

Orienteers impressed with Canadian Championships held in Whistler

national titles awarded in resort over long weekend

By Eric MacKenzie



PHOTO BY RUSSELL PORTER / COURTESY OF ORIENTEERING CANADA

ORIENTEERS IMPRESSED Whitehorse's Caelan McLean competes in the Canadian Orienteering Championships in Whistler during the B.C. Day long weekend.

Whistler has put itself on the map for top-level orienteering competition after hosting Canadian Championship races that were lauded by athletes during the B.C. Day long weekend.

Orienteering Canada executive director Charlotte MacNaughton said the five-day event was a big hit with competitors as national titles were decided on three different courses, including two newly mapped areas that had never been raced before.

"We got great feedback from the participants, and for the three championship races... there was a fantastic variety of terrain that was just really well-suited (for the event)," said MacNaughton, who noted that Orienteering Canada wouldn't rule out a return to Whistler for major competitions in the future.

Hundreds of orienteers representing 12 countries took part in the weekend's races, but only Canadians were eligible to capture national titles.

Edmonton's Will Critchley had his best nationals ever by claiming Canadian crowns on the elite men's Middle and Sprint courses. Critchley finished second behind Norway native Thomas Nipen on the Middle course around One Duck Lake on Saturday, Aug. 2, and was the fastest racer overall for the Sprint event held in Whistler Village on Sunday, Aug. 3. He also finished as runner-up to North Vancouver's Graeme Rennie in the Long race held on the lower slopes of Blackcomb on Monday, Aug. 4.

"Whistler has always had the potential to have some really good orienteering, and this was the nationals that really proved that it could," said Critchley, who will hope to find similar personal success at the North American Orienteering Championships in Arnprior, Ont., in October.

Yukon's Kerstin Burnett was the elite women's Canadian champ on the Middle course, finishing fourth overall when she clocked in six minutes, 22 seconds off the winning time from Sweden's Emma Bergman.

In the Sprint, Hamilton's Emma Waddington also earned a Canadian title with a fourth-place finish overall.

"That was a really good race for me. I felt really strong, focused and I really, really enjoyed it, which added to the aspect of having a good race," said the 16-year-old, whose first Canadian title isn't the first one for the Waddington household — her father was once an elite men's national champ, too.

B.C.'s Emily Ross was the top elite Canadian woman on the Long course after she finished fifth overall.

"For the Long-distance start, to go up the chairlift and run down the mountain was pretty fun, because I've skied there in the winter but never run there in the summer," said Ross, who lives in Vancouver but achieved her undergrad degree while studying in Squamish.

"The organizers did a really good job and the volunteer effort was pretty amazing to pull off such a big event."

Canadian championship races for the three courses were held for various other age and experience levels during the weekend as well. Full results are posted at www.coc2014.ca.

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