

Erik Peckett remembered

So Erik (the letter 'k' reflects his Germanic ancestry) was ahead of me in the queue for the ferry across the Styx. It could easily have been the other way around. I have known Erik for absolute ages, fully half a century, from when he was a stalwart of Teignbridge Orienteers and I was a minnow in Westward OC. This was well before DEVON was formed in 1979 by the amalgamation of these and the other two local clubs of Exmouth Orienteers and, later, Exeter Footsloggers. He was a devotee of the Sport, inspiring his PE pupils at the grammar school and when, in his early fifties, he was offered voluntary early retirement (demographics were different in those days), he seized the opportunity to engage in orienteering full time. This he did with resounding effect at local and SWOA regional level, so much so that he was regarded as a founding father of the Sport in the South West and was awarded the honour of life membership of both the DEVON and KERNO clubs.

His contribution covered all aspects of orienteering: including organising, planning, controlling, teaching newcomers and making early coloured maps. I was a mapper too and, in comparing our methods, we concluded that his terrain interpretation was better than mine but I had a steadier hand with Rotring tubular pens. So we amalgamated, he doing the survey and I drawing the films for sending off to Smallprint. Examples were Parson's Pleasure, near Wareham, and Haldon Forest by Exeter racecourse. On

the latter, it was apparent that the planning of good courses would be usefully improved, were a path to exist through a thinnish but wide strip of dark green plantation. Rosemary Roach and I decided to do something about that and have a bit of fun. We went to the forest and spent a day brashing and clearing a small but useable path through the green. I added this both to Erik's survey sheets and to the drawn map. Sometime after the maps came back from the printers, Erik spotted the path and was nonplussed by not recalling it. We said he was so accustomed to surveying that he could do it in his sleep and probably had done just that. We let him stew for a while and then owned up. Erik was amused and used the path on courses for an event. Our mapping combination split soon after that, not because of the jape, but because of the release of OCAD 3 which enabled Erik, with his IT interests, to produce his own maps. This he did in full measure, particularly maps of school grounds which totalled well over a hundred, perhaps twice that. Erik was prominent at national level, serving in the BOF technical and mapping committees. Later he graduated to similar duties in the IOF. He was a member of the IOF Map Commission, helping to produce the international specifications for maps for the orienteering disciplines. As an experienced national controller he was one of the first to be appointed to the list of IOF Event Advisors for foot orienteering, authorising him to act as 'controller' of any IOF event including world championships.

Although Erik was kind and easy natured, underlying were stronger layers. He was a good man to have in an orienteering emergency. I recall his controlling an event in which one of the first starters came rushing to the finish to say an early control was missing. Erik reacted coolly and instantly, speeding someone off to freeze the start and the assistant controller to check the missing flag site. Then, more methodically, other possibly vulnerable control sites were checked and a replacement for the missing control made up. When all was seen to be in order, the starts resumed and the event saved with only a few competitors seriously affected. I had occasion to successfully repeat Erik's calm and methodical approach as controller of the 1997 British Nights at Penhale under the baleful eye of the Hale-Bopp comet.

Erik's presence of mind in an emergency was not confined to himself in the Team Peckett partnership. His wife Margaret was similarly blessed. On one occasion when he and I were off to IOF Commission duties in Helsinki. I drove at dusk to his house and, after a nice cup of tea, we took to his car to go on to Bristol Airport. We stopped for petrol on the way. On joining the motorway, the traffic was light and we were able to crack on. Somewhere near Bridgwater we passed a car which Erik remarked was very similar to his other car. As we pulled ahead the car flashed us but Erik said he didn't have time to investigate as we had a plane to catch. At the airport we had only been in Departures for a minute or so when Margaret burst through the entrance waving my passport, which I didn't know I

had dropped. There was no fuss nor recrimination. Margaret was simply greatly relieved to have made successful contact. As we said goodbye to her, I noticed she was still in her house slippers. What a woman! As orienteers in the same club with similar interests and duties at BOF and IOF level, Erik and I were close companions. We have shared a great many hotel rooms together – an amalgam of companionship and reduced room charges. We have shared the experience of the ‘finest views in the world from a loo’ communal toilet at a Sørlandsgalopen event in South Norway. We have ‘enjoyed’ outdoor party games in Helsinki at minus 25C, when it was too cold to make snowballs. Elsewhere in Finland we have walked on a frozen lake, something that is forbidden now because of global warming.

Over many decades there have been very many personal memories and I have recalled a very few. Wondering how to finish these brief reminiscences, I asked my wife Sally, a non-orienteer, how she remembered Erik. She said, “He was one of the nicest men I have ever met.” As epitaphs go, you cannot do much better than that.

Brian Parker
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Devon OC