

Venla Relay 2019 – Kangasala Finland

I was very excited to be asked by friends from SMOC to join their Venla relay team. I'd competed in this fantastic event for the first time in 2018, but this time I'd be on first leg meaning I would be in the mass start of over 1700 women.

A fly past by a military jet and a gun blast signalled the start and a 1km run to the start kite. This part felt more like a running than an orienteering race as most competitors chose not to look at their maps until they were near the start kite.

To split everyone up, the first two controls were gaffled with three possibilities for each and there were also route choices. You had to really concentrate on your map and not be influenced by the hundreds of people around you. I chose the safe route via a path and aiming off a bend into the forest to get to my first control. Then a couple of

compass bearings and paying attention to the landscape features saw me safely to control 2 and then 3, which was a common control for all competitors and the first TV control. Not

somewhere to be caught loitering and studying your map!

Leg 3 – 4 was the first long one and having taken a rough bearing I joined a train of runners following one of the freshly made elephant tracks. The terrain for the first three controls had been through undulating and fairly runnable woodland, but the majority of leg 3 – 4 was green on the map and stepping out of the elephant track would take you into very slow going so the train was definitely the quicker option. However, as the train slowed and split near a control, I realised it wasn't mine. I knew from the previous year (you receive an all controls map at the end of the event as well as your own map) that the different gaffles would not be too far from each other, but in quite dense forest 200 metres can seem a long way! Having worked out approximately where I was, I set off towards the control, but then allowed myself to be sucked towards a group of 30 women who it turned out were all looking for the same point. My Finnish does not go beyond 'kiitos' (thank you) but their English was excellent! Descending on control 4 together was not a problem as each point had a triangular wooden trestle with at least 12 punching points.

Controls 5 and 6 were straight forward and then there was another long leg from 7 - 8. This time I decided not to join the train for the whole leg and picked my own route away from the pink line which again went through green forest and very rough open. When I looked at this leg after the event I was pleased that it was the same as that taken by a couple of the quickest elite runners, but I was disappointed at how slow I was over the ground. I only saw one other person on the whole leg as nearly everyone had opted for the elephant track following the pink line and I don't think this helped me keep pushing on.

The last three controls were straight forward and then it was a downhill run into the arena to hand over to Debbie from SMOC. If you would like to read about the event from their perspective see the [news section of the SMOC website](#). We finished 1589th.

