

THE BOB GRAHAM ROUND 1979.

By Mike McGovern.

On the 13th June 1932 a 43 year old Keswick Hotelier, set out with four companions in the early hours of that high summer day for a walk around the Lake District, and arrived back 23 hours and 39 minutes later. Bob Graham had covered 75 miles over 42 summits 30,000 ft of ascent and descent. After a few hours sleep he then rose at 6am and cooked breakfast for his companions. Apart from the last sentence, people have been trying to copy him ever since.

Here is a record of my attempt.

On the 15th of June this year after six months of hard training after work, involving 75 to 100 miles of running a week, I met at Bishop's Scale with several of my fellow members of Horwich Harriers. To make an attempt on the Bob Graham Round. There is a tradition in Horwich RMI that we copy the original as near as possible, so by 12 midnight we were waiting outside Moot Hall, Keswick and on the first stroke we were off. The fresh banter from the well wishers soon had us on our way, even though we had navigational problems leaving Keswick town!

The summit of Skiddaw was reached a little over $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours later in a sharp, cold mist. Superb navigation by Dick Wolmersley had us on the heathery summit of Great Calva an hour later. One or two of my companions were complaining that we were going too fast, but I was feeling good so we pressed on over Blencathra and down Hall's ridge. This descent, in the dark and wind is an unforgettable experience! Dawn was breaking as we ran through Threlkeld to a car with hot tea and a change of socks. Twenty minutes up on schedule and feeling good. I will leave your imagination to conjure up the pleasures of getting to the top of Clough Head at 04.00 hrs in the morning in 40 mins. But it was soon over and the three Dodds followed in quick succession.

The day was on us now, and all the eastern sky was painted pink and gold; and the fell sides too, in reflected light. Leo Pollard was navigating this section and he waxed poetical on the beauty of the morning, he had to be heard to be believed! One of the lads then mistook Ullswater for Windermere and another Swirral Edge for Fairfield, so with topographical knowledge like this, life stayed exciting. Helvellyn loomed large, and as we neared the summit two small figures approached from the opposite direction. As if by unspoken consent, a race developed for the summit, and with a nod and an early morning grunt we passed by. They were disappointed, and probably wondered just what one has to do, to be the first of the day on top of Helvellyn.

Funny, how unexpected things can give doubts to attempts like this. During this time I developed stiffness in the hip-

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joints which made descent very painful. No explanations or reason for this; still, like all good masochists the ascents felt easier. The slag-heap climb of Fairfield from Grisedale Tarn went well, then a quick pull over Seat Sandal and the support cars were visible on the road near Dunmail Hut. We dropped in for breakfast of sweet porage and still sweeter tea. The chances of success on 'do's' like this, are built up by using the earlier experiences of others. Thus because each rest is followed by a long, steep climb, there is difficulty in hanging on to the food just eaten. So my plan was, eat little and drink a lot when resting, and eat on the tops and during the descents. It worked well.

Steel Fell is steep and hard but soon over, Calf Crag a mere bump on the path to High Raise. The pleasure of running on over the soft grass of Sergeant Man felt good after the rocks of the last section. The mist and with it the cold, blanketed us again and stayed for the three hours. Good navigators make or break an attempt in conditions like this and Alan Barber filled this post un-erringly. Only a few yards of rocks represented Thunacar Knott, Harrison Stickle and Pike O' Stickle. On the way to Rossett Crag we passed people taking part in the Lake District Four 3,000' Peaks Race, going in the other direction. We took an 8 minute rest on the side of Bowfell, and here Phil Fleming produced two tins of peaches, from where I know not, but he was inspired! The distance covered was starting to make itself felt and I was beginning to realize that there was a conspiracy to keep the time from me. I casually asked Pete Schofield and got the reply, "Shut up and keep goin', its nowt to do wi' you." Such are friends. The Scafell Group with its rocky slopes gave my stiff joints trouble because my agility was reduced. Long descents take their toll as much as climbing does and so it was that I was grateful as I climbed the stile to Wasdale Camp Site, after the knee-wrecking drop from Scafell coming out of the mist at 2,000ft. The happy, excited smile from Lyn, my wife, as she fed me and looked to my clothes told me that I had time in hand, but still I didn't know how much. Quite a crowd had gathered and a carnival atmosphere was developing and most of the wit was at my expense. Such is life.

All too soon the head-banging had to begin again. The jount up the side of Yewbarrow and then Red Bike were no fun. I had experienced Pete Dawes navigation on this section before, he seems to know every rock. Steeple and Pillar came and went and then one of the really hard parts was before me. The ascents of Kirkfell and Gable loom large in the mind of anyone contemplating the Bob Graham Round. After 55 miles covered at a jog for the most part, two nine hundred foot climbs present a mental stumbling block the size of a barn. But the descents are the things I remember, I had hobbled down. Someone timed

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my ascent and descent of Great Gable, 27 minutes for both exactly. They say stranger things happen at sea, but I wonder! After Green Gable the grassy run to Brandreth made up for it all.

I think it was here, with all the hard work behind, that elation and hope started to take hold; barring a broken ankle it was in the bag. Grey Knotts passed, then there it was again, the heart tug as I looked down on the support team at Honister, it had been picking up followers all day. It happened four times during my round; at Threlkeld, Dunmail, Wasdale and here. After hours on the fells deep in concentration, suddenly to drop down a fellside out of the mist and see people who have taken the trouble to come and be there. It says a lot for the spirit of the hills. The excitement and good-will from everyone was something that had sustained me through the past hours. That, and the thought that I wouldn't get away from the Lake District alive if I had packed up.

After a 13 minute stop, the last section was underway, all the tiredness and all seemed to disappear as I raced over the last three tops, Dale Head, Hindscarth and Robinson. One nasty moment though as we reached Newlands Church, where I was to change into a pair of road shoes for the last five miles into Keswick. To find that we were there before the cars! Just as I ripped the last chunk of hair out, they arrived; with a screech of brakes and beery breath. A slight delay at the Swains Head. It seemed strange to be running on level ground and not having to watch every foot-fall. Soon Keswick came in to view. What a strange sight we must have seemed to the evening revellers, as to the sound of cheers I touched the Moot Hall for the second time that day.

So to the hand shakes and congratulations of many friends, one of the best Mountain Days of my life came to a close. I couldn't say much then, I wasn't in full control of my voice, I had built up a debt that day with them all, that I can never repay, and through them a store of memories that will stay with me all my life. And like that famous man Spike Milligan, when asked why he did it, I can only reply, "Because it is there".

Mike McGovern July 1979.

Schedule: Completion time 23hrs. Actual time 21 hrs 42mins.

(Due to lack of space I am unable to print the full schedule, but will be happy to supply aspiring Bob Grahamers with a copy)

ARCC now have at least three members who are also members of the Exclusive Bob Graham Club. Leo Pollard, Ted Southworth and now Mick. There may be more, I don't know.

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TAKEN FROM LANGDALE LOGBOOK, JULY 1979.

An experiment in choice
 Collapsing holds
 Cracking voice
 Right or left?
 Steep, Yankee 'terminal'
 'Crater'
 The words, they happen
 In magazines.
 But the bounce, the smash
 The thudding crash,
 Its frightening when its real.

The heroes,
 The suckling of the mother chalk,
 The control
 Mirrored in this vertical walk,
 The balance
 The climber, hunter,
 The hold he stalks.
 Disintegrate
 Bleed
 Dead fear.

Dead fear
 Reflected
 In solid liberty
 The rock is an escape
 It has imprisoned me
 I'm far from free.
 Explode,
 My E.Bs a neutron bomb.
 My runners slipped away
 My fingers have gone
 I want to enjoy it
 Its far beyond.
 Catapult backwards.
 The split second
 Is six weeks long.
 Cartwheel out
 The silent shout
 Then the awful world
 That shifts back into focus
 And the bedlam of silence
 The frantic gasp,
 Desperate breath
 And the creak of the highwire light rope
 As you twist slow and limp
 and think
 of the wife and kids and home.
 And next weekend
 When you'll die again.

Nigel Holmes.