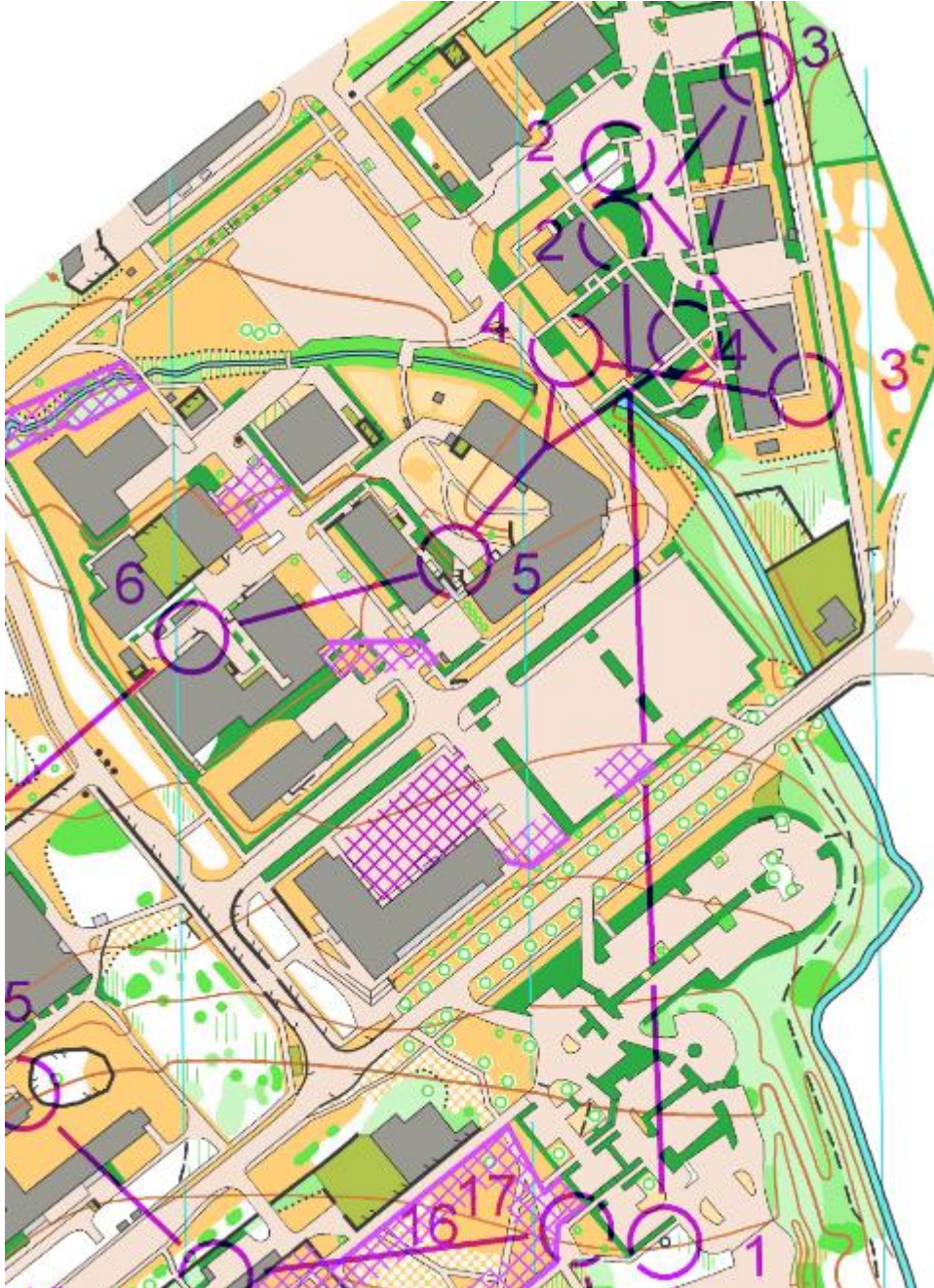


WOC Mixed sprint relay 2024

The race took place on the Heriot Watt Campus, a flat area with a mixture of large university buildings and industrial estate, with some small patches of forest. Start and finish were in Oriam, a giant indoor sports facility. The course was “deceptively simple” - nothing very difficult or decisive but a lot of micro routechoices.

After a trivial first control the first challenge was to get out of the carpark

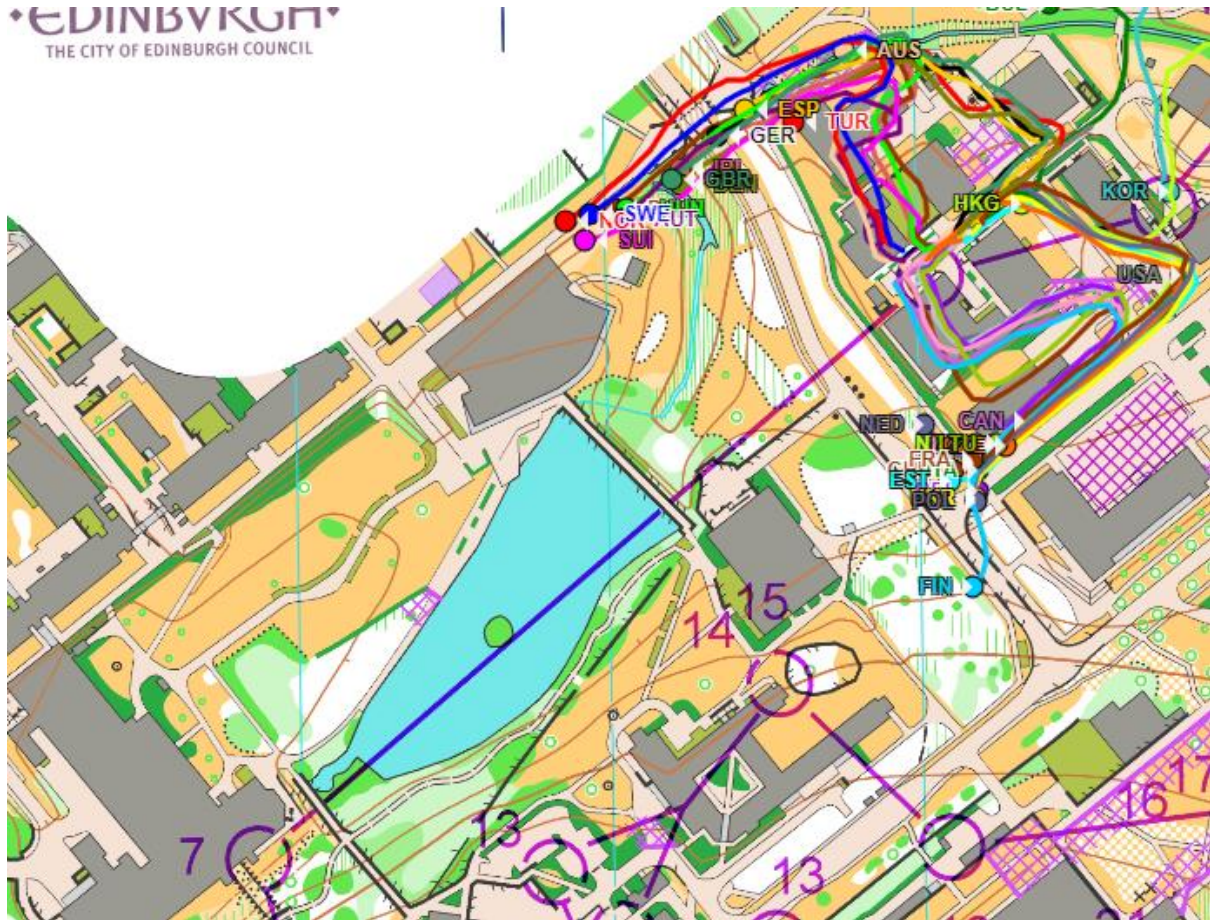


The fastest route is through the gap where the line is cut. Nailing this, a small group of Germany, Belgium and Estonia took an early lead, with a chasing pack of Ireland, Bulgaria, Turkey Japan and Brazil running alongside Sweden and Norway



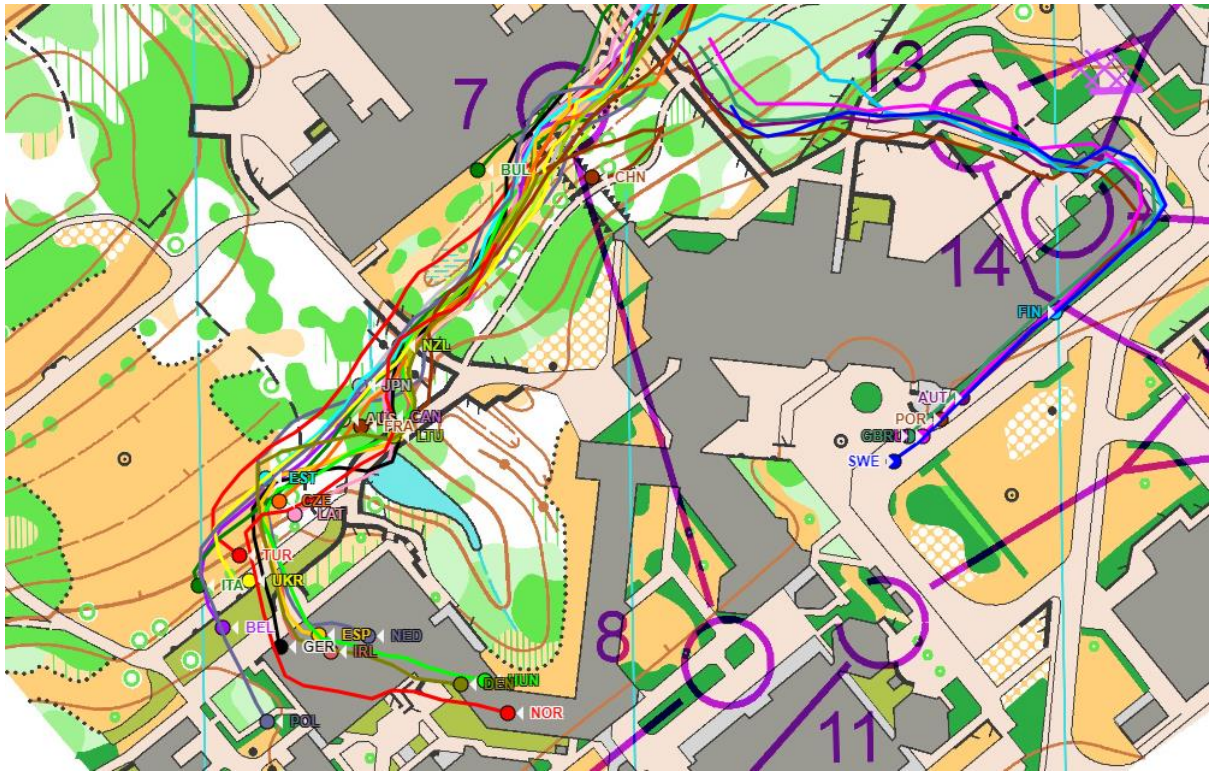
Estonia still held the lead through the forked section, but a poor rote to the common #5 saw them lose ground to the leading pack SUI NOR FIN HUN. Prerace favourites SWE were a little further back, tucked in behind IRL, POR, AUT, CHN and LTU





Escaping from the estate at 6 had a variety of routes, breaking the race into two groups, north and south. Rain the previous day meant that the off-tarmac routes were a little slower than the organisers had expected, and most of the big team played it safe on the north route, which proved faster and provided Norway with a small lead.





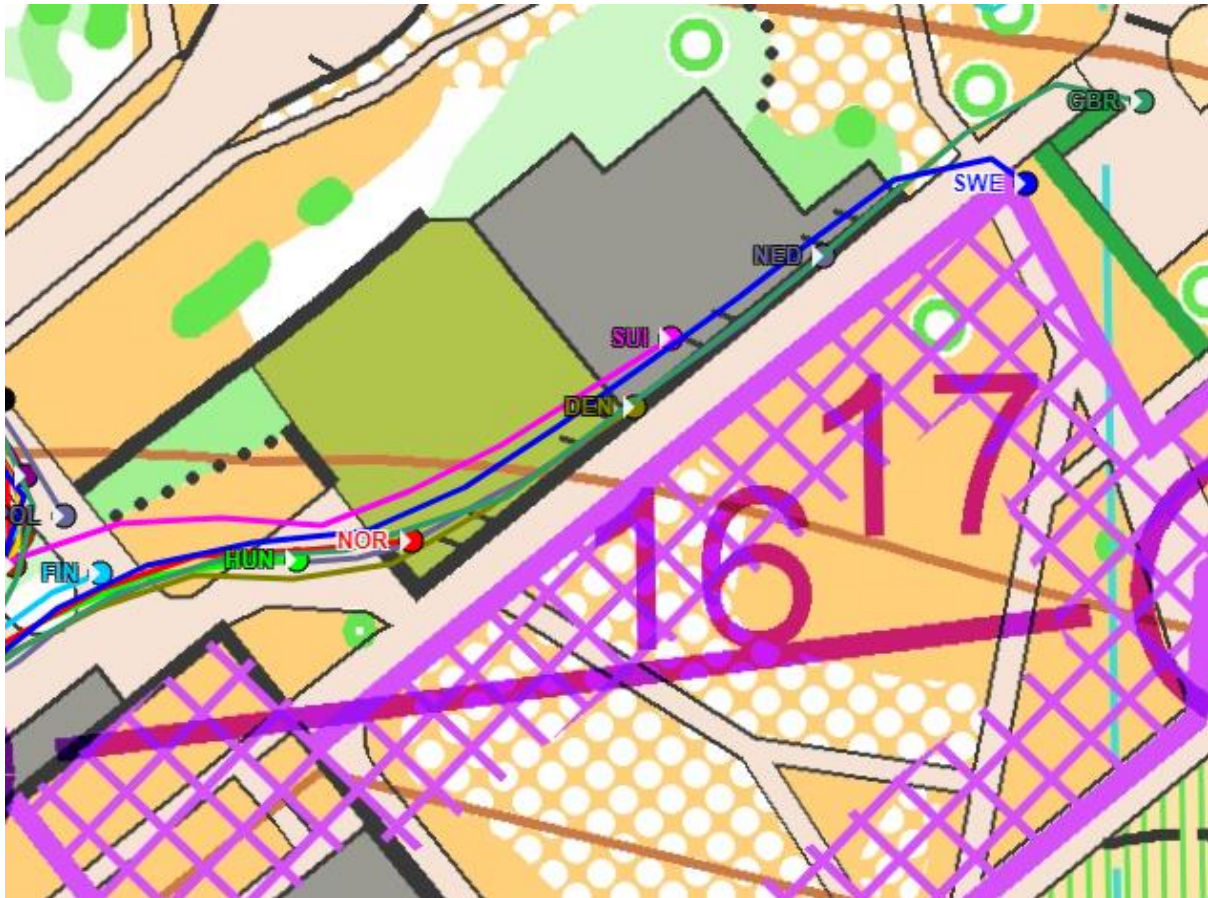
7-8 provided a big two way split. West should be significantly faster, but leaders NOR made an execution error, missing the steps to get close to the building and running wide of the olive green. It meant that the east group led by SWE were back in contention through the GPS-ruining section 9-10. The big favourites were now pulling clear, looking to be first home.



Things got shaken up a bit more in the forked section, and to the delight of the home crowd Grace Molloy led



And still led through the fanzone

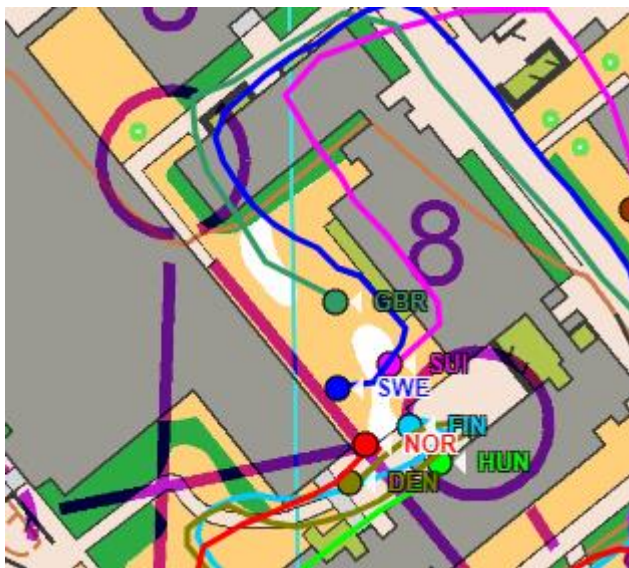


Before a heartbreaking error in from of the home crowd took her back toward #1 (not shown of her map – there was a map flip).

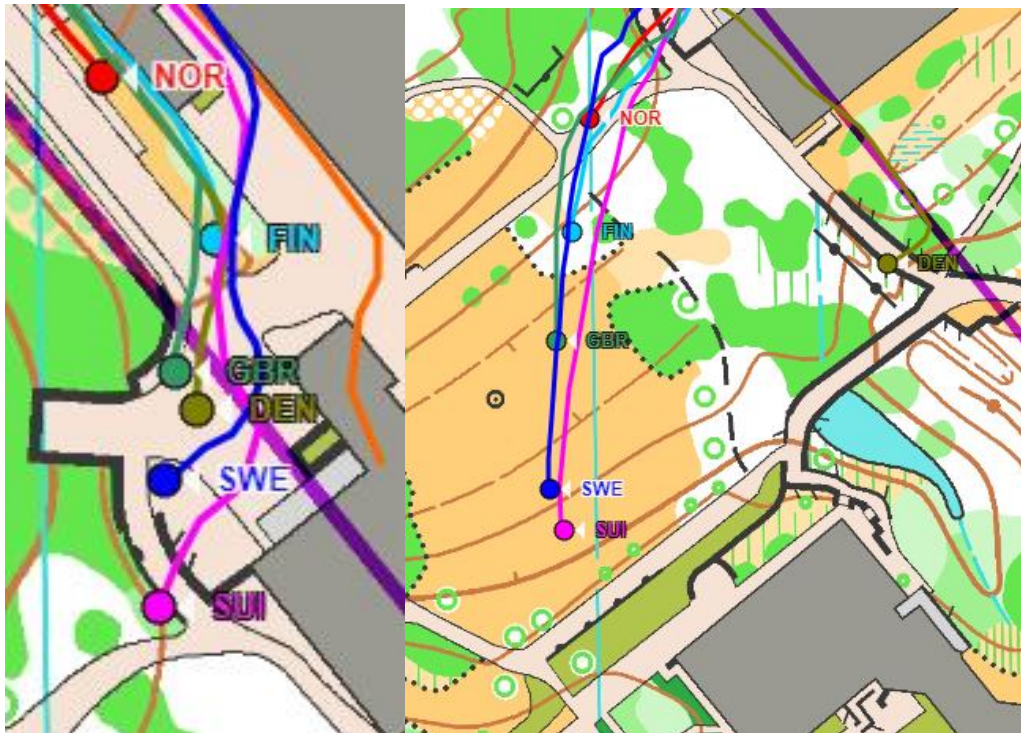


Into the arena. Seventeen of the competing nations have already been namechecked as they showed at the front – who would finish first in the maze? One has to watch the TV coverage, to see it, but the answer is, none of them: a small routechoice error by Hanna Lundberg, a hesitation by Grace Molloy, and Eef van Dongen charged through to give Netherlands the lead at the changeover.

Sadly, it couldn't last. The NED runner was the first person to take the woods route to 2, not a bad route, but the running speed wasn't there. Only SUI got the clean route through the carpark taking Rancan from 4th to a 5 sec lead which he held to the start of the long leg. All the lead teams went north, and the SUI lead disappears to the faster moving Svensk.



A shorter first half on the forking meant the lead group SUI/SWE/GBR had to chase DEN/NOR/FIN/HUN, but as the routes rejoined the true picture was revealed, DEN briefly showing in third before dropping back on a routechoice error



Aside from a big Norwegian mistake, navigating 9-11 and having to turn back to 10, the race was uneventful until 16, with Svensk and Rancan hauling away from the rest until they made a routechoice error on 16-17. But all that happened was the lead closed, then opened again through the final section, losing a little time being cautious through the maze.



On leg 3, the leaders exited the carpark cleanly, but were generally running cautiously which allowed a chasing group of Fin/GBR/NOR to close the gap, and by 14 Finland were back in

contact, and these three nations entered the arena together. Norway and GBR had also gained time over the leg, but were still 15-20 second back.

So off on the last leg, the two superstars Tove, Simone, and the merely world class Finn Venla Harju. Tove took the woods route, Simone messed up the exit from the carpark then swung across to follow Tove and suddenly Venla was running alone at the front. It didn't last, a mistake on the approach to #2 let Tove back in touch leaving the forked section, with Simone a few seconds adrift at the start of the long leg. At which point, time (didn't) stand still as all three stopped dead, studying their maps and each other, until the approach of Megan Carter Davies spurred them into action. Venla headed SW, Simone NE, before turn back to follow Venla. Tove went SE before reappearing sheepishly from that dead end a few seconds later. Back at the Arena, the crowd gasped. The Finnish lead was short lived, and Tove and Simone were simply faster, then Tove found a better approach to the control and was ahead. The superstars ran together and in a final roll of the dice FIN went the long way round the building, setting her up for third place. From 8 to 13, Tove and Simone ran together through the televised section, punched together Simone's forked control and ignored together Tove's control. A little panic as Tove almost missed her next (forked control) and a 5 sec gap opened.

Now it was time for Tove to do the unsuccessful dice-rolling, and the gap opened still further to 13 sec through the fanzone.



Then Swiss joy turned to horror as Simone took a wrong turn in front of the crowd. Tick, tick, and five of those 13 seconds were gone. A couple more went as Simone took a cautious route to 18 and came slowly into the maze. Tove tailed her for a moment, but realising the gap was too large pulled out those well used dice and took a different route choice. As Simone left the first maze control, she saw Tove steaming towards her, they crossed, but the gap was still too large, and ultimately irrelevant because of Tove's missing control. Finland and Norway completed stable races to take silver and Bronze.