**Billygoat Reflections**

Earl's Trails is part of Holyoke Range State Park, just south of Amherst, MA. It's the north slope of the range, just to the west of the existing Mt. Norwottuck orienteering map.

I'd run in the area a few times over the years, very few actually, as it wasn't particularly appealing. What few trails there were went pretty much straight up or straight down. I never gave the area a moment's thought as to using it for orienteering.

Things changed. At some point in the last five years a group spearheaded by the director of outdoor programs at Hampshire College (his name is Earl, he loves mountain biking and rock climbing but has no interest in maps) made a bunch of bike trails that snake their way around the area.

I heard about the trails and went to check them out in December, 2010. Really, really cool, for running that is. But as I explored, it seemed like it might be an OK area for orienteering as the woods were pretty open.

The other change was that the Town of Amherst had procured Lidar data for the whole town, and it overlapped a bit into neighboring towns. Eddie Bergeron took a look at it and determined it was of good enough quality for a base map. And it went just far enough to cover an area big enough for a map -- the map doesn't go any farther south or west because that's as far as the Lidar went.

I did the fieldchecking in November, 2011, and JJ Cote did the drafting. As I was doing the fieldchecking, it seemed to me that the area had the potential to hold an A meet, and also the potential to hold a Billygoat, even if it was only about 3 square kilometers in size. We did the A meet as part of the Western Mass 5 Day last May and the Billygoat this part weekend. Time to move on?

The BG course was set with the following in mind:

-- Keep in mind both those trying to win and those trying to finish within the time limit.

-- It is not a long blue course, meaning that it is not supposed to be technically demanding the whole time. I used to think of it as a mix between a blue and an orange course. It's good to have some parts that are easier.

-- The best route doesn't always have to be technically difficult. It's OK, in fact it will be appreciated, to have optimum routes involve a good bit of trail running.

-- Use the opportunity to visit parts of the map that may not ever be visited otherwise.

-- Try to have some variety: in the type of terrain and the type of legs.

Since I used much of the area just to the west of the start/finish in the A meet, it seemed reasonable to have a longish leg to start off with, and the one that I used was the first one that popped into my mind. I still don't know what the best route is.

From there the course just sort of drew itself. A loop to the northwest part of the map with some nice woods, no rocks, few trails, and pleasant contours, ending with a possible skip at #6 and a very convenient water stop (convenient for me) at #7.

Then a loop to the northeast, lots of trails, not hilly, easy to make good progress and good for morale, ending at the water stop at #10, still pretty convenient.

And then a loop to the southwest. I wanted to get people up high, where the terrain was quite different, more rock features but still really nice woods, hence the leg from 13 to 14, even if most everyone took the same route. It was just different. Coming back into the area of the bike trails, the zig-zag was to give more skip options and make the return trip to the finish area more interesting.

And then the last little loop, different terrain again, quite demanding when the brain is fried, and what I guessed was the best skip, 22. The end from 23 in was uphill, rather nasty, but that was the one time I thought more of those at the front -- if they are neck-and-neck at 23, then it will take both wits and especially fighting spirit to claim the win.

In retrospect, there's nothing I would have changed. That's not to say there's nothing that couldn't have been changed, and I'm sure things could have been changed for the better. But at some point you need to say enough is enough, go with what you have. I set the course in December, changed one control in January (#11, it had been a little further south), and that was it.

January did bring its share of stress -- there was construction starting on Rt. 116, and I wasn't sure how difficult that might make logistics. I explored the idea of starting from a field on the north side of the map, but that didn't pan out. And attempts to get use of the parking area inside the fenced-off area just south of the finish weren't successful. So we went with plan A.

The BG Lite -- a shorter version to offer something to folks not up to the full BG. I debated a bit about the name, the rules, the vibe that I wanted. I think it worked fine. The folks I talked to liked it. I hope it continues.

Of course for that to happen the BG itself has to continue. One possibility I have heard for 2014 is at the Delaware Water Gap. That strikes me as a fine idea. That it is geographically a ways from where the BG has traditional been is -- well, if the Tour de France (or the Giro d'Italia) can start in England or whatever other countries they have started in, then certainly the BG can venture a little further to the southwest. New organizers, new ideas, what could be better.

And I have also heard mention of possibly holding it at Bear Brook in New Hampshire, as more of the new map there is available after the Classic Champs this fall. This would also be fine.

Thanks are due to a rather small cast of characters for their help -- JJ for all the drafting of the map and arranging for the printing, Jim Paschetto for handling the web page, registration and results, Valerie Meyer for rescuing the split times, Patrick Nuss for designing and procuring the shirts, Gail for a bunch of things before and during the event, Phil also for a bunch of help, and Bud and Janet O'Leary for running the recreational course operation. The advantage of the BG is that it can be organized will a very small staff. The disadvantage is that you are tempted to do exactly that.

Finances – For perhaps the first time for me ever, I paid no attention to the finances. I set the entry fees where I thought they should be, very pleased to give various discounts: juniors, geezers, team members. For shirts, I hired Patrick Nuss to do the design, since I have no talent for such things. He took care of everything. I ordered about 50% more shirts than needed because I didn’t want to run short, and also because it wasn’t my money, and who was counting, and, well, NEOC is loaded and what’s a couple hundred dollars. Also had to pay for a couple of toilets, and printing the maps, and refreshments. Imagine my surprise when I did the numbers a few days later and we made $700. Could have bought even more shirts.

I suppose I should add in closing that it may be time to stop this foolishness of directing O’ meets and setting courses. This was the closest I have ever come to really screwing up, in this case it would have been just the White course, but still. Had the codes mixed up when I first sent them to JJ (for the map printing) and Jim (for the e-punch operation). Took three more iterations to get them right – I’ll spare you the details – the last just the evening before.

The time to stop is before you start making mistakes, before it all goes to hell. I’m sensing that time is awful close.

Oops, one more final thing – the award for the winning club or chapter. This was awarded regularly in the early years, perhaps only sporadically recently. It was often hotly contested. It was also often won by NEOC-Western Mass based on various devious scoring methods.

For 2013, it is clear that no one cares about the award, except for JJ, and that for historical reasons. So to humor him, the award is given to – well, did you really expect anything else – NEOC Western Mass, because without them there would have been no Billygoat in 2013.

But there was, it was the 35th, and by all reports it was mighty fine.

Peter Gagarin

Meet director and course setter