

ORIENTEERING UPDATE

Australian Orienteering Championships, Tasmania

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Long Distance

The Australian Long Distance Orienteering Championships is the blue ribbon event on the Australian Orienteering calendar. It has been run and won every year since Orienteering was introduced to Australia in 1971. This year the Championships were held outside St Helens in Tasmania and over 800 orienteers turned up to try their hand.

On paper the women's race looked to have assembled the strongest field. Local girl wonder Hanny Alston should have been the big favourite, fresh of her 6th place in the senior World Champs (whilst still being eligible to compete as a junior). But Alston had been having a few problems with an ankle injury and some erratic form, so the race was looking wide open with lots of challengers queuing up to knock Alston off. Swede Anna Danielsson, NSW's Tracy Bluett, and Alston's Tasmanian team-mates Grace Elson and Danielle Winslow looked the most likely to challenge for the title judging from pre race form.

The Australian Championships was held in steep rocky terrain that tested all aspects of an orienteer, running strength, agility in the rough terrain, and most of all lots of fine map reading. Those conditions proved to suit Alston's Orienteering skills perfectly. Despite the pre race talk of it being an open affair, Alston proved it to be a one horse race winning by the impressive winning margin of 5 minutes. After race analysis shows that Alston went out hard and took an early lead, she then made a significant navigational error which handed over the lead to Grace Elson. At the half way point Alston regained her lead, she made one more navigational error later in the course, but her superior running strength in the rough terrain showed, and she extended her lead all the way to the finish. In second place came Alston's Tasmanian team mate Elson, and former Tasmanian Clair Hawthorne rounding out the minor places, making it a great day for the Apple Isle.

The men's race also looked like being a close race on paper with in-form Dane Rune Olsen, New South Welsh men Eric Morris and Robbie Preston, and myself going into the race as the men to beat. Through analysing split times after the race you could see that the race was a close fought battle over the first half with the lead seesawing between Olsen and myself. In the second half of the races I managed to continue to run strong and navigate close to perfectly whilst Olsen faded, and I finished with a comfortable 9 minute victory ahead of Preston and Morris. The victory was very sweet for me as it was my first national title after 20 years of trying, and almost certainly my last as I am retiring from top end competition after this year.

Sprint Distance

The day before the Long Distance Champs, the Sprint Distance Australian Championships were held in the township of St Helens. The race was held in the town a parks and city streets, and suited the orienteer who could make quick decisions, combined with a fast flat running speed. The Sprint Distance Championships is a new championships only been held for the second time this year, it may not have as much tradition as the long distance champs, but it is still a



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Rune Olsen

National Championships and there were a lot of people chasing victory.

As it turned out no Australian managed to win the National Champs! Swede Anna Danielsson, and Dane Rune Olsen both took close victories. Danielsson had a stable start to her race and was posting times just behind the leaders for the first half, at the 8 minute mark of the race she took a small lead and held it all the way to the finish. Early race leader Grace Elson took second place 4 seconds down on Danielsson, a further 2 seconds back was Tracy Bluett of NSW.

In the men's race Olsen went out hard, and opened up a 10 second lead at the 2minute mark. He held his advantage through the entire race, the Dane tired a little over the closing stages but held on to win by 3 seconds. Second place ended up being shared by Eric Morris and myself, both recording a time in the same second.