

Pupils from 17 Moray schools were out to prove that they knew the right route to success at the 2011 Moray Schools Orienteering Festival last Wednesday. This event is quite a new innovation on the schools sporting calendar, being first held in 2009 thanks to a partnership between Gordonstoun, the Moray Active Schools Team, the RAF and local club Moravian Orienteers.

Around 150 youngsters lined up to compete on three courses of differing technical difficulty, each of them aiming to become the fastest navigators in Moray. A glorious day meant some hot running conditions, but the pace was still fast, with some extremely good times.

The superstar of the day was Katlyn Fisher from Seafield Primary who annihilated the course record in the Girls B class with a super-fast time of 16:08 for the 2.3 Km course. Holly Houliston from Bishopmill had to settle for second place despite also beating the course record with her time of 16:50. However, neither of their schools managed to win the trophy for this category, as it was Hopeman pairing Jodie Reid and Sarah Monkman who took 4th and 7th places to edge out Bishopmill by 2 points.

The girls running in the A class had to contend with a longer and more difficult course of 3.3 Km. Heather Welsh of Kinloss Primary led her team to victory with a very narrow winning margin of just 4 seconds over Joanna Monkman from Hopeman. Heather's team mate Mairi Morrison finished 9th making for a very close thing for the team trophy. Both Dyke and St Gerardine's tied for 2nd on 11 points, but just one single place meant that Kinloss won with 10 points.

There was no doubt about the winner in the Boys B race. Over 2 minutes separated Macaulay Laing from Mosstodloch from his nearest challengers, while just one second was all that separated Greenwards Liam Bell in 2nd from Jake Logan from Mosstodloch who was 3rd. With two of the top 3 places it was no surprise that Mosstodloch duly took the team trophy.

There were more medals for Hopeman in the Boys A, where Lewis Hendry's very impressive 23:52 was comfortably enough to give him the title over Ross McDonald who came home in 24:35 to become the 3rd Mosstodloch boy to make it to the podium. But young Rory Duncan made sure that the cup would be going to Hopeman after he just edged out Kinloss's Duncan Hornsby for 3rd spot.

After the main competition, the competitors were given the chance to experience an orienteering course at the technical standard normally reserved for the country's top under 13s. Many of the youngsters tackled this 'junior elite' course in teams or in pairs, some in very commendable times. Bishopmill's team came out top of the tree with a time of 36:28, just 7 seconds ahead of the trophy-laden Mosstodloch team.

The overall championship was decided on the finish positions of all 8 runners from each school on the A and B courses added together. Clear winners, by 19 points, were Moray Schools League leaders Kinloss, who fought off the determined challenge of Hopeman in 2nd followed by Greenwards in 3rd.

Providing a source of inspiration was Scottish International orienteer Andrew Barr from Forres Academy who had been invited to present the trophies. Andrew took his first steps in orienteering while at Dyke Primary, setting the A Course record back in 2009, and has gone on to become one of the top junior orienteers in the country. Before the prize giving, he gave a master class in how it's done at the sharp end, completing the elite course in an almost unbelievable 22:12.

Active Schools Manager John McMulkin paid special thanks to Gordonstoun for once again offering up their extensive school grounds for the event. The RAF also got a special mention for the technical organisation, and the safety cover and demonstrations provided by the Mountain Rescue Service – not forgetting the surprise flypast by a 202 Sqn Sea King. “Orienteering provides a great way of challenging children both physically and mentally” said John afterwards “Here in Moray we have a thriving partnership between the local club, the RAF and various supporting agencies which makes events like these possible. We are very fortunate to be able to hold an orienteering championship in such fabulous surroundings as Gordonstoun. It’s very rewarding for us to see children going on to achieve national success after taking part in events like this one, and judging by a few of today’s performances it might not be long before we see another Moray youngster running for Scotland!

Anyone wanting to improve their orienteering skills can come along to Moravian’s regular local events. Details of these are on their web site www.moravianorienteering.org where you can find full results for the Schools Festival.