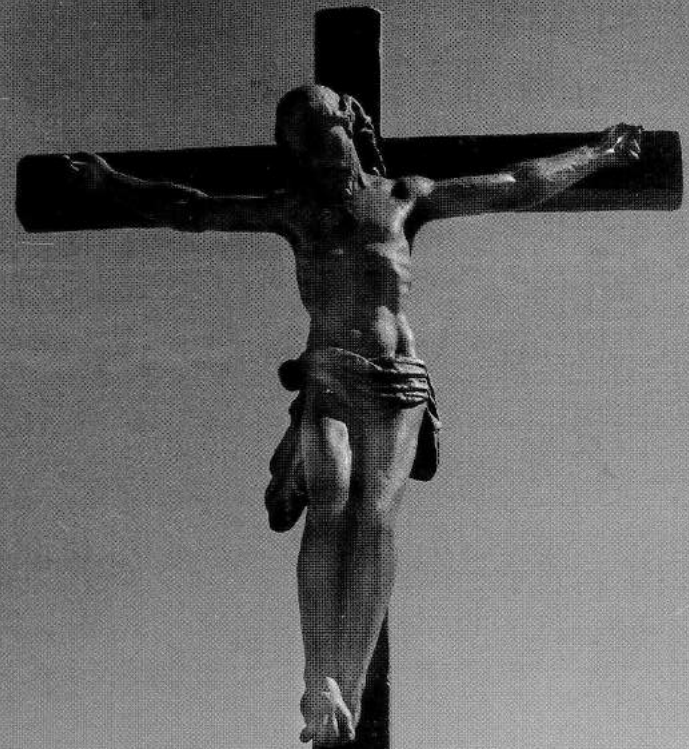


ACHILLE RATTI CLIMBING CLUB



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ACHILLE RATTI CLIMBING CLUB



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Front cover:
Zinalrothorn summit cross, Weissmeiss in background – Phil Hodgson

The Way of St James (or Four Pilgrims, Four Bikes and a Kangoo)

By Bill Mitton

FAZ told me about it five years ago. He walked it in three months (the purist way) he bought me a book – 'The Way of St James – Le Puy to Santiago – A Cyclist's Guide' and I decided I'd like to do it when I had the time. So Pat said she wanted to go, and so did Pete, and Sheila said she'd come to keep Pat company. The general idea was that Pete and I would travel most of the way by bike, whilst Pat and Sheila drove the Kangoo each day, and we would meet up each night. Our aims were: a) a pilgrimage, b) a bike ride, and c) a holiday.

History

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in northwest Spain owes its origin to the discovery, in what is now Galicia, of the tomb of the Apostle James the Great some time early in the 9th century. It probably achieved its greatest popularity in the 12th century, when it rivalled Rome and Jerusalem as goals of Christian Pilgrimage. From then it declined, but over the last 20 years or so there has been a great increase in its popularity. In 1987 it was declared a European Cultural route by The Council of Europe.

The Confraternity of St James was established in 1983 by a group of 6 people who had done the pilgrimage and wanted to help others to complete the pilgrimage. It now publishes a series of guides and has a bookshop and telephone enquiry service to give help and advice to would be pilgrims.

The 800 km section in Spain, from St Jean Pied de Port, over the Pyrenees, to Santiago de Compostella, (known as the 'Camino Frances') is the main part of the route, but there is a network of routes from France, Germany, and other parts of Europe which join at St Jean Pied de Port. We decided to travel from Le Puy, in South West France, to Santiago, a distance of about 1600km.

Early setbacks

We got to Dover without any problem, and were sitting in the hotel car park, when Sheila said she could smell diesel, so Pete opened the bonnet and there was fuel all over the engine. So we went to the pub, and a bloke at the bar who knew all about fuel pumps said it was a minor problem.

Next morning when the RAC man arrived, he gave Pete the bad news – he needed a new fuel pump. The Renault dealer said it would take a

week, but after some negotiation, Pete got the time down to 2 days and the cost up to £!!!! Were we downhearted? No! The RAC provided a Picasso, and so on the second day of the pilgrimage, we drove to Canterbury, and stayed at the University for the night – and a jolly good night it was!



Next day, while visiting Deal, we got the message on the mobile – the Kangoo was ready. Pete drove, at McHale speed, to Dover, picked up the Kangoo, and we all boarded the 14.40 boat bound for Calais. Little did we know that the manager of the Renault garage forgot to return the Picasso, as we had arranged, and so Interpol were on our trail for the next 3 weeks!

France

We got to Le Puy via Amiens and Paris, and stayed at the Auberge de la Jeunesse. Next day, on Friday 9 September, two days later than planned, we started on our journey. The French section is all beautiful Mediaeval towns and villages, deep wooded gorges, vineyards and fields of maize, and steep hills. We were headed for the Massif Central, and the Pyrenees, with quiet lanes, picturesque churches, beautiful towns and village squares.



Le Puy is at a height of 600 metres above sea level, and after collecting our Pilgrim Passports at the Cathedral, the day's ride initially climbed to 1150 metres at Montbonnet. This was followed by a steep descent to the river valley at Monistrol, where Pat and Sheila were waiting with food and drink. Another steep climb onto the high (1000m) plateau of the Gevaudan took us to Saugues.

The next day it rained heavily all day, but we had planned to visit the Millau Bridge, a magnificent 336m high (higher than the Eiffel Tower) cable-stayed viaduct spanning the River Tarn, designed by Sir Norman Foster (from Manchester), and opened in

2005. Nicknamed 'The Bridge in the Clouds' this turned out to be an interesting and worthwhile visit for all of us.

The following day's ride took us up to 1400m, to the Ski Station at Aubrac, and then through exposed terrain and a steep descent to St Come d'Ault. This is an exquisite mediaeval town, with a church with an alarmingly twisted spire. It was a hot day, and we had our lunch on a form outside the church. We then followed the Lot valley. At the beginning of the Lot gorge, we entered the beautiful mediaeval village of Estaing. We arrived in the middle of a mediaeval festival, the streets were full of people drinking and eating at tables, many dressed in costumes, and we had a couple of drinks in the hot sun, before we all cycled back up a local road to Bessuejous. Here is one of the most beautiful



churches on the whole pilgrimage, the Church of St Pierre. The real gem of the building is a tiny chapel on the first floor of the tower, containing ninth century tableaux and carvings. We returned to Estaing, looking for accommodation at the Hospitalite St Jaques. Here we were cared for and fed in peace and tranquillity, setting off next day re-

freshed in body and spirit. The Hospitalite do not ask for payment, this is voluntary. It is a very special place to stay.

Our ride then took us to Figeac, via some steep climbs, some wrong turns, and the village of Conques. This is rated as one of the most beautiful sites in France, and is a long, straggling village by the River Dordou. There is an unrelenting climb out of Conques for 6km, and after levelling out, the Chapel of St Roch provides a welcome rest and shade, with its attractive stained glass window.

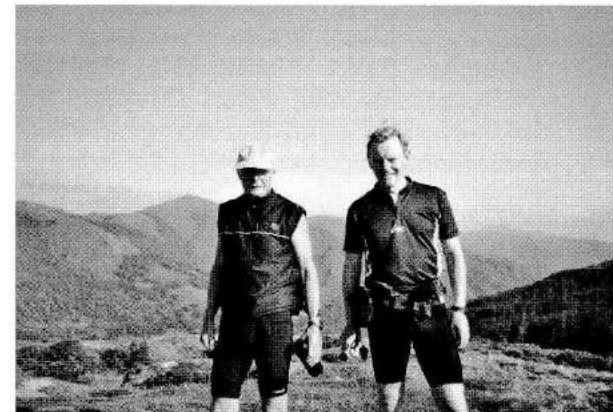
Over the next three days the route took us through the beautiful Cele Gorge to Vers, where we swam in the River Vers in the hot sunshine. We stayed the night at the fortified village of Larressingle, visiting the church, with its exquisite stained glass windows. The next day, the route via Eauze and Nogaro led us to a brilliant overnight stop at 'Le Glindon', near Aire Sur L'Adour. This place is run by an Englishman, Barry, from Chorley, who made us very welcome, and ate and drank with us that night. The open air swimming pool, with views over the surrounding countryside was very welcome, as was the cold beer which we drank as

we lay on the poolside sunbeds. This was followed by a meal with our host.

We continued next day through Arzacq and Arthez de Bearn, on quiet roads, to the foot of the Pyrenees at St Jean Pied de Port. Here we stayed at the Refuge Esprit de Chemin, where we enjoyed a communal evening meal in the courtyard with the other pilgrims.

The Pyrenees

The climb to the summit of the Ibaneta Pass is 20 miles long and climbs from 250m to 1100m above sea level! We started at 8.15 and reached the top, mainly in shade, and the cool of the morning, at 10.15. As expected, the views were fantastic, and



we had done the second major climb of the pilgrimage, after the Massif Central, without much trouble. The four of us had a drink and food together, and arranged to meet in Haorte, in Spain, at lunchtime. As we climbed, we passed many pilgrims on foot, crossing the road route as the footpath wound its way up the pass.

Spain

There is a noticeable cultural difference between France and Spain. France is green, pretty, cultured, and quiet, especially after 10 pm. Spain is brash, with a mainly brown, bare, almost lunar landscape, and life does not start until 10 pm.

Pamplona to Afroz, via Puente La Reina, was typical, with scrubby vegetation and steep, bare hills. The best sections were from Astorga to Villefranche de Bierzo, via the Montes de Leon, climbing from 800m to the Cruz de Ferro at 1550 m. We descended via the mountain hamlet of El Acebo, with unusual houses and a cobbled main street. The guide book warns cyclists to be careful on the cobbles, as 'cyclists have died here.' The section from Villefranche de Bierzo to Samos, via O Cobreiro, was one of the best day's cycling of the whole trip, traversing the Catalan Mountains (500m to 1400m) on a beautiful day, with brilliant views over the surrounding mountainous terrain.

The refuges, or hostels, were generally clean and cheap, the best

being at Leon, Villefranche de Bierzo – the 'Fenix' Refuge, with a psychedelic experience at night, involving brandy and fire eating – and the Benedictine Monastery at Samos. Here we had to undergo an 'interview' to be accepted. As we arrived early, we had our choice of about 100 beds in one room. These were filled rapidly, and the night was filled with an assortment of noises of all sorts, and other goings on. There was no charge, but donations were accepted.

The Cathedral in Burgos, in the French Gothic style, with Renaissance, Baroque, and neo Classical features, is impressive, and has been called 'sublime poetry in stone.' The beautiful 13th Century Leon Cathedral is in French Gothic style, with superb stained glass, which has been compared to Chartres Cathedral. The tiny 12th Century Chapel of Santa Maria in the fascinating mountain village of O Cobreiro is worth visiting, being



the scene of a miracle. The most impressive, however, fittingly, is the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostella. The mass at 12 noon, where the names of the recently arrived pilgrims are read out, was packed with people, and the huge brass 'botafumeiro' filled with incense, was swung by 7 men high above the congregation. I found it a most moving occasion.

Leon is a nice city, and the previously mentioned O Cobreiro, with its thatched roof cottages, is well worth a visit. Santiago de Compostella has a magnificent cathedral and square. We drove to Finistierre, just to say that we had been there.

We finished the trip at Castro Urdiales, after driving back along the northern coast of Spain (losing the exhaust from the good old Kangoo in Gijon). Sheila's Aunty Eunice

found us an apartment for 4 nights, and showed us the night life of the resort with her friend Paco. We had a day in Bilbao, visiting the Guggenheim Museum. This is a fantastic building, designed by an American architect, Frank O Gehry, and made mainly of limestone blocks, titanium covered shapes and glass, in the form of a huge boat. A giant metal spider stands outside the main building.

The Pilgrimage

Why do people go on Pilgrimages? To reflect on their faith whilst journeying to a religious goal? It is obviously a personal thing, and visiting churches and memorials along the route, together with the mass at Santiago, did give me cause for reflection. I would think that travelling on foot for 3 months with other Pilgrims would provide more of a focus for spiritual experience. My impression from the trip was that many people do the Way of St James for the physical challenge (maybe at the same time as the spiritual challenge). We met Jerome, from Huddersfield, in Leon. He first did the Way in 1996, and had done it 8 times since then – even twice in one year. He had, in one year, set out from his house in Huddersfield, walked to Portsmouth, got the boat to Santander, and walked to Santiago, and then on to Finistierre. Obsession or religion?

The trip was full of experiences, sights, mountainous terrain and long roads. If you are thinking of doing it, go ahead. You might be another Jerome!

The Slab and Groove of Sron na Ciche

By John Foster

THE route was first climbed by George Mallory, David Pye and Leslie Shadbolt in July 1918.

In most of the mountainous areas of Britain there are (or once were) hotels, which came to be associated with mountaineering. The one, which our members will think of, first, is most likely the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel, which could hardly be better sited for the crags and peaks of Langdale. That was built in the late Victorian era when tourists increasingly came to the valley to view the famous Dungeon Ghyll. Older still is the Wastwater Hotel, once known as the Huntsman's Hotel, which became the original home of the sport of Rock Climbing in 1881 when Hasket Smith began to seek out and climb steep rock for the pleasure of it, rather than just as a means of getting to the top.

In North Wales, the Pen y Gwryd Hotel came into being soon after the road over the Llanberis Pass was built about 1830. Its early patrons were mostly fishermen, but it was in the middle years of the 19th Century that the founders of the Alpine Club began to come in winter to climb in the snow and in later years to enjoy the new sport of rock climbing and where the Climbers Club was formed in 1897. It was to the Pen y Gwryd that John Hunt gathered his Everest team in 1953 before departure for the Himalaya to test equipment and to get to know each other. Their signatures are on the ceiling in the bar but have had to be protected by a sheet of Perspex to prevent later additions. At the summit of the pass the Pen y Pas Hotel became more popular by the turn of the century but is now a Youth Hostel. In Capel Curig the Royal Hotel closed its doors at Christmas 1955 and metamorphosed into Plas y Brenin set up by the Central Council for Physical Recreation as the first National Centre of instruction in mountain pursuits in England and Wales (Glenmore Lodge was a few years earlier).

At the top of Glen Coe, the Kingshouse (which may be the oldest inn in Scotland) originally came into being as a barracks for soldiers building the military roads and not far away is the ruin of the Queen's House, which is even older. At the bottom of the glen is the Clachaig which probably originated when the single track road was built down Glen Coe in 1812, but may have been a hostelry for drovers even before that. In earlier years the military road ran over the Devil's Staircase from Altnafeadh to Kinlochleven which the West Highland way now follows. Reaching 1,800ft above sea level would be sufficient reason (especially in winter) to construct the lower road down the glen.

On the Island of Skye, the Sligachan Hotel has provided a base for

anyone venturing into the Cuillin for nearly two centuries but originated (in a different location) as a hostelry for cattle drovers. The earliest recorded fair for cattle and horses at Sligachan was in 1753 but the droving of cattle (seldom less than 4,000 and up to 8,000 in a year) from Skye to the mainland goes back before the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. Ponies were in demand also for the coalmines of Lanarkshire.

There were no roads or bridges then, only tracks and the best place to ford the river was just above the head of Loch Sligachan with the original hostelry on the north bank. In the first quarter of the 19th Century the main roads of Skye were under construction and when Telford (about 1822) built the stone arched bridge over the river about half a mile further up the hostelry was out on a limb. The oldest part of the present hotel was built about 1830.

It is probable that Professor Forbes lodged there in 1836 when he engaged Lord MacDonald's forester, Duncan MacIntyre to seek a way up Sgurr nan Gilleann, then unclimbed. The latter had a good eye for the mountains for he successfully led the eminent scientist (Prof. of Natural Philosophy at Glasgow by age of 23) up the South East Ridge by what is known as the Tourist Route. It is so called only because it is the easiest of the three ridges of Sgurr nan Gilleann but the average tourist would go nowhere near it. Another 21 years elapsed before the mountain received a second ascent.

Fifty years after Forbes, another scientist (later first Prof. of Organic Chemistry, University College, London) came to stay at Sligachan for the fishing. That summer of 1886 was long and hot in Scotland with the rivers very low and so the fishing was poor. Out of boredom, Norman Collie and his brother turned their attention to the mountains. Although they acquired a rope they made little progress until they sought the advice of a local gillie, John MacKenzie. Following his directions they got to the top of Sgurr nan Gilleann. So started a remarkable friendship between Norman and John despite their vastly different social backgrounds which lasted until John died in 1933. Norman Collie became one of the top climbers of his day, making 21 first ascents in the Canadian Rockies as well as in the Alps and Lofoten Islands and was with Mummery's expedition to Nanga Parbat when the latter disappeared on the mountain in 1895. With John he filled in most of the remaining gaps in the knowledge of the Black Cuillin.

It was to Sligachan that he came on the 11 July in 1918 signing his name on the left hand page of the visitors' book. On the page facing it on 26 July are signed the names of George and Ruth Leigh Mallory. How long they stayed is unclear before moving over to Glen Brittle where many years ago I saw George's signature in the visitors' book at Cuillin

Cottage but don't recall seeing Ruth's.

That was the month in which he made the first ascent of the Slab and Groove route on Sron na Ciche in Coire Lagan accompanied by David Pye and Leslie Shadbolt who with Alistair McLaren had made the first complete traverse of the Black Cuillin ridge in 1911. It was one of the routes I climbed on my first visit to Skye on a fortnight's leave from the RAF in 1957. Details are now very hazy and who climbed with whom I am unsure but I was with Tom Carroll, Chas. Burman, Dave Holden and another Langdale regular whose name I can't recall.

Ten years elapsed before my second ascent by which time I was much more experienced and was leading a string of five climbers on an intermediate rock-climbing course for the Mountaineering Association. Since



Dave Parker in the early sixties on the way back after climbing the Crack of Doom with the Direct Approach and the Direct Finish giving over 500ft of sustained severe climbing.

The Crack of Doom was first climbed in early August 1918 by Pye and Shadbolt after George and Ruth Mallory had gone back south, with George's army leave drawing to an end. By the end of September he was back in France.

I took the photograph because a patch of sunlight had illuminated the Cioch Buttress, which is 500ft high to the top of the Cioch. To the right of its base is the Western Buttress of Sron na Ciche up which runs the Slab and Groove route to the summit.

then I have made only one more ascent, that time with Geof Cross and Chris Farrell in which I led the first pitch and was content to follow Geof and Chris for the rest of the route. However, back to that day in 1967 and what turned out to be something of an epic ascent.

In the late sixties I worked for the MA every summer holiday doing four-week instructing on beginners and intermediate rock climbing courses all in Glen Brittle except for one beginners' course in Capel Curig. Beginners' courses had three novices and lasted a week but intermediate courses had five students and were for a fortnight. I found that most of the latter had done no climbing since their beginners' course the year before and so the first week turned into a refresher course of Diff and then V Diff climbs before I could get onto Severes in the second week. The weather as always being the master I found that if I could give them a good classic Severe in the second week, then most students counted the course a success. So it was that on a beautiful day towards the end of July 1967, just as it had been for the first ascent 49 years earlier, I decided on the Slab and Groove Route.

The first pitch is described in the guide as a crack but I remember also using some holds on the wall to the right which is about 80ft high. The slab above has few real holds and requires some delicate balance climbing quite exposed until the Central Gully is reached. This gives 150ft of easy climbing until a prominent crack is followed up to the right. It was about 100ft or so above this that I went wrong. Somehow I wandered off to the right and found myself beneath a small overhang. There were handholds above but nothing for my feet. On the front of the overhang was a shallow groove which tapered to a nick about *f* in wide on the edge of the overhang but with little depth to it. The only nuts I had in those days were home made (BSF and Whitworth with the threads filed out) but none would stay in.

Whilst I was faffing about the remaining students strung out below caught up with me and my second and had gathered on the ledge to my left. I was getting quite concerned the day was ticking over and we were only half way up a 1,000ft high rock face. To retreat would have been slow and tedious. As a last resort I placed the double fishermans' knot on a sling of no. 2 hawser laid nylon rope in the nick. It stayed put. Tentatively I placed my left boot into the sling and put some weight on it. The knot settled further into the nick but did not otherwise move. With five pairs of eyes watching intently I put my whole weight onto the sling pulled on the handholds above and stood up in the sling. Finding a small hold on the edge of the overhang for my right boot, and higher handholds, I removed my left from the sling and placed it on one of my original handholds. As soon as I did so, the knot came out of the nick,

but it had done its job and the log jam was broken.

The rock above was still steep but slowly eased back and there were no more problems. In fact the latter half of the route is disappointing becoming no more than Easy Dif. in grade. I left the sling behind to assist the others but none could make it stay in place and so had quite a fight of it with a tight top rope. I found out later that I had followed a VS variation put up by Ginger Caine a few years before.

After that everything was an anti-climax and the course romped up the rock behind me, which was just as well, as it was 10 o'clock as the last man joined the rest of us on the top of Sron na Ciche. Alice Campbel, their hostess at Cuillin Cottage where they were staying, had dinner ready for 7 o'clock and didn't speak to me for several days. It was at Cuillin Cottage where George Mallory stayed that golden July of 1918 but it was Johnny Campbel's (Alice's husband) Aunt Mary, in reality his mother, who provided the hospitality then.

Whilst Alice Campbel was worrying about how she could keep the food edible I knew that Joyce would be beginning to wonder if she might have become a widow. In the good weather and only five weeks after the longest day it was still quite light and I knew that with no cloud it would not get completely dark. I had brought the course down over the top of Sron na Ciche previously and so they were happy to be trusted to descend by themselves and I left them coiling up the ropes while I shot off down the broad, butt end of the Sron. Small boulders and scree at first and still rough going when the tussocky grass is reached with only the last mile to the campsite along a narrow track. In those days the 10 o'clock News on radio 4 finished at 10.30 pm and it was just ending when I got to the Landrover by our tents. Mike and Keith (then 8 and 6) were still playing unconcernedly and Joyce must have had more faith in me than I realised for she said "I was wondering what time you'd get back. The forecast is good for tomorrow too". But the course and me were in need of a rest day.

Looking back across nearly 40 years, I wonder now if I could ever have been fit enough to descend from 2,500ft to near enough sea level and covering 2 1/2 miles in half an hour even with gravity in my favour. And alas, the only other person who might have been able to verify my time of arrival is now no longer with us.

Bob Graham Round

by Mandy Goth

IT'S Friday 7 July 2006 and here I am stood on the steps of the Moot Hall in Keswick with Rhys, Andrew (Bibby) & Richard Bellaries from Clayton. Phil's got the stopwatch and there's 5 minutes to go.

"I can't believe you're putting yourself through this again," say's a voice in my left ear. It's Wally Coppelov from Newburgh Nomads who ran the last two sections with me last time and completed his own attempt two weeks previously. "Can I join you on leg three?"

"No problem, see you in Wasdale".

For those of you not familiar with the Bob Graham Round it's a 72 mile circuit of the Lake District, which starts at the Moot Hall in Keswick. The "Round" was originally run by Bob Graham in his 42nd year and encompasses 42 peaks (a total of 27,000 feet of ascent). Bob Graham originally ran it in 1932 but subsequent interest didn't really start until the 60's when the Heaton brothers from Clayton Harriers decided to have a go. Since then approximately 1,300 people have completed the round (to date there are less than 100 women). It can be run clockwise or anticlockwise and is split into five sections. Most people complete the Round assisted by a team of people including a navigator and carrier on each leg.

Attempt 1 – June 1993, clockwise, 6pm start

My affair with the Bob Graham started in 1993. The highlight of this attempt was the horrendous weather, with rain and mist so dense it was impossible for Dave Wilson to read his map in the dark, due to the light being scattered in the head torch beam. As a result we got lost on the Dodds in the dark and descended too far off Nethermost Pike, thus losing time. Kitey also got stuck in a bog and we had to pull him out. He had to keep his toes clenched so as not to lose his shoes. I gradually got slower and slower over the third section until the hailstones going up Broad Stand finished me off and I dropped out at Wasdale.

Attempt 2 – June 2000, Clockwise

This time both Phil & I set off together at 6pm on the Friday, yet again we were plagued by bad weather, making navigation difficult on the Dodds and time was lost. It was like having buckets of water thrown at you for 12 hours. Yet again the third leg was my problem and as we hit the rocks around Bowfell the going underfoot deteriorated, as Neil Hodgkinson said "The rocks were not just greasy they were alive!" Again I'd lost too much time so dropped out at Wasdale.

Phil who was only just in front of me managed to get his second wind

and went from being nearly dead on his feet to running the last two sections faster than race pace to finish in 22 hours 54 minutes.

Attempt 3 – May 2006, clockwise

This year the memories of the discomfort had faded and it was to be now or never. The training started early with many days in the lakes with Kath Brierley from Tod Harriers, good runs on the High Peak Marathon, the Hobble & even a PB on the Trog. It was going to be my year.

The date was set for early May, the previous couple of weekends were glorious; it was looking good. Friday arrived and with it the bad weather. The forecast said it was going to get better (80% chance of cloud free summits) so I decided to go anyway. The mist was so thick on Skiddaw that it was only the bike lights that I'd borrowed that saved us. Hall's Fell ridge was grim and we kept losing the path. Poor Jeff Walker had the short straw trying to scramble down the rocks and carry the bike lights. Leg 2 went like clockwork thanks to Nick Harris's excellent navigation. It continued to be cold, misty and unpleasant but we managed to arrive at Honister on time.

Leg 3 was where it all went pear shaped again. We strayed slightly off route due to thick mist, a minute here a minute there. Where was the summit of Harrison Stickle? Time gradually ticked away. This time I ran without a watch, but I could tell from the whisperings that I was behind time. On Leg 4 I just couldn't go any faster despite the persuasions of Dave Makin and my team of six or seven helpers. We only came out of the mist on the summit of Kirkfell and for the first time for hours I had a view. At Honister I decided to carry on and complete the round despite the fact that I was going to be over time (I only had 2" hours and needed three).

It was a beautiful night, but the wheels had fallen off by then, Phil tried to kill me by slipping on the rocks coming off Robinson and I couldn't even manage the Goth shuffle on the road into Keswick. I was met by Sue Roberts and Kath (who'd run out of bars to go in as they were all shut) who ran shrieking down the street to meet me. I'd got round, but in a time over 25 hours. Never again.

Back at the Achille Ratti hut in Langdale Arthur Daniels encouraged me with "why don't you go again the other way round, the descents are easier, it would suit you better", and so the seed was sown.

Jura & Duddon under the belt in reasonable times and then an excellent but very tough LAMM with Chris Preston. I'd helped Kath on her first attempt and knew that I could run the first leg very comfortably. I knew I was as fit as I'd ever been so it was now or never or it might rear its ugly head again in a couple of year's time and I'd have to do all that training again.

I had two windows of opportunity – Wasdale weekend or early August. I became obsessed with the weather, looking at the forecast numerous times a day. On Wednesday I made the decision to go on midnight of Friday 7 July, the offers of help came flooding with Peter Browning and John Sharples from Clayton volunteering to come along. And so it went from low key to the more the merrier.

Attempt 4 – 7 July 2006, anticlockwise

So there I was on the steps of the Moot Hall at midnight for an anticlockwise attempt.

Leg 1 – Went very smoothly in the dark with the bike lights yet again (thanks to my work colleague Clive – he's one of those nutters who rides around Stoodley Pike in the dark). A starry night ensured that we arrived at Honister spot on schedule. 39 peaks to go.

Leg 2 – Again a very smooth section. It was still dark and slightly misty. Rhys had perfected the feeding and watering technique and was there when needed. A combination of GPS (John Preston) and good local knowledge (Peter Browning) saw the peaks passing by on schedule. A slightly slow descent (not my strong point) off Yewbarrow saw me arrive in Wasdale only a few minutes behind schedule.

Leg 3 – The rain started as we made the big climb up onto Scafell and into the mist, there was a feeling of "Oh no here we go again". My fears were to be unfounded as the combination of Dave Makin's route finding and Colin Urmston (Clayton) got me up and down a very slimy Broad Stand to pick up the rest of my team. The mist lifted, the rocks weren't slimy and my spirits rose. As we descended off Bowfell there was the welcome sight of the McGonagle (Pete & Hilary) support crew with cups of tea and crisp butties on Rossett Pike. I was even allowed a stop there so I knew I was on target.

The rest of this section was tough as my energy started to fade. Dave and Allan Greenwood resorted to bully boy tactics and were on my case. Every time I slowed slightly they hassled me. Much swearing was done and Dave was now referred to as "Makin". Kath had written messages of encouragement on the rocks and Phil came out to meet me at Calf Crag.

I descended to Dunmail Raise just behind schedule – I knew I was going to do it.

Leg 4 – As I climbed Seat Sandal the wind got up and the weather started to deteriorate. John Crummett led the way and got some awesome photos in the process. Chris of Newburgh Nomads kept me informed of the time along the way and as the peaks went by we gained a minute here, a minute there. Makin arrived again to do some bullying much to the amusement of some of the Clayton boys. The rain started but I was on a mission. I arrived at Threlkeld with 5 hours to go. It was in

the bag with only three summits to go. Chance to refuel with corned beef hash and tea.

Leg 5 – Once again my support crew had increased in number from 3 to 7. Phil had plotted the route on the GPS so there was no chance of getting lost. Blencathra and Great Calva were climbed on schedule. As we climbed onto Skiddaw the wind was getting stronger, it was really cold, going dark and we were heading into the mist. Geoff and Susan Davis of NFR were superb and made sure they shielded me from the wind wherever possible. As we climbed onto the summit ridge the wind was so strong we could hardly stand up. Chris Preston and Anna Forrest supported me so I didn't get blown away. All of a sudden the wind was coming from the wrong direction as the seven of us spread out across the summit. The path is like a motorway but we'd lost it! Phil had plotted the route to the summit thinking that route finding off would be straightforward; how wrong can you be. Thankfully Geoff was on route and called us across. Only a few minutes lost. We ran down the path, yet again the bike lights came into their own as we struggled through the dark and mist.

Half way down the hill we emerged from the mist to see the lights of Keswick; nearly there. We could see a head torch at the Lattrigg car park. It was John Preston who said, "If you want to do this Mandy you are going to have to run." I thought I was running! He grabbed hold of my right hand and, with Anna on my left, I proceeded to run down the hill faster than I'd ever run in my life. Phil was leading the way in the dark. I remember thinking, "I'm sure I don't have to run this fast."

Down the road, through the park, over the bridge, across the car park, through the arches into the square at Keswick. "Right you're on your own," said John and I ran up to the Moot Hall and the welcoming crowd. All I could think was thank goodness I can stop now. 23 hours 48 minutes.

Out came the champagne and the cameras - it was over.

I never had any doubt that I was capable of the Bob Graham Round and when I had finished I wasn't overwhelmed by the fact that I had done it but by the support of those who gave up their time to come and help me on not one but two attempts. The likes of Jim Smith and Tony Shaw who saw me through all the changeovers (Jim was on the phone just after 12 to make sure I'd done it). The people who just turned up and appeared on spec and had a run for part or all of a section. If I could have done it off positive vibes and good wishes from everyone then I could have just floated round.

The difference this time was that it all felt to be under control, I needed the bullying to get me through the tough sections (thanks Dave), but we

never got lost or way behind schedule. I got the eating right this time (proper food at the changeovers so not relying totally on jelly babies and sweet stuff - which I will never eat again). My support crew were awesome from Kath on road support (saving herself for the week after - I wish I'd been there) to all the Tod/ Achille Ratti/ Clayton/NFR/Calder Valley and Ambleside members who helped along the way.

So thank you to everyone for being there for me and especially to Phil for believing in me - so what's next?



OMM 2006 – The 'Orrible Mountain Marathon

By Phil Hodgson

WE were still on speaking terms with Mandy and Chris on Saturday morning. We laughed and joked about lightweight gear and how rough the terrain was going to be. "The clag's down to the trees," we grinned in anticipation. Steaming mugs of tea in our hands, merriment prevailed over a breakfast of muesli and luxury scones. Kitted up we strolled along the track to the start exchanging banter with fellow competitors. Surprisingly, lots of our usual arch-rivals had also entered the Long Score Class of the OMM (the reincarnation of the KIMM), including Mandy and Chris. "We should get some scalps," we agreed, macho competitiveness kicking in even at such an early hour in the morning. And Mandy and Chris? "They'll do well against the other womens' teams," we nodded sagely, but they won't worry us. Well, they're just girls.

We pored over the map just past the start, clock running and ears pounding with adrenaline. Just less than seven hours to go. The checkpoints' apparent random scattering disguised the course setters cunning thought process. Undaunted, we pulled out our latest amazing high tech navigational gadget. Wiggling the piece of string left and right we tried to capture big points without ending up short of the midway camp. Just how far could we run in seven hours on some of the most inhospitable terrain known to man. How long is a piece of string? Ours was 20km, in relative terms, an innovative weight saving plan on my part as we'd guessed our total probable distance for the day at 40km. We'd just lay the string out twice.

It's always nice to go straight to the first checkpoint. But, you can't get it right every time. Having forgotten, in our enthusiasm, to look at the checkpoint description we'd missed it and negotiated several hundred yards of knee-deep swamp before realising our error. Swearing, we returned to the kite through the leg sapping morass. And guess where the next checkpoint was? Up the hill at the other side of the accursed mire. More sapped legs, and to cap it all, Dave disappeared into the evil smelling bog up to his armpits. "Well, it can't get much worse than this, can it!" Dave grunted. But it did.

"Do you know where we are?" we asked a passing competitor as we stood scratching our heads in the thick clag by a hilltop lochan that, by my reckoning, should have our third checkpoint next to it. "There," he pointed, on my map. I looked sheepishly at Dave. "We're on the wrong bloody hill", I confessed.

Many tussocky miles later, after a short cut which resulted in us thrashing through the kind of impenetrable forest that would stop an Ent in its tracks, and half an hour wandering a barren hillside finding every small pond except the one that hid yet another water sodden checkpoint, we were religiously following our compass bearing towards the "large boulder" of the checkpoint description. "There's the wall," Dave shouted triumphantly, referring to the arrow like feature on our maps that we should have followed in the first place. "Where?" I replied.

"Down there, can't you see it?" Now I know my eyes are bad but there definitely wasn't a wall. "You're hallucinating again" I chided, reminding him of our Mont Blanc fantasies. But, this was bad. If we couldn't even find a wall several miles long, what chance of finding a boulder. It was at this point that we realized that both our compasses must be malfunctioning. There was obviously some strange magnetic anomaly under our feet. Even worse it appeared to be following us!

Thus, two bedraggled and demoralized figures jogged lamely down the track to the half way camp, in on time but with little in the way of points to testify to the day's exertions. Worse news was to come. Mandy and Chris, having gone unerringly to every checkpoint they pointed their compasses at, had amassed 10 points more than us. The shame! And every competitor on the campsite seemed to know about it. The greeting, "I hear Mandy and Chris are beating you" started to jar a little after the thousandth repetition. Putting a brave face on it, we amused ourselves by blowing up our balloon beds. Honest! These were our latest



Still smiling!

weight saving innovation. Seven long balloons held together by a flimsy piece of Pertex fabric and, hey presto, a comfy mattress. And we could make a variety of life-like balloon animals as well.

The second day started far more successfully. "Let's do it!" we agreed having decided overnight that it had to be all or nothing. We dispensed with the piece of string and headed for faraway checkpoints with big points. Our strategy seemed to be working. We even found some trods we could actually run on. "Shall we go for that one as well?" We scanned our map. "We might as well, it's not too far off our route back." Bad move. We should have headed straight for the finish. Plagued by unrunnable ground we eventually resorted to running in the shallow water at the edge of a loch to give us a break from the waist deep tussocks we'd struggled through for the preceding hour. And we now noticed, having studied the map a little more intently, that the nice path on which we'd intended to "hammer" back to the finish, more likely resembled one of the numerous linear quagmires that masquerade as paths in the Galloway Hills. And it went over a big hill on the way. And it was 14 km to the finish. And we only had an hour left. "That's blown it!"

Two hours and forty minutes of arduous bog bashing and tree thrashing later we ran the final 200 metres to the finish. Fortunately everyone had not yet packed up and gone home. And somehow they already knew of our predicament. Of the 380 points we'd amassed we'd blown over half in time penalties. "The girls have done well," we were reassured by everyone we passed. "They were getting a bit worried about you...thought you'd got lost or something." We grinned and bore it. Mandy and Chris had indeed done well, not only winning the Ladies prize but soundly thrashing us as well. It'll be a long, long time until we live this one down. I'm still getting the phone calls, "What happened to you then???"



Mandy and Chris – first ladies home.

Yorkshire Dales Winter Meet **4/5 March 2006** **by John Braybrook**

THE Yorkshire Dales Winter meet at Chapel-le-Dale on 4/5 March had the perfect ingredients: Convivial company, blue skies, sun and alpine conditions.

Chapel-le-Dale is situated between Whernside to the north and Ingleborough to the south. The temperature was nippy and you had to be well wrapped-up. There was snow around the old school bunkhouse where we were staying.

On Friday I spent an hour or so walking with Dave Hugill and we took photographs of the Ribbleshead Viaduct. A party of about a dozen of us on Saturday walked up Whernside on the path from the Ribbleshead Viaduct. That day we walked approximately 10 miles and we finished up at the Station Inn near the viaduct for a pint or two and then we had a 2-mile trek back to the comfortable and well-heated bunkhouse. On Saturday evening we went across the road for a meal and a few pints at the Old Hill Inn.

Next day I walked with Sean O'Hagan, Ann Broad and Dave Hugill across the top of Twistleton Scar towards Ingleton and then returned below the scar to the bunkhouse. We covered about six miles.

On both days plenty of picturesque photographs of the Alpine wilderness were taken. There were 20 members on the meet and the accommodation for the two nights was £16. The bunkhouse was well equipped and warm.

Many thanks to Dave Hugill for organising this successful meet.

