

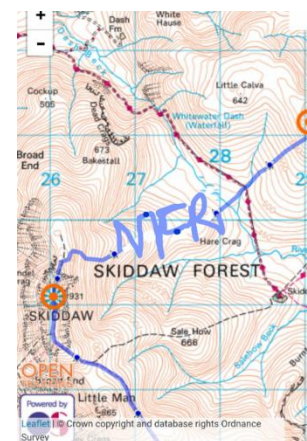
An account of my Bob Graham Round – 26th August 2017 – Mark Clarkson

The Bob Graham Round... the BGR... the Bob! My interest was drawn to this challenge a few years ago reading captivating stories of heroic efforts and epic adventures on the fells. I remember running leg 1 around 5 years ago and finishing at Threlkeld wondering how it would feel to be continuing on up Clough Head and beyond- being thankful at the time that I was not. My interest was further ignited supporting Scott G on leg 3 of his super-fast BG in 2015. 2016 came and went without much progress. I came to realise this year that it would take commitment to get purposeful training in and more importantly to commit to a date. And so 2017 has consisted of not much racing, but more steady runs and leg recces. In fact I think the only races I've entered this year have been: the Teenager with Altitude and Windy Gyle. The latter of which nearly ended all ambitions of a BG this year, after pulling my calf about a mile in. Thanks again to the sixty odd people who asked if I was okay whilst I hobbled back to the start. Some rest and rehab followed before I starting getting out for a few long runs and finally getting reasonably fit. I had not realised what a logistical challenge the BG is to arrange: leg support, road support, camping, food, drink, timings, schedule, daylight hours, equipment, shoes, pickups and drop offs, etc. A few late nights and countless text messages, and all was set for the 26th August.

So came the arrival of 3:59am standing at the Moot Hall, waiting for the off. Leg 1 support was John D and Steve I. The forecast was good and temperature fairly warm. We set off through a quiet Keswick and headed for Skiddaw. The pace was controlled, conscious not to blow up on leg 1. Near the top of Skiddaw the clag was in and visibility was poor. We found the summit, and descended to the fence crossing. We battled the bogs at the valley bottom where underfoot conditions were very wet and ascended Great Calva. I tried to make a real effort to eat and drink as advice seemed to suggest this was crucial for later in the round. We crossed the Caldew and were making good time. The ascent of Blencathra was a chatty affair and we arrived on schedule at the summit. John D even had some time to create a dedicated NFR message on the GPS Tracker (see Andy Higgins FB post right). I had considered Blencathra descent options in the planning. Given the need to save the quads and that the direct/parachute route seemed quite overgrown late in season, I had opted for Hall's Fell. A good rapid skirt around the top rock section worked well, followed by a couple of 'dodgy slips' and we descended fairly speedily to Threlkeld. We arrived bang on schedule to meet the road support of Dad, Claire and Sarth.



A quick sock and top change, some food, and I was off. Leg 2 support was John T and Chris R. My memory of Clough Head was of generally trying to eat a breakfast cereal pouch which tasted far too sweet for my liking and would just not go down. By the top I gave up and it was packed away. Nearing the Clough Head summit was the first time I felt a little heavy legged and had



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to force a jog. The clag was in for much of leg 2 and only cleared a little later on around Fairfield. This was a shame as I hoped for spectacular views as we ticked off the Dodds and headed south. Navigation was good on the leg and the schedule was maintained. I had found choosing a schedule for the round somewhat of a challenge. It is fine to run a leg of the BG on a fairly fast schedule but knowing what pace you can do over multiple legs I found challenging. I therefore chose to use Scott G's schedule of 20.5 hours and see what happened on the day. I knew worst case



scenario this allowed 3.5 hours to still get back in sub 24. The ascent of Fairfield was solid and I felt strong. We descended to climb Seat Sandal. On the ascent I tucked into my supply of nuts, cheese and some fruit pastels. They all went down well and tasted good, the pastels a little too good and I had a few more. We descended to Dunmail and as the clag cleared we could see the road support crew and the next leg runners Andy H and Scott G 'limbering' up. I remember crossing the stile, then the road and reaching the awaiting chair. Then bang. It all went downhill. I felt terrible. I tried to change my shoes and socks with difficulty. I



wanted to eat and knew I needed to but found it really hard to eat anything. Despite Dexter's best efforts I struggled to get more than a couple of mouthfuls. I could sense the feeling of the support team; looking on in worry. This was a real low. As it turns out the only real one of the day. I don't remember having too many negative thoughts or thinking of stopping. I just knew I needed to get going and I would eventually feel better again, but it was hard to get out of the chair and set off.

We departed Dunmail behind schedule and started the trudge up Steel Fell. I was not feeling like any conversation with Andy and Scott and was pretty silent on the climb. Dexter had persuaded me to take a handful of Pringles with me. I nursed these all the way up Steel Fell and still never managed to eat them. I struggled onwards and lost some time on the next couple of peaks. By High Raise I was perking up; generally down to Andy and Scott getting me to sip and nibble! We ran to Thunacar Knott and made good progress thereafter. We enjoyed good views on this section and to Andy's disappointment (stood with video rolling) I avoided going waist deep in Martcrag Moor.



Rossett Pike, Bowfell and onwards we were moving well. Again conscious efforts to eat and drink, with a particular thirst for Torq! And hula hoops! By Scafell Pike I was 25 minutes down on schedule. I was reasonably happy with this given how I felt and the earlier low. The plan had been to climb Broad Stand but a quick assessment from Scott confirmed that it was too wet so we diverted to Lord's Rake and West Wall Traverse, while Andy bolted down

to Wasdale to prepare for leg 4. We ticked off Scafell and began the long descent ourselves; Scott showing great scree riding skills on route.

Arrival at Wasdale was welcome relief for the road support team who watched a very different, 'fresh' faced, person arrive and depart. I also got a nice surprise to see an extra support runner for leg 4 in Luke who had ran over from Honister after finishing work early – top man.



I departed Wasdale 38 minutes down on schedule, still chewing on an 'Anzac' (thanks Claire). Leg 4 support was Andy H, Luke A, and Steve I (re-joining us

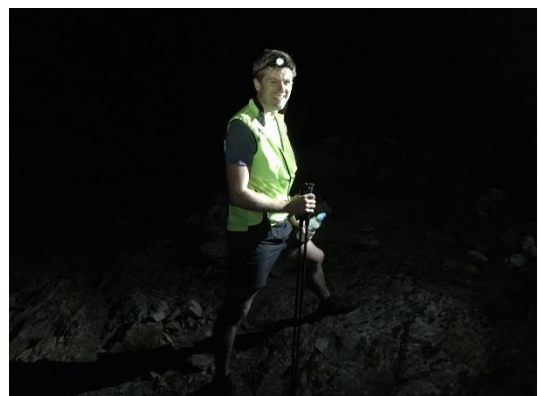


after a leisurely day trying to recover from leg 1). The poles were out and we made good progress up Yewbarrow. To be honest from here on in back to Keswick I felt strong. Not quite able to run fast but a steady trot and a strong walk. By now I was pretty much reliant on Torq, Hula Hoops, the odd cereal bar and some jelly babies from Andy. Apologies must go out to all the support runners for all legs. I think I was somewhat optimistic with my food and drink planning – far more than needed. However it did mean we usually had something I fancied and could therefore eat. So thanks for that guys. As we progressed through leg 4 and descended the great section off Pillar, light began to fade. I

had hoped to hit Great Gable summit before it got dark but I was not going to be so lucky. On the descent off Kirkfell head torches went on and it got dark really quick. This generally made progress a bit slower, especially over rough rocky ground. Andy and Luke did a great job on nav up Great Gable. From Windy Gap up Green Gable we passed a friend, James, who was wild camping and trying to get a good photo – the clag and darkness said otherwise. Running to Brandreth and Grey Knotts was an ease and my mind focussed on the Honister changeover and last leg. I was slow on the descent to Honister, tired legs and the darkness making it difficult. At Honister I wanted a quick change, some food, a change of top and off. I only stopped for 4 minutes and left 45 mins down on schedule.



Final leg runners were my brother Gary and NFR legend Dexter. The final 3 summits seem to come and go so quick. Again I felt really strong and kept the Torq and Hula Hoops flowing. And so we arrived at Robinson summit, number 42, peaks all complete, just the run back to Keswick. Descent to the valley was slow and steady. It was welcome relief to hit the track and then road to Little Town. A quick shoe change and off along the road. The final miles back to Keswick was very much a head down and crack on affair. Dexter banged out a solid pace at the front and I just followed the best I could. The little climbs



were not as bad as feared and before I knew it we were running the final few metres back to the Moot Hall to a nice welcome party (balloons and all!). 21 hours 13 minutes. A fantastic day out in the fells with some very fine folk.

I owe a great deal of thanks to many people for making this round possible. Firstly to my wife Kathryn (and family) for 'allowing' me selfish time to train and do the round. To my road support of Dad, Claire and Sarth; fantastic support over a very long day. To the support runners Steve I, John D, Chris R, John T, Andy H, Scott G, Luke A, Gary, Dexter, I'll repay the favour anytime... To other supporters on the day for your encouragement and help.

In review of the day, what would I have changed? Not a great deal. Perhaps making the support runners life easier by packing less snacks and drinks. I would have not eaten so much in one go on Seat Sandal, in particular the fruit pastels, and had something more sugary before arrival at Dumail – I did this for Wasdale and Honister. I would have started an hour earlier to allow more time to get off Great Gable in the light. Constant eating and drinking was key and I didn't get any cramp all round. I also never really chased the schedule, just allowing the peaks to come and go and keep moving at a steady speed. Would I run the BG again... yes I think I would! But just not yet!



The Keswick welcoming party!

Photo credits to Andy H, Dexter, Claire.