

Thierry Gueorgiou winning the long distance at the World Championship.  
Photo: Malin Björkqvist



## World Championships in Scotland

Text: Clive Allen

The World Championships in northern Scotland with Event Centre in Inverness were of course the pinnacle of the 2015 Foot Orienteering season. Very well organised they were too, with plenty of variety in terrain and course style. There were some fine arena settings, that for the Middle Distance and Relay in front of the imposing Darnaway Castle (the same field as that used in 1976!) being the most spectacular.

The Championships were broadcast on TV live in several countries and as a highlights programme in several others. Record numbers watched the races on web-TV via IOF LiveCenter. The open race programme – the Scottish 6-Days Event run alongside the Championships – attracted more than 6,000 participants, and this event along with WOC added an estimated £9.5 million to the Scottish economy.

### WOC individual finals

The small town of Forres, renowned for colourful summer flower displays in its streets and parks, hosted the individual Sprint Final. Maja Alm of Denmark was the favourite in the women's race after both Tove Alexandersson

and Judith Wyder were forced to miss the race because of injury. And she duly took the gold medal, almost 40 seconds faster than silver medallist Nadiya Volynska from Ukraine, with the bronze going to the Russian Galina Vinogradova. The men's race was closer, Jonas Andersson of Sweden being just 1.9 seconds quicker than Martin Hubmann, Switzerland, with Jerker Lysell, also Sweden taking the bronze.

The Middle Distance races were both close affairs, won by the Swede Annika Billstam and Daniel Hubmann. Annika at the age of 39 retained the Middle title she won in 2014, and this was her third WOC gold; all her international successes have come within the last 7 years. Silver went to the Finn Merja Rantanen and bronze to Sweden's Emma Johansson. Daniel Hubmann was 3 seconds quicker than the fast improving Lucas Basset, France and Olle Bostrom, Sweden was bronze medallist.

Classic Scottish forested and open highland terrain with almost no paths was the scene for the Long Distance races, with the arena down in the lovely Glen Affric valley. Strength, sure-footedness and top-class navigational ability were essential for success; young Ida Bobach, Denmark and the maestro Thierry Gueorgiou, France were the two

athletes who proved themselves able to cope better than anyone else. Ida Bobach won as a result of immense consistency on the almost 10 km course, taking the best route choices throughout whilst other faster athletes made significant mistakes. Mari Fasting, Norway was 2.44 slower in silver medal position, and the bronze went to the 2014 winner, Svetlana Mironova, Russia.

Thierry Gueorgiou retained his title and has now won the Long race three years in succession, and four of the last five. A few years ago he was known as 'king of Middle Distance' but now that has changed! A superb technician and immaculate in his preparation, he beat arch-rival Daniel Hubmann by 25 seconds, with another of his regular rivals, Olav Lundanes of Norway, third. These three athletes have between them won all the Long Distance titles since 2008.

### WOC Relays: Denmark, Denmark again and Switzerland

The first race in the finals programme was the Sprint Relay in and around the small coastal town of Nairn, and here the Danish team set out their stall from the very start with a very strong run by Emma Klingenberg to lead after the first leg. Tue Lassen and Søren Bobach



both had good runs to maintain Denmark's position in the leading group, but it was Maja Alm who starred with her superior speed and spot-on navigation to bring the first gold medals of the week to Denmark. Norway took the silver and Russia the bronze medals.

A forest adjacent to that used for the Middle Distance but very different in character was provided for the forest Relays. Fast and direct running was the order of the day and the Danish women's team of Alm, Bobach and Klingenberg didn't falter, finishing more than 3 minutes ahead of Norway, with Sweden in bronze medal position. Favourites for the men's title were Switzerland, and they lived up to this billing; Fabian Hertner, Daniel Hubmann and Matthias Kyburz were 1.50 ahead of Norway at the finish with France in third place. It was here that the host nation came closest to winning a medal: the British men's team finished fourth.

### A World Cup of contrasts

The FootO season started early in January with three fine-quality World Cup races held in Tasmania, Australia; the Middle Distance courses at Coles Bay in particular received much praise. Tove Alexandersson beat everyone in Sprint, Middle and Long formats, while Matthias Kyburz won Sprint and Long with Daniel Hubmann taking the Middle and two second-placings.

The second round in Norway and Sweden in June was reduced to two races after punching problems in the Sprint. Ida Bobach and Matthias Kyburz won the Long Distance races in Norway, and home athlete Helena Jansson along with Thierry Gueorgiou were victorious over Middle Distance in Sweden.

The WOC finals counted as always for World Cup points, and then the World Cup Final was held as usual in Switzerland at the beginning of October. Here Daniel Hubmann won both races and the women's honours went to Anne Margrethe Hausken Nordberg, Norway (Long) and Catherine Taylor, Great Britain (Middle).

Second and third in the women's final standings were Sara Luescher, Switzerland and Nadiya Volynska, Ukraine, with Ida Bobach one point behind Volynska in fourth place. Olav Lundanes, Norway was the best of those challenging the dominance of Hubmann and Kyburz in the men's list, closely followed by Sweden's Gustav Bergman.

The Sprint Relay World Cup comprised three races. The first in Norway was won by Sweden, the second was the WOC Sprint Relay won by Denmark, and the third was in the final World Cup round in Switzerland and was won by the host country. The overall results



Ida Bobach. Photo: Malin Björkqvist

were very close, with Denmark overall winners followed by Switzerland and Sweden.

### Juniors and Veterans have World Championships too

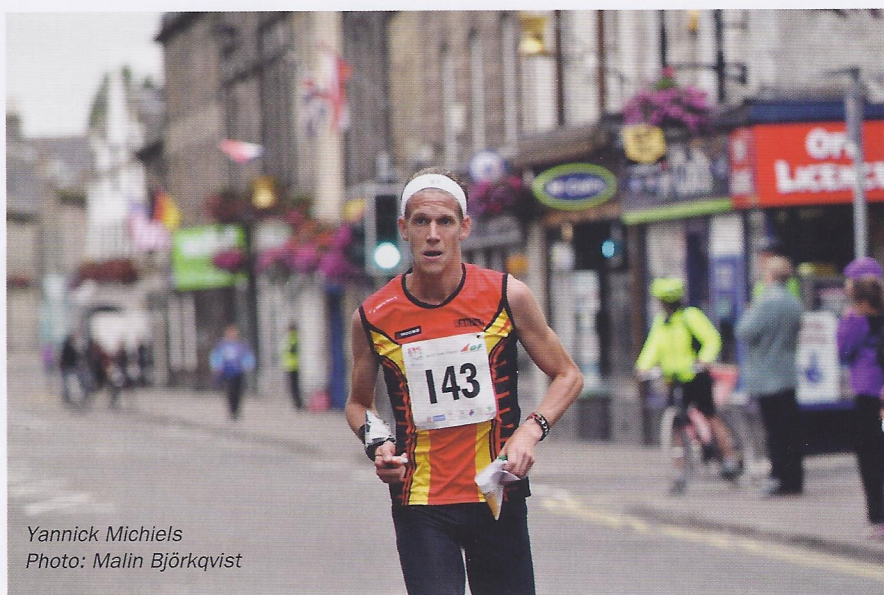
This year's Junior World Orienteering Championships was held in excellent weather in July in the mountain resort of Rauland in Norway. Most successful competitor was Olli Ojanaho, Finland with two individual gold medals and a Relay gold medal. Tim Robertson, New Zealand was winner of the Sprint for the second year in succession. Sweden and Finland won the women's and men's Relays respectively.

The World Masters Orienteering Championships took place in and around Göteborg, Sweden. Well-known past elite orienteers Simone Niggli, Switzerland and Jörgen Mårtensson, Sweden won their classes in both Sprint and Long Distance by big margins. The oldest competitors, Astrid Andersson in W90 and Rune Haraldsson in M95, were both on home

soil. The standard of competition was very high and some races were won with tight margins; Peo Bengtsson in M80 won his Sprint Final by 1 second!

### Unlucky Yannick Michiels

Unluckiest competitor in 2015? In my book that is Yannick Michiels of Belgium, a very much up-and-coming Sprint star. He had the fastest time in the World Cup Sprint in Sweden, but the race was voided and so the victory didn't count for anything. Then, going well towards the end of the WOC individual Sprint, he collided heavily with a fence he was trying to jump and lost several crucial seconds in time. He finished in fifth place, 4 seconds outside medal-winning time. He will be looking forward to better luck in 2016, where the high spots of the season will be the European Championships in the Czech Republic in late May and the World Championships in Sweden in late August.



Yannick Michiels  
Photo: Malin Björkqvist