and the first Schools Championship was held at Ridgeway - with a large number of participants by today's standards.

1978 was perhaps the heyday in terms of participation, with attendances averaging more than 200, and the sixth birthday event at 'The Lea' attracted 320. 1978 also featured the first two-day event in the Central Highlands at Waddamana in February, still remembered for the number, size and ferocity of the tiger snakes (one even slithered across the master maps!)

Another highlight of 1978 was the first appearance of Christine Watson as W 15 Schools Champion. Christine (now Marshall) has gone on to make a name for herself and the State in national and international competition.

Many other names who put so much into the early days of orienteering have not been mentioned —please accept our apologies your contributions are still remembered.

By 1979, the Association had more than 200 members, and the very active Esk Valley Orienteers had formed in Launceston. With the growth in membership the time had come to change the structure of orienteering, with the O.A.T. to become the State co-ordinating body rather than a club. Three new clubs were formed in Hobart on a basically geographic basis to take over the existing membership. So began the Australopos, UFO (Unidentified Flying Orienteers) and HAVOC (Hills and Valleys Orienteering Club), and so started a new chapter in Tasmania's orienteering history.

THE AUSTRALIAN ORIENTEER April 1991

¹⁵ Kelly, Ross. Op cit.