

Australia mapping visit report (20 Sept – 5 Oct 2020)

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How it all started

In my work on the IOF Map Commission (MC), I have collaborated extensively with Australian MC member Adrian Uppill in the development of map specifications in several areas. It was from him that I first heard about the invitation to Australia in mid-2019. I enthusiastically agreed, as Australian terrain has always had a good reputation in Europe and the maps full of rocks and stones looked beautiful. Subsequently, I was also officially contacted about the visit by the main organiser of the event, Noel Schoknecht. The plan was for me to come to Australia in autumn 2020, as a non-Australian mapper, orienteer and MC member to assess the quality of Australian maps, give an update on IOF MC activities at a mapping meeting and attend the Australian Championships. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has postponed this trip until 2022.

Overall trip organization

Overall, the event was very well organized, with no unnecessary delays. The first 8 days included visits to a number of terrains and existing maps in Victoria, mainly post-gold mining areas or areas with granite presence. This was followed by a mapping meeting and participation in the Australian Championship competitions, where we always did a map walk after the competition. A number of accommodation arrangements were made with orienteers/mappers throughout the event. We had printed maps for each visit and concentrated on the complex parts of the terrain as they were mapped. I then produced a short report describing the strengths and weaknesses of each map, with an attempt to say how it could have been done better. This information was then translated into a presentation and, along with a range of other information, was presented at the mapping meeting on 29 September in Woodend. The report was subsequently supplemented with map evaluations from the Australian Championship events that took place after the mapping meeting and should be available on the Orienteering Australia mapping pages.

General comments to maps and mapping in Australia

The main issues that were identified in the field, in studying maps or in talking to mappers include the following:

- Reduction in the size of map symbols on some maps, where there was no reason for this reduction (e.g. using 1:15 000 symbols for 1:10 000 scale). This problem mainly concerned some older maps from post-gold mining areas. Of the maps I visited, with one exception (Rowdy Flat), all can be mapped within the rules given by ISOM 2017-2.
- A number of features have been mapped in detail on some of the maps, but these are difficult to identify due to the general broken nature of the terrain from the mining (for example, some parts of Petticoat Gully). It is necessary not to overpopulate the map with too small objects and to draw the objects appropriately. This should result in a more legible map where objects can be easily identified in the terrain by both the course setter and the competitor.
- Rowdy Flat is an extreme case of terrain that is very difficult to generalize, as almost all objects are very large and distinctive. Omitting some of the objects would destroy the overall situation and the competitors would lose their orientation. The solution seems to be to map this terrain using the ISSprOM 2019-2 specification.

- It has been observed that the 104 Earth bank map symbol is overused in post-gold mining areas, with the slope being easily traversed. This type of drawing may influence the competitor's route choice. I would recommend saving this map symbol for situations where the slope is actually broken off and slowing the competitor down while climbing it.
- The mapping of granite terrain is, in my opinion, well done and the method of feature classification is well described for other mappers in the document Mapping of Rock Features in Australian Granite. Overall, the quality of such maps in Victoria is high.
- There is no point in revising old maps, as the base maps used in the past contains many distortions. If Lidar is available, it is advisable to carry out new mapping. In fact, the time spent correcting errors in the old map is often equal to the time spent in creating a new map on an accurate base map.
- Interviews with mapmakers revealed that work on maps is very poorly paid and often does not reach the minimum wage. The age structure of active mappers is also not very favourable. This is one of the main problems that should be addressed at federation and club level. Mapping is a time and physically demanding job and should be properly paid, this is especially true for the main events of the season. In fact, the enthusiasm of individuals for mapping is often quickly exhausted due to the complexity of the projects. The impossibility of earning a living wage means a very small number of mappers and, for younger mappers in particular, a lack of interest.
- Increased efforts should be made to organize mapping clinics for novice mappers, ideally every year. One recommendation is to start with mapping and drawing sprint maps and only then focus on mapping in the forest. The length of this clinic should be a minimum of two days under the guidance of several experienced mappers. A draft program was given to Noel Schoknecht.

Outputs for the IOF Map Commission

The event led mainly to an understanding of the use of map symbols and to an understanding of the problems faced by local mappers. However, the design of a new map symbols for a dangerous pit that can be used to capture vertical shafts can be considered as one of the main outcomes. The aim is to allow the course setter and the competitor to easily identify dangerous areas and thus increase the safety of the competitors. The exact appearance of the symbol has not yet been fully determined and will be subject of discussion by the MC. Suggestions were also received for adjusting the parameters of some map symbols in the future to make them more easily recognizable.

Conclusions

Mapping as a whole is of a good standard in Australia, the easy to read maps from the last championship are proof of that. There are some partial quality problems with some of the older maps, but these can be expected to disappear with the new version of the map if the rules set out in the map specifications are followed. Education of new mappers and working conditions should be the main issues that the Australian Federation should address in my opinion.

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