

Bob Graham Round 22.6.19

David Jackson

On Monday I struggled to walk down the stairs. On Tuesday I woke in the night with a nose bleed, airways ravaged by countless breaths, well lined membranes stripped bare, my first line of defence happily succumbed to breath-taking but life enforcing endeavours. As my body laid waiting for the paralysis of dreams, shards of sleep jigsaw pieced together a restless puzzle of hurt. My brain making sense, rebuilding fresh neural blocks of fatigue acquired strength. Novel grooves of movement cemented over countless hours and terrain encountered days before. I'd reached a state of exhaustion; a cerebral awakening encountered through self inflicted physical suffering. My body if given the choice would carry on, driven by endless momentum, fuel its only concern. My brain and mind wanted routine, diurnal rhythm it's only craving after an extended deprived weekend.

On Wednesday I slept like a log, unbroken slumber left me awakened, alert and ready for pancakes in the morning. On Thursday I ran again, my legs remembering and reliving the thousands of feet covered the previous weekend during the 42 peaks of Bob Graham's famous round. My softened feet, now cared for, had lost a protective layer of hardened skin during the pounding they had received over the unforgiving sun baked Lake District terrain. A long awaited day turned into a fondly remembered adventure, literally etched into the fabric of my soles. Peeling skin on my neck, a reminder of the hours spent under the suns blazing kiss.

Throughout the 36 hours of wake-fullness I'd volunteered to endure in pursuit of the Bob Graham Round, the twenty one and a half hours of movement turned out to be the relatively easy part. The waiting, largely done in a lonesome bunk, made me eager to get moving amongst friends, companions changing at each stage, a fresh set of faces, legs and spirits freely offered, gratefully received. Preparation and planning largely taken out of my hands made me willing to give myself over to the hands of experienced and faithful others. Procrastinating thoughts and attempted repose over, I was ready for the summits, at first too many to count, step by step would bring purposeful, thoughtless action. My time and attempt had arrived.....

We were joined at Moot Hall by four other groups lurking around the clock tower as it neared its midnight zenith, heralding our traditional clockwise attempt. To break up the stampede through the quietening Keswick streets we set off five minutes early and headed out across the park, Skiddaw's slopes looming in the dark awaiting our first efforts. They came in cool Cumbrian lung draughts of air sending baskets of energy making oxygen to the pre-loaded tissues waiting. Fuel filled free flowing blood quickened and delivered an aerobic midnight feast, quickly warming me as the slopes of Skiddaw steepened and the day's biggest climb settled us in to our rhythm. New lines masterly navigated us to the summit 'Bob on' schedule, my reticence kept in check by the endeavours of my faithful pacers.

Chat and banter ensued while the product of Disney subjected parenting sound tracked our soft footed descents to the awaiting peat bogs below. The Greatest Showman made an appearance as we sure footed our way up Great Calva, and I knew this was where I wanted to be. A decade earlier and countless supporting on leg 1 gave me the confidence of the heather and bracken stepped descent to the chilled valley below. The decent amount of recent waterfall gave me a brief memory of a linked arm stream crossing on a previous round, but we were only faced with a knee deep cooling dip as we marched onto Mungrisdale Common.

As we ascended our way to our third and final summit of the first leg, we were joined by a fellow candidate who said he grew up in a neighbouring village to me back in Yorkshire. It turns out we attended the same primary school, St Walburgas. I suggested that it must've been our harsh upbringing that had driven us to such physical flagellation. We jovially summited the mighty saddleback of Blencathra with a handshake and a good luck as an orange moon lit the backdrop to the rest of the darkened lakes while most of it lay sleeping. A quick well-found traverse and we

chatted our way down to the first rest stop, Halls fell ridge blinking by as the dawn approached and the vale shrugged off its misty curtain of quiet.

I'd worked up a breakfast hunger by 3.42am so the overnight oats plentifully prepared went down a treat along with a sachet of mountain morning fuel and a drink to boost. Hardened helpers helped themselves and were converted to the soft squelch of honey-soaked oats and raspberries, well required fuel for the long day ahead.

The shortest night of the year rapidly gave way to my longest day on the hills. What better way to fully take part in a whole day than by moving through it in awe inspiring landscape.

We trotted out of Threlkeld, fresh legs and faces turned to Clough Head as it reared its steep access to the high rolling Dodds and Pikes waiting. I was moving well enough, legs and lungs keeping an aerobic rhythm. I'd been snacking on coconut milk, honey and chocolate homemade rice pudding, faithful and dedicated food prep that was going down well. Caffeinated chocolate covered coffee beans, a rare night time treat along with mountain fuel caffeine cola jellies, staving off hormonal desires for sleep. Greater more powerful desires were at work now, belly fuelled hungers and heart driven sparks of reward, kindled and lit by the majestic dawn that rose at our backs. Full vistas of far off summits enticed the spirits, legs eager to carry, each one a goal attained by the purposeful touch of a hand on their immovable cairn. We'd covered a sizeable chunk of the distance of the round already. Twenty percent my learned pacer informed me to be precise but only four of the forty two peaks crested. I decided to focus on other things. My legs were beginning to feel slightly heavy, restricted at ankle and hip, less swagger more shuffle to my stride. I guessed the time of day to be around 6am and knew my body's routine was requiring attention. A brief panoramic throne room functioned spectacularly. Legs renewed, pelvis swivelling and hips driving I skipped up the gentle slope to join my waiting companions at the summit of White Side. Sustenance and energy on constant supply my dawn-treading friends continued to fuel both body and mind.

"He looks like he's just got up"

"He looks fresh"

"Keep smiling"

"Slow down Jacko"

All encouraging, ego swelling words.

The mighty Helvellyn and its lower man provided a rare rich view from their summits, where previous visits have often been mist shrouded, fast paced fell runs, wind and rain soaked triathlons distant memories now. While the aforementioned ablutions had freed up the legs, a prophylactic paracetamol washed away thoughts of ensuing cramp previously encountered during the favourite Old County Tops fell race. Now tread in reverse, the steep descent down Dollywagon Pike, warmed the legs and brought a bead to the forehead. The cooling breeze atop the bagged plateau of peaks thus far, swept behind as we skirted the banks of Grisedale tarn, depositing us at the col and foot of Fairfield. It's steep scree laden switch backs a chance to maintain acquired warmth, breath deep and catch a few minutes up the climb that lungs and legs enjoy despite their southern dwelling-based conditioning. We'd made up time but didn't want to get to the breakfast stop before our crew had fired up the skillet. We could smell the bacon from the top of Seat Sandal and we staved off our hunger with chat and smiles as we descended to Dunmail Raise to breakfast with buried kings and morning risen family and friends.

Often described as the 'Ratti machine' the well-oiled wheels were in full flow and butter greased bacon and egg butties were duly delivered to well-deserved supporters.



A replenishing bottle of mountain fuel recovery alongside a fresh coffee brewed added to the home comforts of an expert support crew. Comedic humour accompanied focused attention on feet and over stimulated calves, a rare pummelling in the recovery chair.

Rest over, we steeled ourselves for Steel Fell, fresh legs from my renewed pack of pacers quickly brought heart rates up, lungs like bellows drinking in the morning. The strung out pack speedily regrouped as the quick pace was maintained, chivalrous wayfarers and pathfinders signalling the best lines. Hand signals directed me, never a foot of climb lost or energy wasted by a leg sapping bog or wayward route. Lead by masters of terrain and navigation perfected over countless repeated days had out on these Lakeland expanses, a threadbare dome of blue clear sky and hazy horizons surrounded and encircled our playground in the clouds. Fatigue took a back step as engrossed in the group, coddled by the net of collective movement, miles were covered and summits reached in a semi-conscious euphoria.

A constant shadow at my shoulder now delivered pub grub snacks, nuts and crisps replenishing salts while tangy fizzy sweets woke the taste buds and spiked my glucose deprived brain. We were in our back yard now, the Langdale pikes coming and going in quick succession. A well-chosen route marched us on our way to Rosset pike and there we took a moment, savoured the rest and enjoyed a pork pie with added hot stock hand delivered from the descendants of Arthurian legend. The great Bowfell and its stepped traverse made legs and lungs work, stripping the pork fat attempting to stick to our ribs.



Elven sure footed peda-gods of rock lead the way effortlessly boulder skipping and route finding the quickest routes across the sun-dried tundra leading towards the highest of the Lakeland peaks. The relentless pace since the start of leg 2 was taking its toll and a minor wobble brought the faithful group to a huddle. Noting the midday hour, picnic time was upon us, novel bites of mustard spiced

sandwiches and liquorice allsorts washed down with a heavy dose of positivity and encouragement lifted the spirits and off we went.

The Scafell range and its massif now quickly upon us I took a moment to remove the compression shorts I'd had on for the past 12 hours, unsurprisingly releasing a niggling band of abdominal tightness. A bustling summit greeted us atop England's highest peak and we quickly dispersed through the crowds, front runners off to meet and greet our awaiting Broad Stand climbing crew.



We were warmly greeted with shouts of "we're not ready" "you're too early", old friends rightly reminding us of our schedule. We were around thirty to forty minutes premature. Fat man's burden presented but a greased squeeze and it was around and up Broad Stand under the safe stewardship of our fondest crag borne friends. Time saved was thankfully maintained as we worked our way down, ever down to bright Wasdale thousands of feet below, its usually dark waters shimmering in



the June sun. The dry red scree run gave a brief respite to the legs and chance for the light-footed to reveal their prowess and descend to the waiting cooling plunge of the stream crossing. I arrived with a burn in the feet and heat in the head, taking the opportunity to wet both before the final path lead us to the waiting crew at the car park. A glimpse of nearest and dearest brought a lump to the throat, chest swelling pride and thanks for unrelenting support.



Seated and now satiated with salty oxtail stew and soaked root veg, a proper meal for a proper day out.



Removing shoes and socks the extent of the burn in my heels was revealed. A flap of dry old skin had been pumiced away from my left heel leaving new unblemished pads, shock absorbers and soles awaiting fresh prints to forge body memories over the coming hours. Fresh coffee and fruit quenched and stimulated while cuddles from smiling loved ones replenished and lifted spirits.

Over a decade ago my legs had first stomped up Yewbarrow, youth filled vigour relishing the steep ascent. Legs now stepped in single file with wiser and younger pairs of pistons, bent backed breathing the only sound to be heard as the steady climb found our efforts matched with youth, experience, fatigue and digestion. Sheltered from the breeze and noses barely a scrape away from the quickly drying out heather, the dusty ground reflected an added heat for our bodies to manage along with the already flaming June sun bearing down on us.

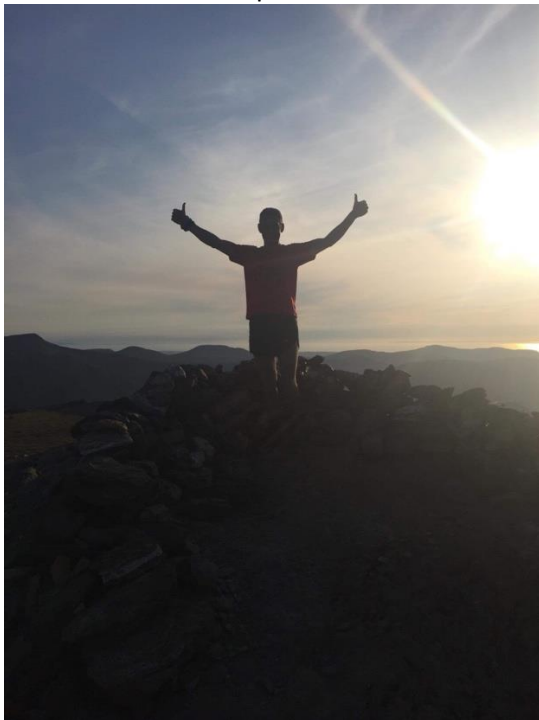
Warmed legs now meandered through the rocky traverse to the foot of Red Pike, every foot gained revealing dramatic views when sporadic release from tunnel vision took in the wider periphery. Ozzy's lines on full view for all to learn from brought us to the wall, a moment of respite for helpers as out and back, the gentle giant delivered my ailing legs to lonesome Steeple. The promise of a

hoisin duck wrap on our return sped us up and I managed to force some down as eating became arduous yet necessary.

Passing through stages of head swimming heat driven nausea, heavy shortened steps brought doubts of time lost. Reassured by the ever-present and faithful water carrier and food deliverer shadowing my steps, a steadier pace was maintained as Pillar and the leg sapping Kirk Fell were left behind us in a dreamlike, semi wakeful state. Ahead inviting us to its protruding summit, where eons of ice stripped it and its neighbours of their unfathomable heights, the greatness of Gable laid bare its striven gorges and strewn boulder fields, awaiting hands and feet, whole body effort on all fours delivered us to the backbone of leg four. A brief hat tip to the great fallen and unmentionable gestures and profane words to Bob Graham, swift footed and lightened loads brought speed back into our steps as we quickly visited Gables Green neighbour.

Channelling my inner Lakeland light foot, Borrowdale lines and flattened plateaus left us on the sun drenched Brandreth. Grey Knotts finally gave us the evening as chest bared and swelled, our slate mine dwelling posse clapped and greeted us with sausage baps and magnum ice creams. I was barely able to mouth at the bread but managed to suck the butter from it and wolf down the ice cream. A brief stop and swap of crew, fresh scented we stepped into the evening, Dale Head prolonging the end in sight yet allowing reflection on a savoured day, body stamped, and mind sealed memories delivered first class.

Red grapes and orange segments kept juices flowing along with the return of fizzy sweets and perhaps an overreliance on flat coke, I was beginning to feel full after eighteen hours of constant yet required feeding. I needed to run. Luckily the rolling sections of leg five kept the legs turning, brief glances to hidden trods brought fond memories of past wanderers on secret lines, our path lay wide and open before us. The gentle slope of Robinson quickened the pace and opened the stride to a respectable Catalan inspired canter. The final of forty-two summits reached, one edge of the now revealed cauldron of peaks enclosed a moment of arm raised smiles.



Regrouped we headed down and away from a whole day spent at height, revellers of fell filled hours, drunk on the hubris of fatigue.

At the foot of the final fell a recharged bull lay waiting, gates were opened, and paths cleared as quick paced, rock gave way to grass then tarmac gave energy back, bouncing us down to Newlands church. A final seat and change of shoes and vest, loved family and committed friends who had done enough already lead and joined the throng along the final kilometres of road. Shaded woods and

overgrown fields lead to swaying bridges and finally paved civilisation. Traffic and pedestrians negotiated a surge of spirits ended in a high kneed, arm driven required sprint up the high street, the steps of Moot Hall delivered me to its doors to touch and signal the completion of a long-held ambition.



Claps and congrats, group huddles and cuddles, pictures and attempted descriptions distracted a growing nausea, my body soon expelling what it now didn't need.

Thanks, and grateful praise offered I left my friends to the barrel and delicious pulled pork and retired to my bunk for a dreamless leg twitching sleep.

Dave would like to thank all members and friends of the Achille Ratti Climbing Club who supported him on his successful round. ARCC maintains a 100% completion rate for the BGR – ad altiora.

He would especially like to thank his navigators and pacers who joined him on each leg:

Leg 1: Rob Green Snr, James Lurati, Daz Graham

Leg 2: Andy Pooler, Chris Lloyd, Gary Walmsley, Malc Christie

Leg 3: Dave Makin, Tash Fellowes, Rob Green, Dave Riding, Tim Clarke, Gary Walmsley, Andy Bryan, Mandy Goth and Phil Hodgson (climbers), Keith Daniels, Carolyn Daniels and Eleanor (Arthurian descendants and delivers of stock and pork pies)

Leg 4: Ozzy "The Bull" Kershaw, Tom Makin, Mick Green, Rob Green

Leg 5: Martin Kirkman, Jenni Boocock, Dave Riding, Tim Clarke, Juliet Jackson (road) Adam Jackson (road) James Gorman (road) Vicky Pooler (road)

Road, morale and foot care: Tony Shanley

Catering: Janet Makin, James Gorman, Teresa Jackson and Sharon Jackson

