

Bob Graham Round by Mandy Goth

It's Friday 7th July and here I am stood on the steps of the Moot Hall in Keswick with Rhys, Andrew (Bibby) & Richard Bellaries from Clayton. Phil's got the stopwatch and there's 5 minutes to go.

"I can't believe you're putting yourself through this again," says a voice in my left ear. It's Wally Coppelov from Newburgh Nomads who ran the last two sections with me last time and completed his own attempt two weeks previously.

"Can I join you on leg three"

"No problem, see you in Wasdale".

For those of you not familiar with the Bob Graham Round it's a 72 mile circuit of the Lake district, which starts at the Moot Hall in Keswick. The "Round" was originally run by Bob Graham in his 42nd year and encompasses 42 peaks (a total of 27,000 feet of ascent). Bob Graham originally ran it in 1932 but subsequent interest didn't really start until the 60's when the Heaton brothers from Clayton Harriers decided to have a go. Since then approximately 1300 people have completed the round (to date there are less than 100 women). It can be run clockwise or anticlockwise and is split into five sections. Most people complete the Round assisted by a team of people including a navigator and carrier on each leg.
Attempt 1. June 1993 Clockwise 6pm start.

My affair with the Bob Graham started in 1993 The highlight of this attempt was the horrendous weather, with rain and mist so dense it was impossible for Dave Wilson to read his map in the dark, due to the light being scattered in the head torch beam. As a result we got lost on the Dodds in the dark and descended too far off Nethermost Pike, thus losing time. Kitey also got stuck in a bog we had to pull him out. He had to keep his toes clenched so as not to lose his shoes. I gradually got slower and slower over the third section until the hailstones going up Broad Stand finished me off and I dropped out at Wasdale.

Attempt 2. June 2000 Clockwise.

This time both Phil & I set off together at 6pm on the Friday, yet again we were plagued by bad weather, making navigation difficult on the Dodds and time was lost. It was like having buckets of water thrown at you for 12 hours. Yet again the third leg was my problem and as we hit the rocks around Bowfell the going underfoot deteriorated, as Neil Hodgkinson said "The rocks were not just greasy they were alive!" Again I'd lost too much time so dropped out at Wasdale.

Phil who was only just in front of me managed to get his second wind and went from being nearly dead on his feet to running the last two sections faster than race pace to finish in 22 hours 54 minutes.

This year the memories of the discomfort had faded and it was to be now or never. The training started early with many days in the lakes with Kath, good runs on the High Peak Marathon, the Hobble & even a PB on the Trog. It was going to be my year.

The date was set for early May, the previous couple of weekends were glorious it was looking good. Friday arrived and with it the bad weather. The forecast said it was going to get better (80% chance of cloud free summits) so I decided to go anyway. The mist was so thick on Skiddaw that it was only the bike lights that I'd borrowed that saved us. Hall's fell ridge was grim and we kept losing the path. Poor Jeff Walker had the short straw trying to scramble down the rocks and carry the bike lights. Leg 2 went like clockwork thanks to Nick Harris's excellent navigation. It continued to be cold, misty and unpleasant but we managed to arrive at Honister on time.

Leg 3 was where it all went pear shaped again. We strayed slightly off route due to thick mist, a minute here a minute there. Where was the summit of Harrison Stickle? Time gradually ticked away. This time I ran without a watch, but I could tell from the whisperings that I was behind time. Leg 4 I just couldn't go any faster despite the persuasions of Dave Makin and my team of six or seven helpers. We only came out of the mist on the summit of Kirkfell and for the first time for hours I had a view.

At Honister I decided to carry on and complete the round despite the fact that I was going to be over time (I only had 2½ hours and needed three).

It was a beautiful night, but the wheels had fallen off by then, Phil tried to kill me by slipping on the rocks coming off Robinson and I couldn't even manage the Goth shuffle on the road into Keswick. I was met by Sue & Kath (who'd run out of bars to go in as they were all shut) who ran shrieking down the street to meet me. I'd got round, but in a time over 25 hours. Never again.

Back at the Achille Ratti hut in Langdale Arthur Daniels encouraged me with "why don't you go again the other way round, the descents are easier, it would suit you better", and so the seed was sown.

Jura & Duddon under the belt in reasonable times and then an excellent but very tough LAMM with Chris Preston. I'd helped Kath on her first attempt and knew that I could run the first leg very comfortably. I knew I was as fit as I'd ever been so it was now or never or it might rear its ugly head again in a couple of years time and I'd have to do all that training again.

I had two windows of opportunity Wasdale weekend or early August. I became obsessed with the weather looking at the forecast numerous times a day. On Wednesday I made the decision to go on midnight of Friday 7th July, the offers of help came flooding with Peter Browning & John Sharples from Clayton volunteering to come along. And so it went from low key to the more the merrier.

So there I was on the steps of the Moot Hall at midnight for an anticlockwise attempt.

Leg 1 - Went very smoothly in the dark with the bike lights yet again (thanks to my work colleague Clive - he's one of those nutters who rides around Stoodley Pike in the dark). A starry night ensured that we arrived at Honister spot on schedule. 39 peaks to go.

Leg 2 - Again a very smooth section. It was still dark and slightly misty. Rhys had perfected the feeding & watering technique and was there when needed. A combination of GPS (John Preston) and good local knowledge (Peter Browning) saw the peaks passing by on schedule. A slightly slow descent (not my strong point) off Yewbarrow saw me arrive in Wasdale only a few minutes behind schedule.

Leg 3 - The rain started as we made the big climb up onto Scafell and into the mist, there was a feeling of "Oh no here we go again". My fears were to be unfounded as the combination of Dave Makin's route finding and Colin Urmston (Clayton) got me up and down a very slimy Broad Stand to pick up the rest of my team. The mist lifted, the rocks weren't slimy and my spirits rose. As we descended off Bowfell there was the welcome sight of the McGonagle (Pete & Hilary) support crew with cups of tea and crisp butties on Rossett Pike. I was even allowed a stop there so I knew I was on target.

The rest of this section was tough as my energy started to fade. Dave & Allan Greenwood resorted to bully boy tactics and were on my case. Every time I slowed slightly they hassled me. Much swearing was done and Dave was now referred to as "Makin". Kath had written messages of encouragement on the rocks and Phil came out to meet me at Calf Crag. I descended to Dunmail Raise just behind schedule - I knew I was going to do it.

Leg 4 - As I climbed Seat Sandal the wind got up and the weather started to deteriorate. John Crummett led the way and got some awesome photos in the process. Chris of Newburgh Nomads kept me informed of the time along the way and as the peaks went by we gained a minute here, a minute there. Makin arrived again to do some bullying much to the amusement of some of the Clayton boys. The rain started but I was on a mission. I arrived at Threlkeld with 5 hours to go. It was in the bag with only three summits to go. Chance to refuel with corned beef hash and tea.

Leg 5 - Once again my support crew had increased in number from 3 to 7. Phil had plotted the route on the GPS so there was no chance of getting lost. Blencathra and Great Calva were climbed on schedule. As we climbed onto Skiddaw the wind was getting stronger, it was really cold, going dark and we were heading into the mist. Geoff & Susan Davis of NFR were superb and made sure they shielded me from the wind wherever possible. As we climbed onto the summit ridge the wind was so strong we could hardly stand up. Chris Preston and Anna Forrest supported me so I didn't get blown away. All of a sudden the wind was coming from the wrong direction as the seven of us spread out across the summit. The path is like a motorway but we'd lost it! Phil had plotted the route to the summit thinking that route finding off would be straightforward; how wrong can you be. Thankfully Geoff was on route and called us across. Only a few minutes lost. We ran down the path, yet again the bike lights came into their own as we struggled through the dark and mist.

Half way down the hill we emerged from the mist to see the lights of Keswick; nearly there. We could see a head torch at the Latrigg car park. It was John Preston who said, "If you want to do this Mandy you are going to have to run." I thought I was running! He grabbed hold of my right hand and, with Anna on my left, I proceeded to run down the hill faster than I'd ever run in my life. Phil was leading the way in the dark. I remember thinking, "I'm sure I don't have to run this fast."

Down the road, through the park, over the bridge, across the car park, through the arches into the square at Keswick. "Right you're on your own," said John and I ran up to the Moot Hall and the welcoming crowd. All I could think was thank goodness I can stop now. 23 hours 48 minutes.

Out came the champagne and the cameras - it was over.

I never had any doubt that I was capable of the Bob Graham Round and when I had finished I wasn't overwhelmed by the fact that I had done it but by the support of those gave up their time to come and help me on not one but two attempts. The likes of Jim and Tony who saw me through all the changeovers (Jim was on the phone just after 12 to make sure I'd done it). The people who just turned up and appeared on spec and had a run for part or all of a section. If I could have done it off positive vibes and good wishes from everyone then I could have just floated round.

The difference this time was that if all felt to be under control, I needed the bullying to get me through the tough sections (thanks Dave), but we never got lost or way behind schedule. I got the eating right this time eating (proper food at the changeovers so not relying totally on jelly babies & sweet stuff - which I will never eat again). My support crew were awesome from Kath on road support (saving herself for the week after - I wish I'd been there) to all the Tod/Achille Ratti/ Clayton/NFR/Calder Valley & Ambleside members who helped along the way.

So thank you to everyone for being there for me and especially to Phil for believing in me - so what's next?