

6th BeiDou Orienteering Week, China

by Nick Pullen NOR & Mark Burley MDOC



Nick Pullen.

Historically, it has been difficult for foreigners to orienteer in China. In fact, unless you are selected to run for your country, it can be very tricky. So when Jack Kosky SO mentioned the first-time opportunity to Mark, he was intrigued. The BeiDou ('Big Dipper' in Chinese) Orienteering Week is a unique multiday event, the biggest and most prestigious in China, which in the past has always been open to Chinese nationals only. This year, Austrian international Erik Simkovics had worked with the Event Organisers to make the event accessible to Westerners for the first time.

It was an all-inclusive package; therefore we would be accommodated, fed, transported and able to race at every event without having to worry about anything or needing to know any Chinese - there would be translators available. Guangdong province in Southern China was home to this sixth running of the competition.

The next step was for Mark to get in touch with Nick Pullen NOR [who has a Chinese wife] and let him know about it. In the end, Jack could not make it, but Nick could, and so Mark didn't need to worry about travelling halfway across the world without anyone he knew. We were committed - it was visa time. Thankfully Manchester is one of the four UK cities where you can pick up a Chinese visa (category 'M' - 'Competition', no less) and so despite the byzantine application system, the process was relatively straightforward. In the end, there were just 12 of us who took the plunge from 'the West' - along with the 360 Chinese pre-entrants. It was a diverse dozen in the

tour group: Erik, his parents, some other Austrians, three French, an Australian elite (Paul), Mark & Nick.

So what was the cost? The package was 799 euros (which included almost everything: Event + Accom + Travel in China [excl. flights] + Food). The visa was £150. Flights were £580 return. Approx. £1436 in total.

There were nine events over the eight competition days - two long distance, two middle distance, four sprints, and one night-sprint-score. The first half was based in Longchuan, around three hours North-East of Guangzhou; then the second four days were based in Zhaoqing; an hour to the West of Guangzhou.

Longchuan doesn't have much to write home about. Those for whom it was the first time in China were amazed by the giant supermarket, or super-cheap shopping mall, but nothing of note appeared to happen in the City. We were stared at quite often, by adults and children alike, so we concluded they don't have many Western visitors, and frankly we understood why. Zhaoqing was a much nicer city, probably receiving more tourists on daytrips from Guangzhou due to its Lake, which has mountainous islands in it and therefore amazing scenery. The weather in Southern China



Erik Simkovics in action and group leader of the Europeans.

at this time of year is mild in general but because we had to leave so early every day (0630 alarms!) it was normally rather chilly when we arrived at the events. In the afternoons it was more pleasant, even above 20°C occasionally.

Despite everything being taken care of for us, we had been told we would need to be adaptable. Indeed, flexibility was the name of the game as many things seemed to change or be arranged (or rearranged!) on the day itself. In stark contrast to your normal UK or European multi-day event, the Chinese participants were mostly University students or young children. There were approximately 350 competitors in total, and because we

were all there at the same time due to the mass transportation, including the students who were involved in setting up the day's event, it created a really nice and relaxed atmosphere. They used a kind of SI system but without having to insert the dibber into the hole - just tap it on top of the unit. It was exactly what you would expect if you gave an engineer an SI box and said "reverse-engineer this"! We were also given a GPS tracker for the week, half the size of a matchbox and not particularly ergonomic, with the idea we could all watch our traces back afterwards à la RouteGadget. When this worked it was very nice of course, but it seemed rather hit-and-miss so didn't get quite live up to its potential.

After every race we were taken to lunch in a large restaurant, barn or (once) outside some kind of government communist facility and received generally very similar food each day. We also had pretty much identical things every dinner as well. A soup, rice, a fish dish, a variety of vegetable dishes, sometimes tofu dishes, and the occasional surprise. This was amazing at the beginning of the week, but became a bit samey rather quickly (Mark would have killed for a pizza by the end of the first week), but it was amazing how they found some of these food venues in seemingly remote areas for the 70 or so adults/children who seemed to make up our part of the touring party (always in the same hotels, same coaches, eating at the same restaurants, etc.). The groups of schoolkids were all exceedingly well behaved considering their ages and the adult/child ratios!

Another different aspect from the UK was how well they did media, i.e. photos and videos. Each day, post-event they uploaded hundreds of photos and made a video of highlights including drone panoramas and footage from cameramen following runners through the terrain. This was really a great aspect to show-off what we got up to! As a video must be worth a million words, here's a direct link to the overall highlights video:

<https://youtu.be/QKuEG2OUF24>

We have looked at 4 of the 9 races here in more detail. Days 3, 4 & the 2 races on Day 6.

Day3 - Long at HuoShan

NP (Nick Pullen): This was probably my second most looked-forward-to day as I'd Googled some photos of the mountain

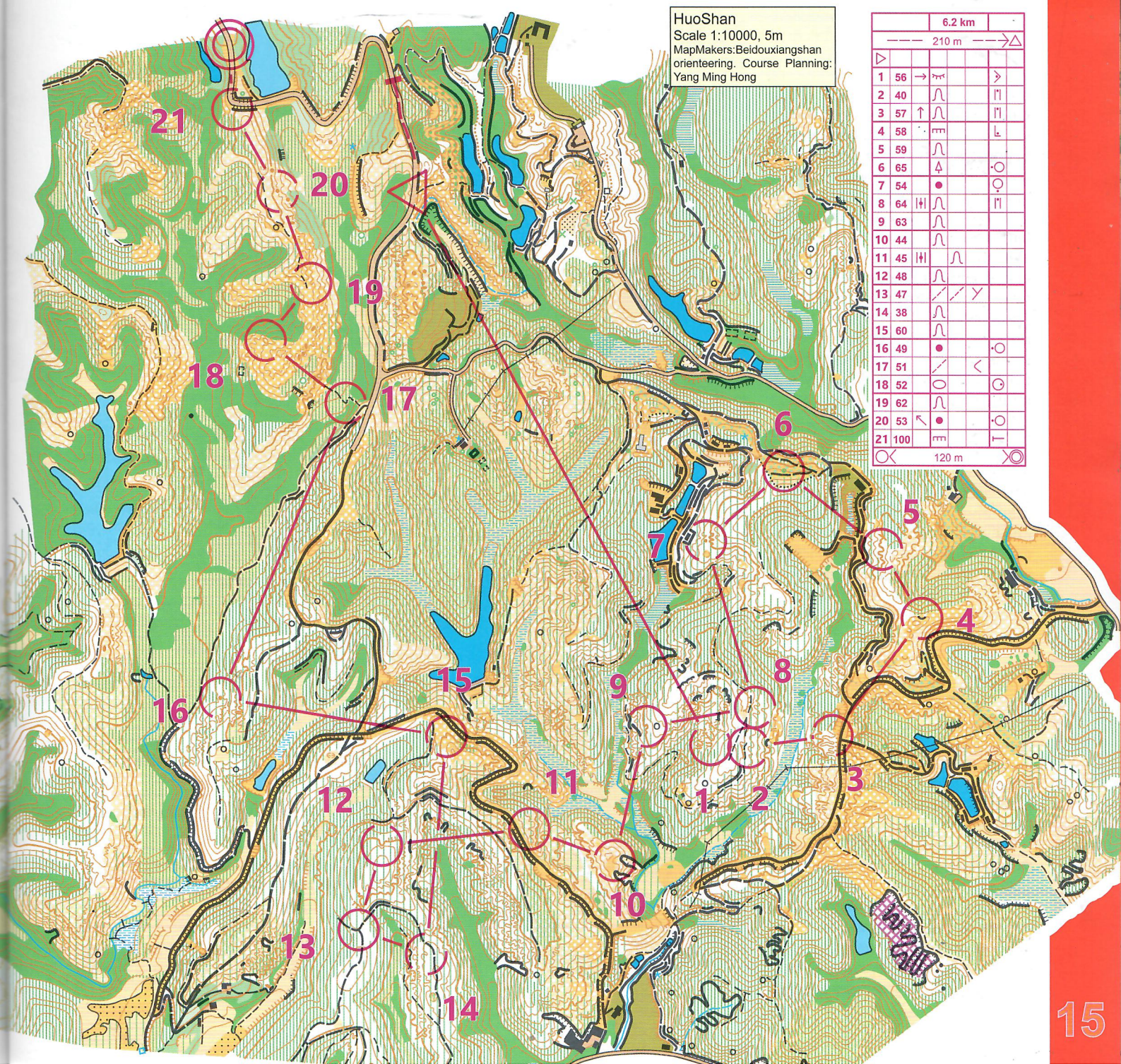
and was hoping we'd see it. It turned out better than that as we had a great sight of it walking from the coach stop to the start and from some high points on the course. I was already a little tired due to my lack of fitness and then the course was brutal, or at least the vegetation was. Unless you were right on top of the ridges or on an actual path it was mostly fighting through undergrowth up or down very steep banks. Maybe jungle was more appropriate at times so pretty unpleasant to be honest. Took me 92 mins for a 6.2k course yet ended up 16th. Beat Mark by two mins; 2-1 in the race standings. Skipping lunch due to time constraints, we went to walk around the mountain afterwards. Definitely worthwhile with great views over the region. It also had a glass walkway - not for the faint-hearted! - but we braved it.

MB (Mark Burley): Lovely day, a little warm for running though, and awesome to be in a spectacular national park. Great views of the mountains all around, and some massive rocky mounds in the background. Was expecting rough forest and was not disappointed!

All the days so far have had a long leg to #1 and this trend continued. Wanted to take as much of a track route as possible for as long as possible. Did this fine, but then when I'd planned to leave the track there was just a wall of vertical jungle. I tried, but decided it was a bad route and decided to find a better way. Wish I'd have stuck with it...went further round the hillside on a vague trod and found somewhere else which looked possible, but it turned out to be even worse and had to turn around. Contoured a bit more but was getting critical now, so had to

find somewhere probably equally as bad as the first place. Eventually got up and relocated on #9. At the time I thought this was great! Only 150m from #1.

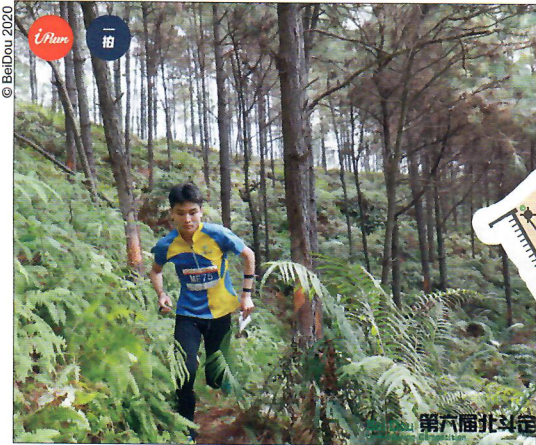
Unfortunately, there was a massive, steep, jungle-filled re-entrant in the way. I could now see the control, but not get to it. Tried to contour and lose height but it was crazily slow and dangerous. After a few false starts, eventually I worked my way down and up the other side, but it was probably 10 mins since I had first set eyes on the control! Crazy. So not a great start. Next three controls all good. Then on #5, I contoured around rather than over the hill, which is fine on the map, but again resulted in exactly the same situation where I could see the control but not get to it, and lost another few minutes watching people 20m above me have no trouble



HuoShan
Scale 1:10000, 5m
MapMakers:Beidouxiangshan
orienteering. Course Planning:
Yang Ming Hong

		6.2 km	
		--- 210 m --->>>	
▷			
1	56 →	↖	▷
2	40	↘	Π
3	57 ↑	↖	Π
4	58 ↘	↖	⊥
5	59 ↘	↖	
6	65 ↘	△	○
7	54	●	♀
8	64	⊥	Π
9	63 ↘	↖	
10	44 ↘	↖	
11	45	⊥	↘
12	48 ↘	↖	
13	47 ↘	↖	∇
14	38 ↘	↖	
15	60 ↘	↖	
16	49	●	○
17	51 ↘	↖	<
18	52	○	○
19	62 ↘	↖	
20	53 ↘	●	○
21	100	↖	⊥

○ 120 m ○



Forest terrain looking not unlike what the UK has to offer.

at all whilst I was stuck in jungle. Annoying. Then good #6, and #7, learnt from experience and went over the top; no issues. #8 first mistake that I class as being 'my fault' (haha!), mistook path junction for path bend (photographer; gr) and looked in the wrong re-entrant for a few mins. Then fine to #9, but to #10 had to slide down an uncrossable crag and lost a few more mins. Then overtook by China team #1 who ran up a hill I'd just decided was impossibly steep and green - so followed his lead. Followed him to #11 too but he made a mistake dammit, but he relocated fast. The next few controls to #18 all went well and was feeling good (and glad it was nearly over). But #19 time for one last mistake, misread contours (hard to see on scattered trees...) and thought I had to be much lower, rather than on the ridgeline. So turned a very easy control into another 5-minute loss...sigh.

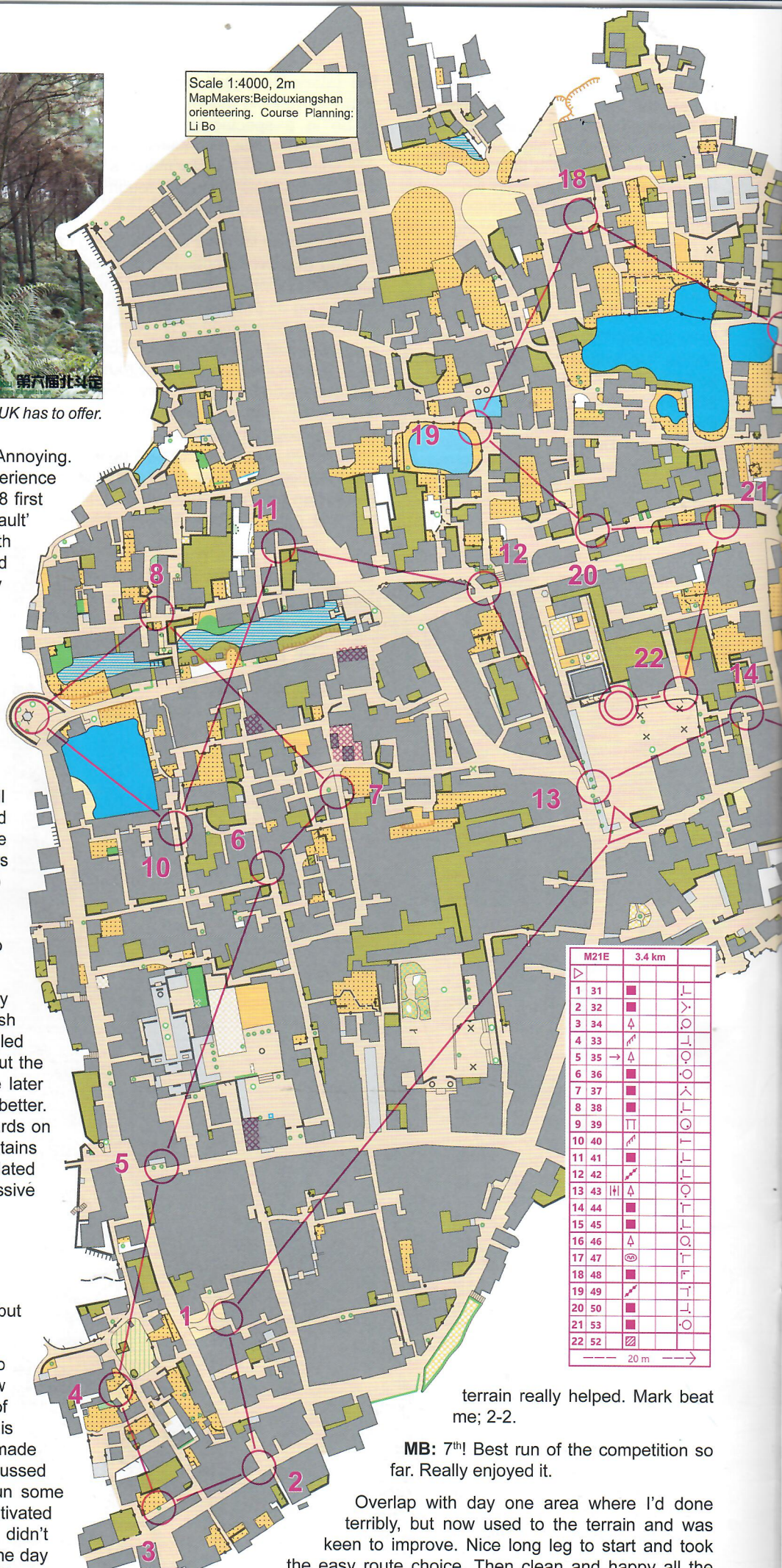
So - a terrible run. 18th, but only 42 finished and there were 20ish retirements, so at least others struggled too... Couldn't have done much about the map ones near the start but all the later ones were annoying; I know I can do better. On the plus side, great time afterwards on vertiginous walkways in the mountains including one made of glass. Hated every minute at the time! But massive adrenaline rush.

Day 4 - Sprint.

We returned to the town of Day 1 but with a new part added to the map.

NP: We had learnt from Day 1 to avoid the chickens and mopeds, low hanging wires and random piles of rubble. I was really feeling tired this day however, had no speed and made lots of little mistakes. We'd discussed after day 1 a lot and decided to run some interesting route choices across cultivated land i.e. the locals' vegetable plots. I didn't rate the performance highly but on the day I was 24th, so I guess familiarity with the

Scale 1:4000, 2m
MapMakers:Beidouxiangshan
orienteeering. Course Planning:
Li Bo



M21E	3.4 km
1 31	■
2 32	■
3 34	△
4 33	▲
5 35	→ △
6 36	■
7 37	■
8 38	■
9 39	□
10 40	▲
11 41	■
12 42	▲
13 43	△
14 44	■
15 45	■
16 46	△
17 47	⊙
18 48	■
19 49	▲
20 50	■
21 53	○
22 52	■

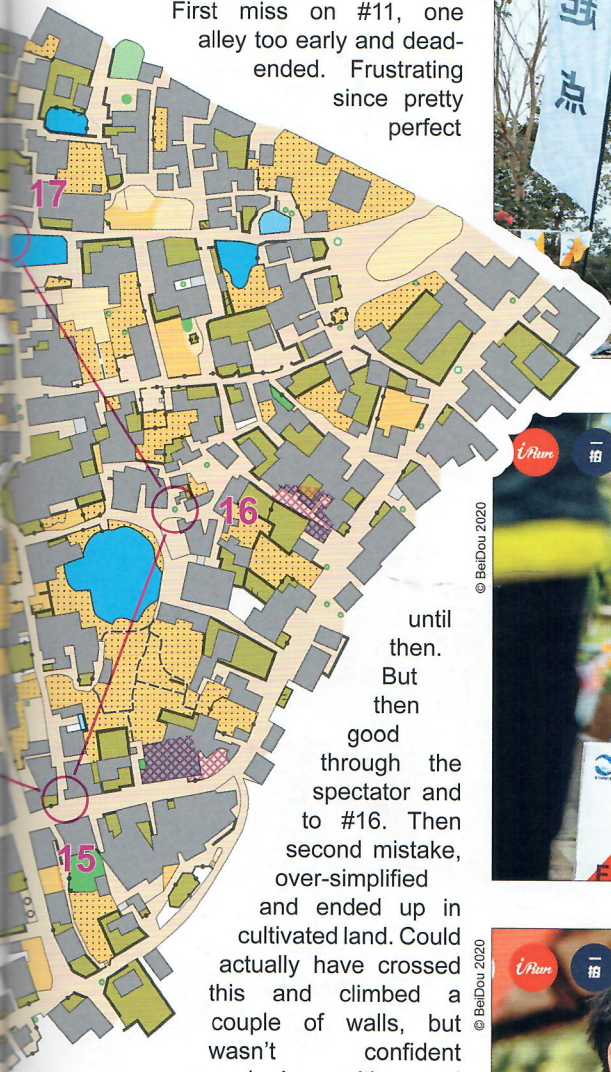
terrain really helped. Mark beat me; 2-2.

MB: 7th! Best run of the competition so far. Really enjoyed it.

Overlap with day one area where I'd done terribly, but now used to the terrain and was keen to improve. Nice long leg to start and took the easy route choice. Then clean and happy all the

way to #10, even the bit that felt very much like running through someone's house.

First miss on #11, one alley too early and dead-ended. Frustrating since pretty perfect



until then. But then good through the spectator and to #16. Then second mistake, over-simplified and ended up in cultivated land. Could actually have crossed this and climbed a couple of walls, but wasn't confident enough in position and instead retraced my steps. Should have planned route out of control better - still a complex area so needed more thought than the vague plan I had.

Safe route to #18 which was slower, but happy with choice. Then fine to the end.

Really pleased to have done this well vs. the Chinese on terrain they're really good at! Only two mins down on them and Erik, and these are world class guys. So very happy with performance today. Think I could have been maybe 4th with no mistakes, so running pretty well too.

Day 6a - Sprint on Yanzhou Island.

Firstly, we had to get a ferry across the Xi River to even get to the island; pretty cool. On it were a few villages; with dense, little buildings partly abandoned; or fields and banana plantations. This made for an exceptional sprint race



Mark starting a forest day.



Nick finishing.



Nick and Mark involved in some post race analysis.



Packed lunch with maps.

NP: I could summarise this by saying I made over 1:30 of mistakes just in the bananas but finished 8th for my best result of the week. Not often you have such an amount of errors on a sprint and rank so well. I felt really in tune with the map even though I occasionally went one building too far or the like. The fact I was so sore and not able to run fast I'm sure helped, but with all the twists and turns and requirement for concentration, no-one could run very fast. Before the bananas I was only 30s behind Erik Simkovic's AUT, the real elite. Things went a bit pear-shaped in the bananas as I had forgotten to take my compass out my pocket, which took some time, then scrambled through some dark green, then didn't get my bearing right and ended up way-off. Still I managed not to completely lose hope and because the bananas were actually rather runnable in any direction, I resolved that section in the end before another loop in the village. My time was 23:32, two minutes off the podium, which I don't think has ever happened before so a nice result for me. I concluded the Chinese around my place in the overall standings were also not so good on super-technical sprint areas. My favourite day and just the sort of terrain I was hoping to run on in China. 45s ahead of Mark; 3-3.

MB: Best sprint area I have run on, ever - incredible. Semi-abandoned village on an island, coupled with areas of banana plantation.

Two-handed map reading at its best. Deliberately really slow and careful, so not many mistakes. One alley too early for #5 (despite the care!) and one error in the bananas, caught by someone or caught them and the pressure put me off my bearing. Otherwise didn't do a lot wrong - 9th. Such good fun! Basically worth coming to China for that one area.

Day 6b - Night race

NP: This was a late addition to the program so I was without headtorch and we didn't even find a little one in a shop. The arena was a performance area preparing for Chinese New Year with a huge stage and TV screen that they showed some of the O videos on - surely the largest image of myself I'll ever see! The format was a score event in the park on the lake near to our hotel. I'd walked around in the afternoon to check it out a little and it's actually quite nice. We were told we had 30 minutes for the score with the last control 100 points out

of a max of 217. Apparently, all info would be on the map! Start was advertised as 6pm when it was still light enough but we didn't actually go till 6:20 and there the night closes very quickly so by half past it was dark. The park had quite a few streetlights etc. so I wasn't too worried. A Chinese guy had strapped a strip light to his head to use - very funny. The mass-start was pretty incredible - presumably a smaller version of what happens at Jukola. The race was super-fast despite my soreness, as my tactics were to go past the bunched fighting (no touch-free punching) at the start and get these controls on the way back

one. Still it was good fun and very different.

MB: Fun but laughably bad performance. After a very brisk 3k walk

Yanzhou Island
Scale 1:4000, 2m
MapMakers: Beidouxiangshan
orienteering. Course Planning:
BlackLiang long sheng



		2.7 km	20 m
▷	S1	△	△
1	31	△	○
2	32	△	○
3	33	△	○
4	34	■	○
5	35	■	○
6	36	■	○
7	37	↓	△
8	38	△	○
9	39	△	○
10	40	←	△
11	41	△	○
12	42	△	○
13	43	⊥	△
14	44	△	○
15	45	⊥	△
16	46	△	○
17	47	△	○
18	48	△	○
19	49	△	○
20	50	△	○
21	51	△	○
22	52	△	○
23	53	△	○
24	100	△	○

up as we had no idea when start would be and so had to be ready...

Anyway; 30 min score. Expected that it wouldn't be possible to clear, but it was, trivially. Started with the pack but made the ridiculous mistake of going to the same first control as 200 other people; thought I'd punched but no idea really and so decided to

come back later - but leaders were long gone now. Far better to always ignore controls near the start in events like this!

The main problem was not remembering which controls I'd been too - 29 controls in a very small area. Elected to do the top loop the opposite way around to lose the pack. Missed a control so decided to come back to it later. All pretty straightforward and was running well. Punched quite a

depending on time. I was overtaken by faster guys inevitably and rarely looked at my map, but given we'd got over half the controls in about seven/eight minutes, clearly time was not going to matter. I just tried to get all of them and get back to the finish ASAP. Some lack of awareness of where all the controls were meant to be, I crossed back and forth unnecessarily in a few places. Unfortunately, when I got my results I'd found I'd missed one out. (But Mark had missed two so I beat him again; 4-3). Erik won in around 14 minutes so it was a shame that the time was clearly inappropriate - 15 mins would have made it really interesting. As it was, this was like a mass start sprint event to just get all the controls, apart from that it was dark and with no real point of planning an order of getting controls leading to my missing



Nick goes Bananas.

back from a cultural site I arrived back late and so was a bit stressed...but the start was pushed back to allow time for it to get just a bit dark (it had been brought forward due to a clash with some ballet or something). Waited around in cold start pen for a while and hadn't done a warm-



Ready for the start of the Night Event.

few (four?) controls twice as I couldn't remember if I had got them on the way out, so got them on the way back too.

So obviously in no danger of winning anyway... But then bad compass meant I found a control that wasn't the one I'd aimed for and I didn't realise, and the next bearing turned out to lead directly to another control - confused because not where I expected, but happy to be at a control so continued.

Got into a bit of a sprint finish with a Chinese guy at the end which I maintained for three controls; awesome. But then



Innovative Headlamp Solutions at the Night Event.

it turned out I'd missed not one but two controls; one I'd just run straight past. The disadvantage of not staying with the pack! So 32nd, since everyone slower with more points beat me, it was so easy to clear. If I'd actually gone to all the controls (and I ran much further than I had needed to) I'd have been 4th!

The following day was an epic Long Distance which Nick finished in 2h45min. Mark spent the day in bed. He comments, "I literally couldn't get

out of bed. At the time in mid-January we knew nothing about the coronavirus epidemic that was just kicking off just a few hours drive from where we were. I found out a few weeks afterwards that Nick had previously actually been to Wuhan a few days before coming to the event. Thanks Nick. I refute your 5-3 scoreline - biological warfare is definitely cheating!"

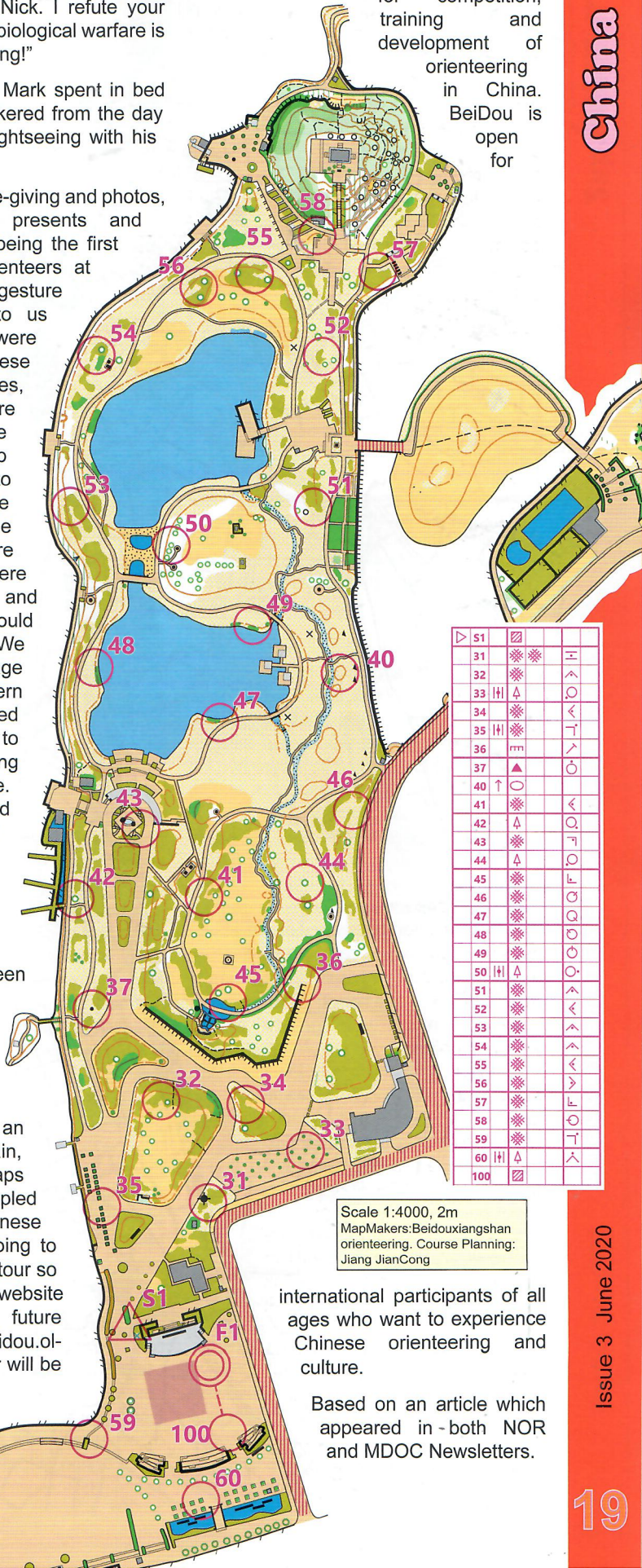
The Final race Mark spent in bed and Nick, knackered from the day before, went sightseeing with his wife's family.

At the final event prize-giving and photos, everyone received presents and O-shirts as gifts for being the first group of foreign orienteers at BeiDou. This last gesture really emphasised to us how warmly we were received by our Chinese hosts. After races, language barriers were overcome with the language of the map and using fingers to point out respective route choices. The Chinese all took care to ensure we were well looked after and any difficulties would be quickly solved. We would highly encourage any other Western Orienteers interested in going to China to consider orienteering there at the same time. This was Nick's third time in China and he knows others in the group enjoyed seeing part of "real" China, and how it is lived by locals, rather than what might be seen reported on TV or visiting overrun tourist sites.

Overall, we had a great time at this event. It featured an amazing mix of terrain, very high-quality maps and atmosphere, coupled with wonderful Chinese hospitality. Erik is going to make this an annual tour so please look at his website if interested for future years: <https://beidou.ol-sport.at/> Next year will be the 7th BeiDou and the trip will be

around the period of 10th - 20th January 2021.

BeiDou Orienteering Competition offers intense and high-quality orienteering in eight consecutive days, every year in a different province in South China. It is a platform for competition, training and development of orienteering in China. BeiDou is open for



Scale 1:4000, 2m
MapMakers:Beidouxiangshan orienteering. Course Planning: Jiang JianCong

international participants of all ages who want to experience Chinese orienteering and culture.

Based on an article which appeared in - both NOR and MDOC Newsletters.