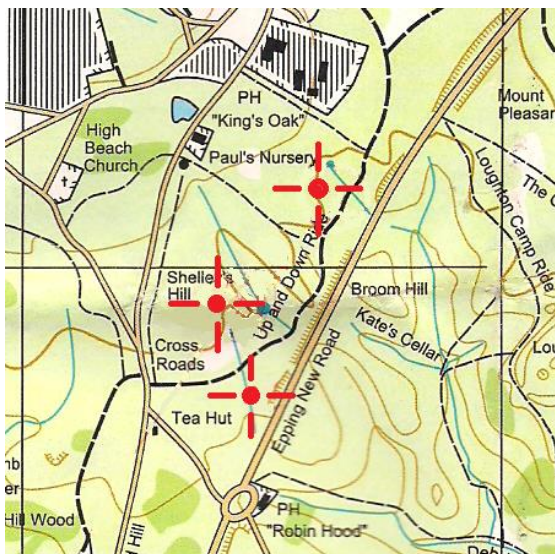


## Rodings Rally

By Neil Rosewell

It's about one o'clock on Sunday morning, and a lone figure stands in the forest as Storm Angus, the first named storm of the season, rages around him. All he can see in the light of his headtorch is the rain blowing in his face and the wet vegetation of the bracken, holly and trees, but no sign of the checkpoint he is trying to find. He looks down to check the map and compass yet again. He is beginning to shiver, and asks himself what he is doing here.

To answer that question we need to go back a little over 24 hours to Friday evening. Our friend is sitting at home, watching TV and talking to his wife about their plans for the weekend. "We've been invited to Stella's on Sunday. You can meet their new puppy," his wife says. "Oh, and Neil Carter has sent me a message on Facebook." "This is a bit last minute, but I wondered if you or Neil would like to join our Rodings Rally team Saturday night at 21:04 in Epping Forest. We have Chris Panton, Duncan Harrison and me. But would really appreciate a 4th person!! We normally take just over 4 hours. Not sure how you're fixed for tomorrow?" read the message. Many more messages followed revealing more details of the Rodings Rally, but ended up with our friend replying "Go on then, I'll join you."



*Checkpoint 3, but which is "above the start of the rollercoaster"?*

Rodings Rally isn't your normal orienteering event, not even a normal night orienteering event. It's an annual night navigation exercise organised by the Epping Forest Outdoor Group consisting of ten checkpoints, including the finish. Each team of between two and four gets a 1:20,000 map before the event, but only get given the checkpoint co-ordinates at the start, but with a twist. Not only do you need to plot the checkpoint locations, but you also need to decipher the clues to know which of the three co-ordinates indicates the correct location. So, if you can't find the checkpoint, is it your navigation that's wrong or have you gone to the wrong location?

Only thirty minutes before we first met our friend shivering in the storm things were a lot different. The SUFFOC team had just found checkpoint eight with little problem just ahead of the team from South London Orienteers, who had started eight minutes before them. Despite the storm, they were feeling good; a clean run through checkpoint nine could see them retaining the trophy and finishing in under four hours. But that's not quite how it worked out.

So, back to our friend alone in the forest, who is now joined by his three teammates. After a short conflag, a new plan is agreed. Relocate back to the track junction and attack from the east rather than the south. Off they run, spreading out to sweep through the forest yet again. This time, success. The checkpoint tent found and the route card signed, the two strongest runners head off through the forest, back to the road and head for the finish – only two members of the team need to be at the finish for the time to count. Their teammates, their legs tired and cramping, head home at a more leisurely pace. But how much time has been lost and how far behind South London are they?

Despite South London also having problems finding the last checkpoint, it's clear they didn't have as much trouble as SUFFOC. South London finished in 4 hours 17 minutes, SUFFOC in 4 hours 35 minutes. Twenty-six minutes lost on the last checkpoint, but an amusing GPS trace on Strava!

