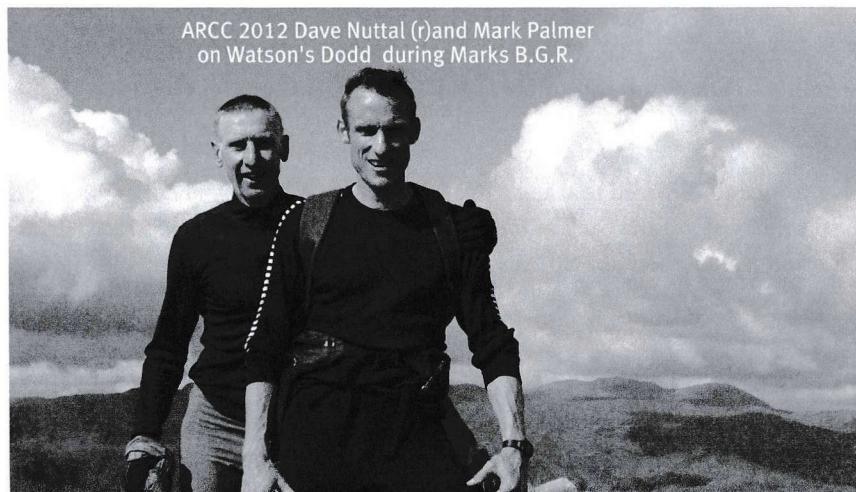


SUB FIFTEEN HOUR BOB GRAHAM ROUND

Mark Palmer



Most days in the fells are memorable, even the cold and wet ones are cherished in an insane way. Occasionally we are rewarded with an exceptional day when everything is perfect, the weather, the company and boundless energy. I was extremely fortunate that my reward came on 11th June 2011.

The dawn had already arrived as we departed Moot Hall at 4am. The overnight rain clouds were gradually dispersing to reveal patches of blue sky, whilst the cool morning air was welcomed as we made our ascent of Skiddaw. I had planned an 18:30hr schedule that would give my support teams and myself a comfortable day out on the fells, but secretly felt I might have a 17hr round in me.

With a Borrowdale trio of Steve Birkinshaw, Paul Cornforth and Chris Steel we were soon crossing the first summit of the day two minutes down on schedule, fast starts have never been my strength! The low cloud hanging around the tops was of no hindrance to Steve's navigational skills and Great Calva was bagged

ahead of schedule. I'm not fond of the open grassy moorland between Calva and Mungrisdale Common and was glad to reach the trod leading to Blencathra. All that separated me from my porridge was Halls Fell ridge and in the daylight it proved to be no problem.

A quick change of shirt and partners and we were heading up Cough Head. My Clayton duo of Dave Nuttal and Mike Wallis were not familiar with clockwise rounds but had little difficulty in adapting as we made good progress over the Dodds and up to Helvellyn. Reaching the top at 0840 ensured we had the mountain to ourselves, which is always a pleasure. With Nethermost and Dollywaggon ticked off it was a fast descent to the west side of Grisdale Tarn to start the climb up Fairfield. With summits 14 and 15 also safely in the bag it was time for a PJB (Peanut and Jam) buttie at Dunmail.

Leg 3 has always been a favourite of mine, I have supported attempts in both directions and reccied it on numerous occasions. Climbing up Steel Fell with fresh shoes and socks it felt like an old friend. My fresh support legs belonged to old friends too, Andy Schofield and Tom Brunt. The clear visibility made navigation easy and sightseeing ideal, although the pace and concentration required for the rocky terrain allowed little time to enjoy the panoramic views. I felt strong on the climbs and comfortable on the descents, summits came and went until we were just 3 other people on a crowded Scafell Pike. With Broad Stand scaled and Scafell peaked we headed down to the Wasdale Valley, another favourite of mine.

I was now 2 hours up on my schedule. This was a big surprise for me but an even bigger one for my support team who had just arrived. Having supported countless runners before, this professional outfit soon had me fed, watered, cleaned and on my way with team 4: Ozzy Kershaw and Tim Whittacker. I had heard stories of Wasdale being a graveyard for many BG attempts so was glad to get the climb up Yewbarrow out the way. Reaching Red Pike at 1500 hrs it suddenly registered that I was now 11 hours into my BG; I had 3 legs in the bag, a comfortable 2-hour cushion and was still feeling relatively good. Perhaps a 16hr round was within grasp. That thought safely tucked away we push on to Steeple. On route to Pillar Mark Roberts and Mike and Hazel Robinson join us. They had planned a Wasdale rendezvous but arrived after my departure, undeterred they raced after me, Mark straight up Dore Head and the Robinson's