

Table Top Rally - CoRvid-19

January 2021

Crow (aka Ray Crowther) has done it again - CoRvid-19 - a 19-leg internet rally to challenge us during what became another national Covid lockdown... writes *Monica Dowson*.

This one was a little different to previous competitions set by Crow and definitely showed his devious mind at its best. Each of the 19 route cards started with a puzzle which had to be solved to get the unlock code before you could begin what he called a simple plot using standard road rally plotting instructions to mark the route interactively on screen.

The best 17 out of 19 scores counted towards the final score with ties on points decided by furthest cleanest and then least elapsed time on the route cards. The clock started ticking as soon as we clicked 'Enter Rally', i.e. puzzle solving time was also taken into consideration.

Fortunately, the elapsed time wasn't needed in this rally, but if you hadn't finished a route because of domestic interruptions, then hours or days could be accrued as the elapsed time. Total elapsed times ranged from 1.5 days to 200 days.

There were 78 entries of whom 62 started and most finished the routes. The winner, Marcus Duyzend, cleaned all 19 legs, but four other competitors scored zero, each of them dropping different RCs. The finishing order could have been completely different if it had been judged by elapsed times. Iain Tullie completed all 19 routes in one day 18 hours 56 minutes 45 seconds. By contrast, Marcus kept three RCs open while he did something else for three weeks, and then completed all remaining routes in the last weekend, recording 63 days. Those who opened all the RCs to have a look before starting recorded up to 200 days.

There was an amazing variety of puzzles with a hint system and penalties for taking one, two or three hints, which meant that everyone should be able to start plotting.

The top five with zero penalties		
1 Marcus Duyzend	All legs zero	63 days
2 David Bell	Dropped leg 12	9 days
3 Ian Canavan	Dropped leg 5	98 days
4 Monica Dowson	Dropped leg 2	10 days
5 Iain Tullie	Dropped leg 1	1 day

I've picked out a few of my favourite puzzles and plots...

Leg 1 Sliding/Using Blocks and Leg 2 Historical Heights

I saw that those keen competitors who started straight in with Leg 1 were able to solve the puzzle, but many got big penalties on the plot, and then Leg 2 also seemed to cause plotting penalties. As we didn't have to do them in order, I decided to start in the middle.

Leg 11 Jigsaw

Sounded easy enough - an online jigsaw puzzle of a map. But after getting a code from the first jigsaw there was a second jigsaw with more pieces, before getting the route trace to transfer onto the plotting screen.

Leg 10 - Brouwer Theorem

Having Googled 'Brouwer Theorem', I thought it looked as though it would be interesting, difficult and time consuming... I was right.

My diagram and working covered three pages and, being an old scientific programmer, I then wrote a Fortran program (a general-purpose, compiled imperative programming language) to calculate the answer (copies of these available on request).

Although I was the first to solve it, others succeeded in much quicker times; Marcus (one hour 38 minutes) and Iain (five hours 50 minutes) against my one day four hours and 24 minutes.

Leg 9 CRoW Act 2000

Since I seemed to be going backwards, I decided to try Leg 9 next. The puzzle was my first encounter (this rally) with Crow's rally round board. Having solved it and got the unlock code, we were presented with a 170-page PDF document entitled 'Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000'. Obviously!

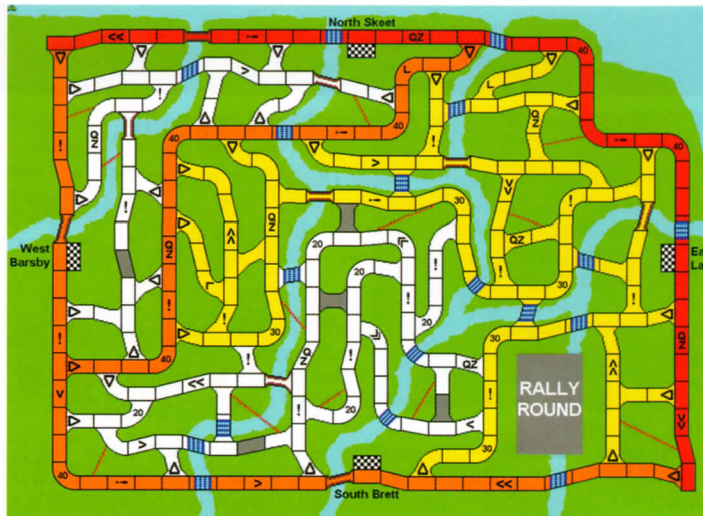
I looked closely at the table of contents, looked at various sections that might be relevant, speed read (no, scrolled through) the majority of the document looking for highlighting, codes, anything to give a clue what the plotting instructions might be.

After sleeping on it, next time I just sat and clicked around, and I really did laugh out loud because the bookmarks tab, reading downwards, said 'Your unlock code is...' and 'now via...' a list of spot heights.

That had taken me one day four hours 42 minutes, whilst Alan Jackson did it in 16 minutes.

Leg 6 Board Game

Oh, it's the rally round board again. Trace the rally route round the board. It said there were clues to help, something to do with an O and a D, but I never found those. I did once see a car moving around the board, but wasn't quick enough to take many notes, and try as I might I never saw it again. So I did it by trial and error. Every time I went wrong, I had to start again and I went wrong many times. My mouse hand/arm were going into spasm! I did get round eventually in five hours, but Glyn Hayward took 49 minutes and Tom Campbell 50 minutes.



Leg 3 Spot the Differences

By the time I started Leg 3, I had got to the point where I screamed, "Not the rally round board again!" My long-suffering husband knew when to bring me a calming cup of tea.

Two RR boards were displayed, easy - click on where they were different. Eventually you work out there are 12 differences, each bringing up a message giving a digit and its position in the unlock code. Could I see all the differences? No. I even tried moving the mouse over all parts of the screen to see where the cursor changed shape. Still had two digits missing. By now my eyes were really complaining, so in the end I decided to try inserting numbers in the gaps and checking if they unlocked the plot.

I'd seen that the digits two, seven and nine hadn't been used yet, so I did a trial using two, seven and nine with all digits zero to nine. No, they weren't used. I then went systematically through all the rest. My missing numbers were six and zero and I had tested almost all possible combinations. So, for a bonus point, work out how many that was.

By the time I finished that leg I needed to give myself two days without any screen time to rest my eyes...

Leg 2 Historical Heights

Unlock code given by heights on 1919-1947 map at given lat/longs - then a 'simple' plot via given PCs - which I got wrong. I blame the dog demanding to go out for a walk but, of course, I know I should not have submitted until I had checked, checked and checked again after I'd got home from the walk.

Other highlights were the astonishing variety of puzzles and plots. They all deserve mention, but here are just a few more:

Herringbones - the puzzle was a circular herringbone on the rally round board (aghhh) and followed by plotting a herringbone on the map.

JigSwore - yes, I did too!

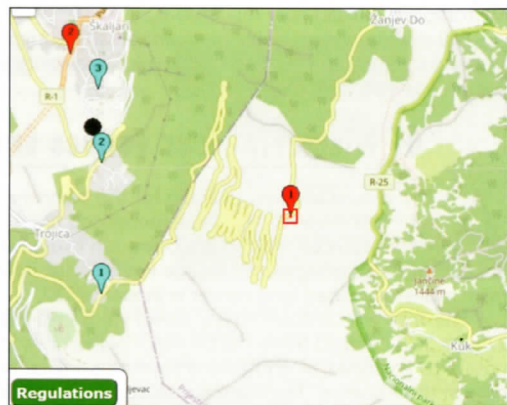
Montenegro -

one of two foreign maps, this one on the Cetinje-Kotor road including the 16 hairpin turns on the Kotor Serpentine. To get the unlock code we had to look on Google Street View to read the words on the chuck wagon at TCI of the route.

SudoCrow -

sudoku with a difference, as you'd expect from Crow.

secnereffid drawkcaB - Back to front symbols from the RR board then a trace to plot around the Yornup State Forest in Australia including use of bridleways, footpaths and some unmarked tracks(!) which Michael Cochrane cleaned in 20 minutes and Steve Barber in 22 minutes.



Not only did Crow keep us on our toes for one month of lockdown, he raised £1,660 for charity, this time for the Ramblers Association which campaigns to preserve our countryside for healthy activities.

Crow's next event is the annual championship running between March and May 2021 with the extremely reasonable entry fee of around £21 going to NHS Charities Together. Let's give it our wholehearted support. You can sign up by visiting the website at: tabletop.ity.me.uk/.

Competitors Comments

Francis Tindall - Many thanks for your efforts, you never fail to surprise me with your creative ideas!

Mark Tolhurst - This rally has been a really fun challenge with never a dull moment. Crow, you must have an amazing (and possibly a little devious) mind/imagination to put together such a raft of puzzles and subsequent route cards. Many, many thanks for the hours of enjoyment, frustration and sleepless nights.

Bob Blackstock - Just like to add my thanks Crow. I thought that I had hit the wall about halfway through but step by step the light dawned, often at dead of night.

Keith Cunningham - Crow, as usual, provided some mind-boggling legs which once more caused some head scratching... How he devises the clues is beyond me... Many, many thanks Crow for all your hard work, which I can assure you is very much appreciated.

Marcus Duyzend - Great fun, and nice diversity of puzzles. Fun navigation too. I'm glad I got them all in the end, though perhaps that means they were too easy? I must try your geocaches when things open up again. I gave geocaching a go 10 or 11 years ago, but that just involved plain text coordinates which didn't interest me too much. Yours look like they'll be much more up my footpath.

It's so nice that not only do you have an active retirement, but that you choose to spend it creating things that give others such enjoyment.

Mark Lewis - Thanks to Crow for a real challenge - I did get Brouwer worked out using simultaneous equations. This brought back memories... good job HRCR events don't usually include these. Thanks for rallying around Northumberland a bit. Got arm ache with following the route on the geocached ones - must be an easier way. And I found a way of shuffling tiles around too which I never did as a youth. My son had a bit of a go and maybe he will make a navigator for his old dad sometime if he can avoid being car sick and at 6' 5" fit in a Mini. High point was finding that error on the herringbone - but there were a few lows when yet again I didn't check before pressing submit.

Best wishes and congratulations to the winner and others with clean sheets... how?