

Bob Graham Round. July 17<sup>th</sup> 2021 by Joe Stringer

The beginning: "The mountains will always be there"

One of the requirements for entry into the Bob Graham Round 24 Hour Club is that along with the ratification form detailing your attempt, a report of the run must also be submitted. There isn't any guidance I could find on how to compose this report, so here is my typically rambling effort, where I'll attempt to tell you all about a day I will never forget. It's probably unnecessarily longwinded for the Bob Graham Club but writing this helps me think back over the day and remember all the little details better. Plus, if you had broken your hands badly whilst mountain biking a few years ago and your employer had got you some great dictation software because you can't type, you might as well make the most of it eh?

I had probably only heard of the Bob Graham Round sometime in 2019 when I grew more interested in fell running and it only became something I seriously considered doing at some point in 2020. I was initially attracted to the fells in general because of all the time I've spent riding past them on my bike, looking out at the places tarmac doesn't go, and thinking, "I bet it's really nice up there". Simple as that really.

A few forays later into some of the North East fell races, and I was hooked. Matters were helped more by the encouragement and friendliness of the whole scene and particularly the Northumberland Fell Runners club, whom I subsequently joined after chatting to a couple of members at the 9 Standards race on New Year's day 2020, but only raced for twice before the world abruptly stopped turning.

I've done some big endurance stuff on the bike, and I am, at best, an "ok" runner but the Bob Graham Round would be like nothing I've ever attempted before. I was reading in a book about 'The Bob' that said attempts tend to fall into two categories – those with years of planning, where every single variable is controlled and thought through to the Nth degree with teams of coaches and sports scientists, and the Rounds where some foolhardy *baroudeur* just rocks up and gives it a bash. My Round was certainly leaning toward the latter category. And, as the great Don Whillans said, "The mountains will always be there. The trick is to make sure that you are."

I had managed to sell the idea of the Round to a couple of friends Sam and Jonny who along with Sam's mate Steve, were also keen, and we decided to keep it low key and do it as a group. Obviously the first step was to establish a WhatsApp group with a strict "fell running craic only policy", and then next it was to organise meeting up for training and planning. We quickly realised that one of the major challenges would just be the logistics of planning and organising the whole thing, especially as Sam is in London and getting up to do recce days in the Lakes was going to be tricky. Jonny, Steve and I, all being in the North East, managed to meet up for a couple of runs but soon Steve pulled out. Steve knows the Lakes well and spends a fair bit of time there but felt he was unable to get the required training in. Shortly after Sam also had to drop out, realising the training and logistics were going to take its toll and impact negatively on his primary goal – the London marathon, which now he better completely smash the back doors off! To be fair, making any kind of long term plans that involve travelling and booking things and arranging anything in advance has been hard for everyone this last 18 months or so, with so much uncertainty. I'm sure Sam's Round will come, though.



*Sunrise on Great Calva*

### Fitness, footwear, and fortitude

I hope this report could also help people considering doing the Round by answering some of the common questions which seem to be asked by most people, including myself. How good a runner do you need to be? How fit do you need to be? What kind of shoes should you wear? Well, I would describe my running ability as average to fair but then I would also describe myself as cyclist who dabbles in running. Perhaps now after completing the BGR I can class myself as a proper runner, dare I say it a proper fellsman. Anyway to give you some idea - my best 5km was 17:22, 10km 36:49 both in 2020, my best half marathon 1:26:4 in 2019, and in some of the fell races in the North East I wasn't far off the top 10 but a long way back from the guys who win. Obviously, your general fitness has to be good, but I don't think you have to be a fast runner to get round the Bob, it's just about coping with the relentless up and down, and then for me, how well could I cope with fatigue? More so than physical fitness, it requires commitment, determination, and mental fortitude. I hoped this would be my strong suit, and that what I lacked in physical ability I could make up for in my capacity to deal with the extreme fatigue. I also thought a lot of people would tend to give up psychologically before they do physically. I like to think I'm the other way round although wouldn't class myself as anything special in terms of mental toughness – probably stupid, or bloody minded would be more accurate descriptions. I think Sarah (Jonny's GP wife, school friend, and one half of our road crew along with Jonny's dad Gary) agreed with me after she saw the horrific state I was in at Honister, at which point the thoughts of how they were going to explain my tragic death to people started creeping in. Stupid or brave, I hadn't gone into this underestimating the challenge and was

confident that I could push through whatever psychological problems the day might bring, although I was still ultimately humbled by the fells, by the weather, by my own physicality, and ambition.

Another thing I've noticed people seem to fuss a lot about is footwear. I reasoned that we would be going pretty slow on the descents to avoid taking any risks and to save the legs therefore I probably wouldn't need any of my mega grippy racing shoes with the big lugs. Comfort was going to carry a five-star priority rating for me, and anyway, my preference is for something with more support and cushioning. Especially as over the last year I seem to have lost a lot of the padding in my heels so it can feel like I'm just walking on bone if I'm bare foot in the house for example. On the first leg, I wore some Saucony Peregrine 11s, which I planned on switching out at Threlkeld as they would be wet from some potential boggy bits or running through the River Caldew. On leg 2, I wore some Nike Pegasus Trail 2s, not the grippiest but I find them so comfortable. At Dunmail Raise I changed into a pair of Hoka Speedgoat 4s and wore them for the rest of the Round. I would've put these on at the start of leg 2 but I wanted to save them for a treat whereby I would feel the benefit of the extra cushioning. A bit like making sure you take your jacket off indoors when it's cold outside. And then finally for the last few km on the road into Keswick I was flexing in some pink Nike Vaporflys. Probably the slowest 5km anyone has ever run in a pair of those. Shoes are such a personal preference though and depends on how you run as much as the terrain I reckon.

#### The entry of Joe and Jonny into Keswick: Part one

On the eve of the Round Jonny and I drove over to Keswick after work. The week leading up had been busier than usual for me at work, which had made getting all the bits and pieces ready for the round a bit more stressful. Not the ideal prep really. A lot of the time I have to accept that things just aren't going to go exactly the way I'd like them and work with what I've got – essential Bob Graham mindset. The nerves gradually eased once we were in the car and heading West but really, we both just wanted to get it underway and get up on the fells.

I'd booked us some digs at the Keswick YHA, so we dropped off the bags and headed for some food at The Round pub – trying to book a table somewhere in Keswick proved harder than trying to nail down a date for doing the round that didn't clash with everyone's various pesky life commitments. The Round pulled through for us though and it was Bob Graham themed burgers for all. Here we met up with Toby. Toby had answered the call when I put a post on the Facebook group looking for additional support. He had attempted the Round a few weeks earlier but had to bail at halfway on leg 3 because of bad weather. He had struggled to find support for each leg for a subsequent attempt so asked if he could piggyback ours and do the day with us. Why not we thought. Toby was bringing his own road crew and had pacers/carrier for leg 2, 4 and 5 so we thought it could be good to have him along and an additional person with knowledge of the route that could help mitigate some of my comical navigational blunders. As it transpired it was Toby who caused eyebrows to raise when occasionally he'd shoot off up another line without saying anything, only to catch us back up later. What he revealed later was that he was in fact bagging an extra few peaks just to make it up to 51, which was the total number of peaks in Alan Heaton's 1961 round. Errr, fair play I guess Toby. Too bad your gps malfunctioned or something and didn't manage to record the whole round. I don't even want to imagine for a single second what it would be like doing the Bob Graham Round in under 24 hours and then it NOT being on Strava. Can you imagine? Jonny certainly can because he doesn't even have Strava, not even his own sneaky private account, and chooses to "operate in the shadows," as he puts it. The ultimate flex I reckon, and I wish I could be as cool. I briefly thought about leaving the run titled "morning run" which would also be a pure flex but then the Bob

deserves more respect than that and is not a thing to be played about with on Strava. Saying that though, go and see what you think of the title of Kilian Jornet's record breaking Round on Strava.

Back to the Keswick YHA, which on the evening of July 16<sup>th</sup> felt hotter than how I imagine a space shuttle re-entering the earth's atmosphere must feel. I cursed myself for not blowing the budget and booking something that could have featured something luxurious like air conditioning, but then again, a night in a youth hostel is more in keeping with the spirit of the Round, and we'd only be in there for about 5 hours anyway. The alarms were set for 02:00, and I experienced one of those situations where you are telling yourself how important it is to get as much sleep as you can, and you end up getting yourself all worked up and not really having any sleep at all. I think I managed maybe one fitful hour. Jonny confirmed he was in the same boat soon as we got up.

### Our *grand départ* in the small hours

At 02:55 we arrived at Moot Hall to find Toby already there waiting. The last thing he'd said to us the night before was, "If I'm not there at 03:00 don't wait for me," to which we both assured him he needn't worry about, whilst wondering if that was the kind of thing someone would say who was serious about attempting the Bob Graham Round the next day. As it turned out we needn't have doubted him. On that note though, what I have observed about running is that people are very relaxed about time. Club training sessions never start at the advertised time, and there's always load of hanging about before the running actually starts. Even most casual club rides in cycling always leave exactly on the dot, whether you're there or not. I'm not having a pop by the way, just an observation, but if anyone could explain this relaxed approach I'd certainly listen.

Also at Moot Hall was a bloke called Dave who was setting off on a solo anti-clockwise Round, also at 03:00. I remember Dave just had a great energy about him and came out with the classic line about it being "just a good day out in the fells", one of several mantras I would return to on several occasions.

As the clock struck 03:00 we were off and on our way. Here we go. As soon as the path turned upward, we were shedding layers as even at 03:00 it was 14-15 degrees, with the rest of the day set to be a real scorcher in the high 20's. Here's an understatement: Doing this on the hottest day of the year was a mistake. As extremes of weather go though, we rationalised that this was the lesser of two evils.

### Ups and downs in the early legs

The heat was probably one of the biggest factors in the day and slowed things down so much. I just seemed unable to replace the fluids and salts I was losing through sweat no matter how much I could drink. Fortunately leg 1 was relatively cool, and we were treated to a spectacular sunrise at the top of Great Calva and made steady progress. We were about 4 minutes down on a 22.5 hour schedule at Skiddaw, which wasn't too concerning as there was still so much more in front of us and setting off conservatively would be better than getting over excited and burning too many matches. As it turned out I ended up in survival mode a lot sooner than I had hoped, and thoughts of any kind of schedule more or less went out of the window. At that point on leg one, though, conditions were great, and the sensations were promising as we continued up over Mungrisdale Common, over Blencathra and down Hall's Fell.

Arriving at the cricket club car park in Threlkeld at 07:03 we were greeted by the welcome sight of our road crew, Sarah and Gary, who had also brought along Swiss Dave, who would be running Leg 2

with us. David Zürcher is over in the UK staying with me for the summer, learning English and training with the Muckle Cycle Club, and up until a week earlier he had never heard of the Bob Graham Round, let alone imagine he would be dragged out on a 24 hour odyssey of one of the oldest and most prestigious mountain running challenges in the world. David was, however, the Junior Swiss Orienteering national champion and a strong athlete, so had no problem handling himself in the fells. In fact, he enjoyed himself so much on leg 2 he decided to just keep going and do leg 3 as well. I tried explaining to him that leg 3 is possibly the toughest bit and we could be out there for 6.5 hours – “Yes, sounds great,” he replied, without a second’s hesitation. Gotta love that positivity.

After changing shoes, necking a cup of tea and a flapjack, we set off Clough Head with the addition of Swiss Dave and Toby’s friend and leg 2 pacer Rebecca, and made reasonable progress up and along the Dodds. I had predicted that this would be optimum banter time, ideally being woken up enough from the early start but not too tired from the effort to be able to chat. The best I could manage, aside from a few pleasantries with Toby and Rebecca was describing some of the craic about David Goggins on our BGR WhatsApp group. Neither of them had heard of him. Jonny and I swapped a couple of Brian Clough impressions but that was about it. P\* weak patter Joe, must try harder.









*Dropping down from Blencathra and with Swiss Dave and Jonny at Threlkeld before Leg 2*

Disaster struck going up Lower Man when something in my back just went PING and a horrendous pain shot through my body and stopped me still. I was moving again straight away but this was not good at all. A couple of weeks ago on a recce run, I had lost my foot in a bog and jarred my back and experienced the same pain but since then it had been absolutely fine, so I thought there was nothing to worry about. I tried to stay positive and hoped it would be ok, and I suppose it was in a sense that I still got round. However, for the rest of the day my back would go into spasm periodically and stop me in my tracks with a shooting pain. Climbing, descending, running on the flat, everything seemed to set it off. We were less than a third of the way I and that was the first time I started to think that perhaps it wasn't going to happen. I kept that thought to myself though and decided I just need to see how I got on, but already in my head I was trying to figure out how I could retire without jeopardising Jonny's round.

Going up Fairfield was when I first really felt the heat kick in. It wasn't long after 10:00 but the temperature was rising through the 20's and there wasn't a single cloud in the sky, or breeze in the air to provide any respite from the heat. I was already losing more fluid and salts than I could replace and could feel the first few worrying twinges of cramp setting in. Jonny was moving really well, and I was struggling to hold the pace; keep it steady, I told myself, still a very long way to go.

Onwards we continued, up and down Seat Sandal, to the Dunmail Raise road crossing, and second change over point of the day at 11:17. Gary and Sarah had set up a little gazebo where we could shelter from the sun whilst changing kit and refuelling. Stuff like this made such a big difference on the day, and without the aggregate of all these little touches and organisation there's no way we would have got round under 24 hours. We were about 10 minutes down on our schedule arriving at Dunmail and ended up taking a bit too long at the changeover as well. I wish I'd take a bit longer still if I'd known it was about the last point in the day when I'd be able to stomach any proper food. An absolute mountain of food had been packed and taken over by Sarah and Gary but I don't think we'd made a dent in it by the end, when it was just impossible to eat. At Dunmail Raise though I managed to wolf down a bit of ham and pease pudding stottie and some sausage roll, which went down quite well with a cup of tea and my spirits lifted slightly. I dispatched a desperate caffeine gel to make myself feel better about Steel Fell, then we set off.





*Leg 3 begins*

### The blurry middle bit and death on Ventoux

Here's another understatement: Leg 3 was when the suffering started to begin for me. The heat really picked up. The fatigue was mounting. My legs were cramping, and my back was still periodically going into spasm. The day was saved at this point by Sean Kennedy who was running leg 3 with us, and doing a star turn with pacing, carrying, and doing the nav. I don't think I would have got round if it wasn't for Sean, his reassuring presence, reminding me to eat and drink, and keeping us on course when I was starting to get wobbly and disoriented – more or less the whole way between High Raise to Scafell Pike, I just had to blindly follow. I managed a banana that Sean gave me after Calf Crag, and remember it really picking me up; the boost was short lived though as we were soon into the more gnarly terrain of the Round and my legs continued to feel worse and worse.

Around this time, we crossed paths with Dave, the bloke who started at the same time as us going clockwise. I'd been wondering at which point we'd run in to each other and had been thinking of something funny to say to him all morning. When the time came I could only manage a limp, lifeless, whimper.

As I struggled to hold the pace, I was finding myself at least a couple of minutes behind at some of the summits, and then losing contact on the descents when the impact going downhill was setting my back off and stopping me in my tracks. Scrambling up Lord's Rake and the West Wall Traverse was embarrassingly slow going, with my legs really cramping up, but with each summit came a small measure of relief that we were one summit closer to the last. Apart from surfing down the nice

forgiving scree round the side of Rakehead Crag, the Scafell descent felt horrendous, and again I was a few minutes back arriving at the Wasdale change over.

As I arrived at the Wasdale carpark at 18:00 I felt I seriously demoralised. I'd stopped looking at the time knowing we were way down on the schedule we'd set, although a small voice inside reminded me, we'd set an optimistically quicker schedule anyway to make sure we had some wriggle room to play with.

The Wasdale stop was a blur. Jonny's mum, brother, and brother's wife had travelled over from Newcastle, and were there, but I was unable to acknowledge anyone really or communicate in anything other than monosyllabic grunts. I struggled to get down some chicken soup and super noodles. I remember starting to feel a bit emotional at this point. I think Sarah could tell as she began to ramp up the encouragement, telling me how everyone at home was watching the dot and willing us on and she reminded me that I'd been through worse than this. She was right, and I certainly had a well of difficult experiences I could draw on for motivation and enable me to keep believing that even though I may be suffering, I could crack on despite the pain and fatigue, and the little voice saying it was hopeless.

Sometimes during extreme physical exertion, I like to visualise Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs* screaming down the well at his prisoner, the senator's daughter, "You don't know what pain is," and then use that as a mantra. That sounds pretty weird, doesn't it? Well, *that* was a man who knew what pain is. I also know what pain is but having Bill shout that at me reminds me that no matter how bad you think it is, there's always more to come, and that most people never realise how great their capacity is to endure pain and keep going. If you can just manage to switch off that voice telling you to stop, you can endure and endure. It is a grim thought that by the same token, you can apparently ride a horse to death, and in human terms, a factor in why Tom Simpson rode himself to death on Mont Ventoux in the 1967 Tour de France. The obsession to keep going and not give up overruled all the signs his body was giving him that it was shutting down, and it was "Goodnight, Tom". I thought about how I felt visiting his memorial on Mont Ventoux with my Dad, a few years ago and reading the inscription on the stone that says, "There is no mountain too high". Well, hopefully I wouldn't be dying like, but the prospect of getting up Yewbarrow seemed more and more like an impossibility.

Sean and Gary had to bring me to my senses, drag me out of the chair and push me on, then Sean jogged along the road, got me over the stile and on to the line for the start of Yewbarrow. I was sad to see Sean go, and again started feeling emotional, mainly due to the gratitude I felt for his help, and for Gary and Sarah. In that moment I knew I was going to do it and get round in under 24 hours. Sean assured us that it was very do-able as long as we just kept moving forward, did what we could on the climbs and tried to keep a decent pace on the flat and downhill sections. He's told me since that what he really thought at the time was that I looked ruined, but in that moment at Wasdale, I believed him completely. I remember hearing someone referring to Wasdale as the graveyard, where a lot of attempts had to be abandoned. Not this one! There was roughly 9.5 hours left to cover about 35km and finish the last two legs in under 24 hours. The fighting spirit and the will to win was back. We can do it. Just keep moving forward.









*Cooking in the leg 3 furnace*



### Just when I thought it couldn't get any blurrier...life just about in the last legs

Yewbarrow was one of the sections I was least looking forward to but then knowing that once we were up it, one of the hardest climbs was out of the way and we could start imagining the home stretch having broken the back of the Round. I don't know what got me up that hill, I suppose the caffeine tablets and gels at Wasdale had helped to some extent along with my renewed positive mindset. Whatever it was, it didn't last - perhaps I'd burned what few matches I had left on Yewbarrow or was once again experiencing the discrepancy between my mental determination and the reality of my physical ability because as I went up Red Pike, I started to feel myself really blowing.

At the same time, I was hit with intense nausea and had to be sick. From then on, I could barely take on any food or drink, occasionally having to pause and bend over for some dry heaves. I'd put a sachet of SiS Beta Fuel in one bottle which probably saved the day as I could sip this slowly and still take on a few grams of carbohydrate. The sickly-sweet thought of it now turns my stomach. I'd carried a banana in my hand up Yewbarrow but it was too much of a chore to eat and now even the trusty Kendal Mint Cake was beyond me, I couldn't stand even the thought of anything going in my mouth at all without feeling sick.

Toby and Adam had passed us and pressed on up Red Pike and beyond and out of sight and were about 10min ahead for most of the leg. I think I pleaded with Jonny to leave me and crack on ahead with them to save his Round, as I was finished and just going to hold him back. He wasn't having any of it though and insisted we'd finish together, even if it was outside of 24 hours.

We got to the top Great Gable at 10:06 as the last rays of sunlight began to disappear and were replaced with darkness. After the Yewbarrow psychological finish line, Great Gable had been the next psychological finishing line and point by which I could really start thinking that things were going to be ok. Getting up Kirk Fell had been savage and I was more or less running on empty as I was continuing to throw up anything that touched my stomach, liquid or solid. At the top of Great Gable, we had just under five hours to make it back to Keswick. I was in a very bad place, but hope wasn't lost, we could still do it. I don't think Jonny was convinced by this point, and I probably didn't cut a very convincing figure as I attempted to keep up the positivity and assure him that we could still do it. (Picture the knight in Monty Python who gets his arms and legs chopped off but still fancies himself in the fight)

I welcomed the dark and the cool that it brought but was aware that navigational errors at this point could be costly, and by this time I was seriously wobbly and seeing double. Despite that, though, I think the only slightly bad line we took all day was coming off Kirk Fell.

We managed to get down from Grey Knotts on a good line and into Honister at 23:18. Somehow, Toby and Adam were a few minutes behind us and must have gone off track somewhere as I was convinced they'd be long gone after I saw them disappearing up Brandreth as we arrived at the top of Great Gable.

I almost didn't want to stop at Honister, aware of the fine margins of time, and slightly worried if I sat down, I wouldn't get up again. I sipped some tomato soup and a few spaghetti hoops, which tasted indescribably wonderful but were then promptly vomited back up all over the ground next to where I sat. A cruel blow for a starving man. I felt horrendous, and like I was at rock bottom. I tried not to think how was going to get through the next leg on a completely empty stomach, seriously dehydrated, and unable to take on food or water. I've spoken to Sarah since finishing and she had wanted to pull the plug at this point, concerned it might not have been that safe for me to carry on. I

was insistent though, and the fact that it was cooler now and all we had left was the “easiest” bit, meant I was still clinging on to a glimmer of hope that finishing under 24 hours was still a reality.

On the slog up Dale Head, I looked forward to the caffeine tablets I’d necked at Honister kicking in along with the paracetamol I’d taken, then remembered I’d vomited them all up. I was well and truly running on fumes for the last leg.

Between Dale Head and Hindscarth we ran into another group of three who were also on the last leg of their Round. Normally I’d have been keen to hear about their day but I was barely able to acknowledge them or offer anything more than one or two terse grunts. I hope they don’t think I was being rude, it was literally the most I could manage. For the rest of the way into Keswick we played a bit of cat and mouse with them, catching them up, then getting dropped by them, then catching them up again. We’d lost track of Toby and Adam all together.

After a wobbly line off the track to the top of Robinson, we arrived at the final summit of the round at 00:50 – It was all downhill from here and we had 2 hours and 10 minutes to get back to Keswick. I was trying to calculate how long it would take and how slow I could possibly get away with going. It was going to be tight, but it was still achievable.

The descent from Robinson was not an experience I enjoyed. I was moving painfully slow over the steeper bits that you need to scramble down, knowing I had to take extra care to compensate for the fact that I couldn’t see straight. Well and truly hypoglycaemic, my head was spinning, and I was seeing in tunnel vision. Getting on to that final grassy descent and down on to the flat track running above Scope Beck was such a relief.

#### The entry of Joe and Jonny into Keswick: Part two

We had opted to change into road shoes for the finale so when we hit the road section Gary, Sarah and Swiss David were waiting at the Little Town car park. It cost us a few minutes but slipping into a nice pair of Vaporflys felt incredible – I knew I would get some good use out of them one day and spending all that money would be worth it, but then again you can’t put a price on comfort like that, and thinking of expense, you should see how much cycling shoes cost.

We had around an hour and 10 mins to get into Keswick. Jonny asked how long it was to the town and Sarah advised 10km. In reality, there was only 6km left. I’m not sure if she actually knew or not, I had certainly worked out how long the final run in on the road was when studying the route, but in that moment, I was so confused I just accepted what she was saying was true, whilst my heart sank. This was going to be the longest 10km of my life – Jonny didn’t seem convinced we’d make it, I assured him that it’s only 6 miles and we could cover that in an hour even with a really quick walk.

More than anything I’ve attempted before, the Bob Graham Round kept me guessing right until the very end as to whether or not I’d even be able to do it. From the very first time I thought about it, right until the final kilometre of the actual Round on the actual day, there had been a little committee meeting going on in my head. Some of the committee were sure that the Round was perhaps a little too ambitious, and kept reminding me of my lack of fitness, lack of miles in the legs, and lack of hours on the fells. Those moderate, conservative members of the committee were quite adamant I should set some easier goals and liked to worry all the time about things like weather conditions, and what that little twinge was I felt in my ankle. Some of the real worriers think I would be safer just staying in bed most of the time. If I’d allowed them sole control over my thinking and actions, I’d probably be doing a write up of the latest game of *Call of Duty* I’ve just played or something and would never have even started the Bob Graham Round. Thankfully, we have the

other half of the committee. This half of the committee have a wild look about them. Some of them are topless, with painted faces, and are wearing furry hats with huge horns sticking out of them. One or two of them are staring you down in an overtly aggressive manner and frothing at the mouth. This part of the committee are always shouting, always fired up, always ready to kick off. They say things like "You're the f\* man, you're going to smash it," and "Shut up and get on with it, stop being a soft s\*."

Clearly some kind of balanced voice from the two sides makes for effective progress in life, though all I can say is, that it's a whole lot calmer now the committee meeting is over, even though I know it's only really adjourned until the next challenge.

I ended up covering that road section in about 50mins, averaging tortoise like 11-minute miles, not much more than a shuffle, but it's all I could manage. Jonny was going well, but I was struggling to cling on, dangling a few metres back, blindly putting one-foot in front of the other. Just as I came out of the wooded section towards Portinscale, Sarah appeared and informed me Jonny was just 100m ahead and we could catch up. I ran the final couple of kilometres with Sarah leading the way, I had no idea where I was going, everything I had was just going in to staying upright and moving forward. Emotions were coming thick and fast through the exhaustion and the confusion – but now also elation was starting to creep in. Elation that we were going to do it. When we turned off onto Main Street and towards the Moot Hall, Jonny appeared, and we finished as a trio. Seeing Moot Hall, looking at my watch and knowing that we'd done it was an amazing feeling, a feeling that I'm still having difficulty finding words for.

#### The gratitude Round

How do I feel now it's over? Relief. Even though this Round leant more towards the swashbuckling, just rock up and give it a go variety, it still dominated our lives for a good while leading up to it, and particularly in the final couple of weeks before the Round when the enormity of the task at hand became more apparent. As well as the physical effort, the toll that the mental and emotional stress took was more than I could have imagined, and the day after I was an emotional wreck, finding myself welling up when I started thinking about the achievement. I messaged Jonny to see if he was experiencing anything similar – he verified that he'd just started crying watching a sausage roll heat up in the microwave.

Aside from the relief I felt a huge sense of accomplishment and pride. But primarily the overwhelming emotion was gratitude. Gratitude to Jonny for getting round with me, for those long recce days, and for sharing the same vision as me. I am so grateful to Gary and Sarah for giving up their time just to enable some ridiculous run. They were really the stars of the show, and I can't stress enough how much of team effort this was. I'm grateful for my lass at home who had to put up with my single mindedness and increasing obsession with all things Bob Graham. I am mega grateful to Sean who had really come through for us and saved the day on leg 3. In the end I cut it so fine, coming in only 23 minutes under 24 hours, so every minute before that had counted, and without Sean getting us round leg 3, we would have lost precious time. Whilst I write this report, I am booked in to support on Sean's Round in a week's time, which I can't wait for. Sean has supported on a good few successful Rounds including some super quick ones so I'm excited to see what happens.

#### The committee of enquiry

What would I have changed or done differently? Well, it didn't help that I had about 10 weeks off from training with bad Achilles tendonitis at the start of the year so the training more or less started

from scratch with about a month and a half to go before the round. Now I think about it, that sounds (and is) absolutely crazy. I did manage four long recce days in the lakes in June and July but because I'd lost so much fitness, it was taking me nearly a week just to recover from some of those efforts, so wasn't getting any other running in. So up until the date of the Round on July 17<sup>th</sup>, I had only run around 500km since the start of the year.

This the last understatement: Not to have been injured and to have been able to do more running would obviously have been a lot better. But when you have Jack Burton from *Big Trouble in Little China* on the committee in your head saying things like, "Have you paid your dues? Yes sir, the cheque's in the mail," going in for an undercooked Bob Graham Round doesn't seem so bad really. "Give me your best shot pal, I can take it."

Ok, enough of all the big chat. I was in a mess on the succeeding days, I couldn't walk properly for a couple of days and was suffering badly from dehydration, still unable to eat much if anything, and I had lost around 5-6kg of weight during the Round. Not ideal recovery, but gradually I caught up on the lost sleep, took on the fluids and nutrition I needed (and plenty I didn't), and started getting some energy back. The stiffness left my legs, and I had a couple of easy spins on the bike with Swiss Dave, which significantly helped me level off emotionally as well. One thing that has not left me is the gratitude. And then I picked up my book about the 'Big Rounds' and thought... "Hmmm what could I do next..."

#### The Stats

106 kilometres, 8,200m elevation gain, 42 peaks,  
average pace 11:40 /km  
average heart rate 136 bpm, max HR 192 bpm  
Time taken 23:37:57

Checkpoint	Time	Split
KESWICK	Sat 03:00:02	
Skiddaw	Sat 04:28:47	01:28:45
Gt Calva	Sat 05:09:40	00:40:53
Blencathra	Sat 06:17:19	01:07:39
THRELKELD	Sat 07:03:13	00:45:54
Clough Hd	Sat 07:51:06	00:47:53
Great Dodd	Sat 08:20:00	00:28:54
Watson	Sat 08:27:58	00:07:58
Stybarrow	Sat 08:37:56	00:09:58
Raise	Sat 08:53:53	00:15:57
White Side	Sat 09:02:53	00:09:00
Lower Man	Sat 09:16:50	00:13:57
Helvellyn	Sat 09:23:48	00:06:58
Nethermost	Sat 09:31:47	00:07:59
Dollywaggon	Sat 09:43:45	00:11:58
Fairfield	Sat 10:28:15	00:44:30
Seat Sandal	Sat 10:54:11	00:25:56



Checkpoint	Time	Split
DUNMAIL	Sat 11:17:22	00:23:11
Steel Fell	Sat 12:01:14	00:43:52
Calf Crag	Sat 12:23:11	00:21:57
Sergeant	Sat 13:00:05	00:36:54
High Raise	Sat 13:11:02	00:10:57
Thunacar	Sat 13:24:59	00:13:57
Harrison	Sat 13:31:59	00:07:00
Pike	Sat 13:45:56	00:13:57
Rosset	Sat 14:34:48	00:48:52
Bow Fell	Sat 15:06:42	00:31:54
Esk Pike	Sat 15:32:38	00:25:56
Great End	Sat 15:56:35	00:23:57
Ill Crag	Sat 16:13:31	00:16:56
Broad Crag	Sat 16:24:29	00:10:58
Scafell Pike	Sat 16:36:28	00:11:59
Scafell	Sat 17:10:22	00:33:54
WASDALE	Sat 18:02:14	00:51:52
Yewbarrow	Sat 18:51:17	00:49:03
Red Pike	Sat 19:40:20	00:49:03
Steeple	Sat 19:58:44	00:18:24
Pillar	Sat 20:32:12	00:33:28
Kirk Fell	Sat 21:26:16	00:54:04
Great Gable	Sat 22:06:09	00:39:53
Green Gable	Sat 22:22:06	00:15:57
Brandreth	Sat 22:40:03	00:17:57
Grey Knott	Sat 22:51:02	00:10:59
HONISTER	Sat 23:18:08	00:27:06
Dalehead	Sat 23:56:19	00:38:11
Hindscarth	Sun 00:18:21	00:22:02
Robinson	Sun 00:50:16	00:31:55
KESWICK	Sun 02:37:59	01:47:43

**Supporters, pacers, navigators, and water carriers**

**Leg One**

Jonathan Graham

Toby Harling

**Leg Two**

Jonathan Graham

Toby Harling

David Zurcher

Rebecca Wren

**Leg three**

Jonathan Graham

Toby Harling

David Zurcher

Sean Kennedy

**Leg Four**

Jonathan Graham

Toby Harling

Adam McGinley

**Leg Five**

Jonathan Graham

**Road Crew**

Gary Graham

Sarah Graham

David Zurcher



*With Toby and Jonny back at Moot Hall*