



The first World Championships in Trail-O convened competitors from 14 countries. Next year the championships are held in Japan.

PHOTO: PIRIO VALANEN

## Trail orienteering comes of age

BY BRIAN PARKER\*)

Take note of the date. Thursday 16 September 2004. That was the day of the first World Championships in Trail Orienteering at Västerås in Sweden. That was the day of one of the most moving ceremonies ever seen in orienteering, when the 'paralympic' class winners stepped onto the rostrum to receive their gold, silver and bronze medals. That was the day that trail orienteering came of age.

Trail orienteering is the last of the four disciplines in orienteering to reach world championship status. The reason is that

it is the version of the sport specially designed for disabled entrants, which means relatively small numbers of participants and it has taken time to spread to sufficient federations to satisfy the minimum number requirements for holding world championships. But it is now there and on its way.

For those who are unfamiliar with trail orienteering a brief description is in order. At the elite level of world championships it requires the highest standards of map reading and terrain recognition. Much the same as in elite foot orienteering, you might say, but

without the running across the terrain. The trail orienteers walk or wheel round the tracks (or trails) from one control to the next. At each control viewing point a number of orienteering markers can be seen, up to five. The competitor has to decide which of the markers, or even none of them, coincides with the centre of the circle on the map and the accompanying description. The competitor is not permitted to leave the track and has to seek out subtle clues in order to solve the problem. Nor can he or she take long about it. At the world championships there were 18 controls on a course of 2.5 km which had to





Ivo Tisljar from Croatia and Antti Rusanen from Finland participated in an open class which is decided over two days of competition.

PHOTO: SAMI SUODENIKI

with tied scores. And that is all there is to it!

That the world championships were tough was self evident. The competitors coming into the finish were physically exhausted and mentally drained. All credit, then, to the medal winners from Norway, Ukraine and the United States. All credit too goes to the organisers, the Swedish Orienteering Federation, who gave the same care and attention to the World Trail Orienteering Championships as to the World Orienteering Championships being held at the same time in and around Västerås. It is fitting that these first world championships in trail orienteering should be held in Sweden, the cradle of traditional orienteering and the lead country in trail orienteering, although they call it 'pre-orienteering', which stands for precision orienteering.

Although trail orienteering focuses on disabled participation, there is an open class which is decided over two days of competition. The medal winners in this class were from Sweden, Sweden and Sweden! A home advantage, you might

say. Possibly so, but much more likely due to the extensive participation that pre-O has in Sweden, with all the practice and skill that ensues.

A third award is made at the world championships and that is for the best 'paralympic' class team. This award went to Great Britain.

These first World Championships in Trail Orienteering were elite in every respect; elite in organisation, elite in course setting, and elite in competitor performance. It sets the standard for others to follow. Next year the championships are held in Japan. From the careful preparation we have witnessed, it will be a worthy successor.

Footnote: The description 'paralympic' is used in preference to other terms but with due deference to the International Paralympic Committee. Trail orienteering is not a Paralympic sport but has aspirations to make application to become one in due course.

\*) Brian Parker (GBR) was the IOF Event Advisor to the World Championships in Trail Orienteering in 2004.

be completed in 2½ hours. But that was not all, in addition there were two timed controls with penalties for getting them wrong or being too slow. The times are used to separate competitors

## Trail orienteering control point

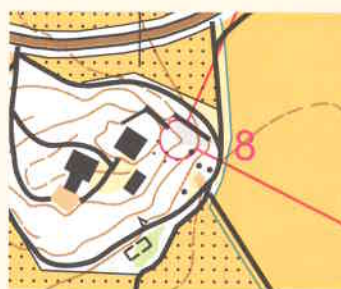


Control descriptions.

The Finnish selection races for the World Trail Orienteering Championships were held at Siuntio.

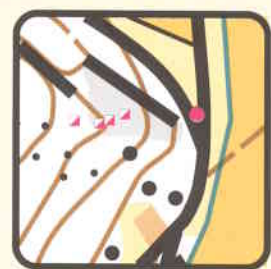


The terrain seen from the viewing point (left) and from a different angle (right).



The map and the correct answer (marker A).

MAP: CLUB HIIDENKIERTÄÄT



8 - A