

Review: The UK 2009 Minesweeper Championship

The first UK minesweeper tournament took place in Scotland on 20 June 2009 at the University of Stirling. This was my first time organising a tournament and it was a good learning experience. I now appreciate the effort made by other hosts in a new way! The idea for the tournament came when I noticed Gergely and Christoph had not made plans for their popular events in Budapest and Vienna, so I posted the idea in the Guestbook in early January.

Players seemed interested so the planning started. I contacted the university for permission to use the computer labs. After several meetings and emails, the lab director gave me permission - but the business department wanted to charge £350 for using the room! As a result, we used the computers by logging in as visitors. Random people used the room during some parts of the competition. This unofficial use of the room meant I could not properly advertise the event.

Another plan was to have the competition results online and displayed live at the event. Sergey Pastukhov gave me the program he wrote for the Moscow tournaments, but the firewalls on the computers prevented it from working. It was too complicated to use the ViennaSweeper program without Christoph. In the end I wrote a program to create an online ranking based on uploaded videos. Because of the computer firewalls, I was unable to automate the uploading - during the tournament I had to stop playing every few minutes and upload them myself! We could not get a beamer from the university, so we all had the website open while we played.

Arranging places to stay was complicated. You can't book rooms unless you know how many people are coming - and no one knew until the day before the tournament. I remember being with Gergely at the first tournament in Budapest and he kept getting emails or messages saying people had changed their minds or missed their planes! For several weeks it looked like Kamil and Lukasz would come, but in the end neither of them could. The result page for the tournament shows Rupert, but he emailed me on the day of the competition to say there was a problem. Two people cancelled the night before. In the end, after emailing every British player on the ranking, only one British player arrived! I did manage to find two local girls who agreed to play for fun. (One of them is my girlfriend!) In the end we had nine players from nine countries.

Gergely arrived on Thursday evening and Yvonne and I met him in Stirling. After finding out that he had started packing at 0300 we decided to keep him awake as long as possible. After dinner we visited the ruins of Cambuskenneth Abbey (built in 1140), then drove most of the way to the town of Alva looking for Highland Cows. We only saw one, but it was too far away and too dark for pictures. Then we took him Doune Castle (where Monty Python was filmed) and our new flat before letting him go back to the hostel.

I spent Friday being a tourist with Gergely. We followed the Back Walk, which is a path leading up the hill to the castle. After visiting Cowane Hospital, the Old Town Jail and the Church of the Holy Rude, most of the afternoon was spent exploring the castle. Then we walked to the Beheading Stone, which is a large rock on a hill near the castle where executions used to take place. The funniest thing was, that after seeing all this history Gergely thought the best thing was the grass! I guess if you are a European castles are pretty boring by comparison!

We had walked all day without eating, so we bought supper and went back to my place. Yvonne arrived from work and we soon got a call that Joni and Edu were on the train. The three of us drove back into town and waited for them in a local pub. Another call meant that Fritz had also arrived. I took the boys to a Chippy and Edu was brave enough to try deep-fried haggis. While they ate, Yvonne and I waited in the pub...and waited...and waited. Eventually we went outside to find them - the guys were all waiting for Edu as he tried to finish the haggis! The rest of the night in the pub was fun and the boys decided to visit the Wallace Monument the next day before the tournament started.

On Saturday I went to the computer labs at 1000 and spent the next few hours setting up computers and making sure the program worked. Jennifer arrived around 1200 and played minesweeper while we waited. Unfortunately, the expert games she finished did not count towards the tournament! Then I got a message from Rupert saying he couldn't come, and Yvonne phoned from Glasgow Airport to say Bertie was missing. At this point I started to panic....only a little! The first good news was a call from David to say he was at the university but couldn't find the room. I ran outside to find him and bumped into the boys arriving from the Monument. They thought it was extremely funny to see me run out of the building. We all got ready and waited to see if Bertie was going to arrive. Yvonne called again to say Bertie was still missing, but she agreed to wait a few more minutes. Then finally a call at 1400 to say Bertie had arrived! They made it to the tournament an hour later. We let them have a break and started the competition at 1510.

After the first hour, Fritz had already made sub50. It was my goal to sub50 at the tournament and although about half a dozen games were close I lost them all. Gergely was solving games like a machine and most of the videos were his. Joni had a really bad day and could not finish an expert game to save his life. In the second hour Bertie shouted as he made sub60. He was planning to beat me but was having trouble with his mouse. Joni started getting more and more annoyed about his blasts! The rest of us thought it was pretty amusing. In the final hour, my hand stopped working. I had played only 5h of minesweeper in the month before the tournament and it seems I am becoming an old man. It was really frustrating. I could finish lots of games but they were all the same speed. The big surprise was having David get a 52 as his first sub60 of the day. Joni solved a 4th expert game with 20 minutes left - that was enough for him to pass Yvonne on the ranking. About 10 minutes before the end of the tournament, Fritz stopped playing and walked around taking pictures of everyone! In the end, David managed to just beat Bertie for third place, and Edu just beat Gergely for fifth place.

We had a small awards ceremony and left at 1900 to find food. At 2030 we all met again for bowling. In the first round, I passed Joni on the final throw to win with a mediocre score of 120. But on the next two rounds, David came into form and annihilated us with a 158 then a 173. Not content with winning the tournament, Fritz tried to get us to beat his minesweeper scores on his mobile phone! (We couldn't, what a surprise). The rest of the evening took place upstairs in the Nicky Tams pub.

Gergely and Fritz left on Sunday morning. I gave Bertie, Joni, Edu and David a tour of Stirling for the rest of the day. Even though Scotland was having the best summer in years, Bertie never took his jacket or hat off. David left after we had toured the castle, and the rest of us visited a 17th century mansion known as Argyll's Lodging. In the evening we visited the ruins of Cambuskenneth Abbey, which required climbing over a locked fence.

Bertie and I spent Monday walking around Stirling. We visited the remains of an old jail that is now under a shopping centre, then we toured the Bastion. Bertie spent Tuesday by himself, but we met up in the evening to watch the Emerging Springboks draw with the British Lions rugby team. Went out afterwards to the cinema to watch 'Hangover'. Bertie was most amazed that the Sun was shining after 2200 and he kept trying to take pictures with his watch in the photo. He also seemed to like all the chimneys on every house. He was the last player to leave, on the Wednesday. Then it was time to sit back, relax...and plan for the next one?

Thanks to everyone who came, it was great meeting many of you again and some of you for the first time. Cheers!

Damien
17 August 2009

Meeting for the first time.



No visit is complete without puzzling over a red phone box!



The last night together.

