

My Bob Graham by Kath Brierley

It was New Year's Eve morning and I was whimpering on my back on the floor in considerable pain as my back had just 'gone'. By the evening and several drinks later I decided to state my New Year's resolution, which was to have a go at the BG (**Bloody Gormless!**). Fortunately Mandy had decided on the same venture, which made the training much more enjoyable. I realised that I couldn't do any speed work due to recurrent sciatica so a nice leisurely pace was my plan with lots of long walks in the Lakes. I drew up a training schedule which was to do something long every weekend 20 ish miles or 7hrs and to familiarise myself with the route. I had some superb days out in January & February, crisp cold days with blue skies and snow & ice.

I also decided to do the longer races, which all fortunately are early on in the calendar – High Peak Marathon, Wadsworth Trog & the Haworth Hobble.

Everything went well until Easter when after playing football with the kids I started with a knee ligament niggle (**Bad Goalkeeping**). This meant pushing my attempt date further on, and for a while to do training that involved no descending? Sue kindly rang me to say she had a friend with a parascender I could borrow. Nevertheless I set off in June on a rather grey day with Mandy running from Keswick to Honister, we finished on schedule. I didn't realise until then just how hard my support team were working carrying gear and supplying me with food & water, neglecting their own needs to keep me going, chivvying me along when they were obviously not enjoying the conditions. I also realised that my navigators Geoff Davis leg 2 and Neil on leg 3 were under tremendous pressure, unable to take their eyes off the route for a second, I slipped most of the way to Broad Stand, nearly pushing Mark Harris off, also Neil and I left Jane & Mark to fend for themselves in the mist from Broad Stand, no problem for those mountain goats, they soon caught us up. We worked hard to pull back time, but it was not to be. I was initially disappointed but soon realised there were lots of plus points about the day:-

- a) I still felt quite strong after 14 hours
- b) It was an excellent training run
- c) I would not be too tired to reattempt in a few weeks
- d) I might have better weather next time

Over the following weeks I developed an obsessive compulsive disorder of checking the weather on the net, which was bad news for John & Jack because the forecast could change several times within a day, which resulted in several sulks and hysterical mood swings. (John says that's normal!) I also had a phone call from my Mum which went along the lines of 'Never mind Kathleen, I think you're getting a bit old for this sort of thing, don't you? I bit my lip and said ' Well Mum I'll just have one more go and see what I can do'. I then swore to myself that I would complete my BG if it killed me. The final weather forecast was to be hot,hot,hot, so I decided to move my anti-clockwise start of 8am to 2am – to get as much of the route done before I started suffering, I had wobbled in the heat at the Wasdale race the year before so my track record was not good.

After finishing work on Friday, we parked the camper van at Threlkeld and settled down at 10pm for a few hours sleep, or lay horizontally with my eyes closed wishing I could get off to sleep. At 1am the alarm went off and I breakfasted and got my gear together. I soon realised that my digestive system was still asleep and my food was lying like a brick in my stomach.

Leg 1: Keswick – Honister 2am – 4.25am

I met Rhys & Charlotte and walked round to the Moot Hall. There was a large group of drunken blokes pointing and laughing at us, so we avoided eye contact and ignored them as best we could, fortunately their cab arrived before they got any closer. Suddenly it was 2am and we were off, It was a lovely night. We jogged the road very steadily and walked up every incline, the Honeysuckle smelt wonderful along the lanes, I felt relaxed and confident. I had a great time chatting away (no surprise there), Rhys was keeping an eye on the clock, and kept me on schedule. As soon as we started climbing up Robinson I felt reassured, that nice steady climbing pace felt good. We found the optimum line to Hindscarth and Dale Head and arrived 5 mins over schedule (a little too much chatting) at Honister in the semi light. John was there waiting with refreshments, along with Ros Murray and Dave Makin.

Leg 2 : Honister – Wasdale 4.30am – 8.40am

Dawn was just breaking at 4.30 am, I collected Rhys's walking poles and we set off. The dawn was fantastic and as we climbed over to Gable we just grinned, it felt like we had the Lakes to ourselves & that we were the 'Lords & Ladies of the Lakes', all those days out in crappy,misty,gloomy weather was flung aside and now all around us it's incredible magnificence and beauty was revealed. Every feature of Gable was highlighted in the orange-pink dawn light. We kept stopping to look back, I felt so privileged to be there. We made good progress over to Pillar, so we had time to take in the views. Dave kept feeding me and passing me drinks. I then realised that I had started to feel warm in my Helly lifa– I glanced at my watch and it was 6.30am. I then knew that it could only get hotter. Ros did a great job of navigating and picked the best line down Yewbarrow (very steep) I had ever been, we even stopped to pick & eat Wimberries en route. We arrived at Wasdale 5 mins up on schedule. Wahoo!

Leg 3 : Wasdale – Dunmail 8.50am – 15.20pm

I changed into cooler clothing, ate, drank & set off at 8.50am with Dave Wilson & Dave Makin. Ha, I thought Scaffell at this time should be quite cool. How wrong I was. Dave was passing me water every few minutes and it was pouring out of my skin as fast as I could drink it. Psychologically I wanted this climb out of the way, I knew that once I

was up Scafell, there were no serious ascents until leg 4. Dave (minder) Makin was superb, he was constantly providing food and water, even when I didn't want it, but I knew that he knew it was in my best interests, so I eat even when I didn't want to.

Mike Wardle (CVFR & Teacher at Tod High) had agreed to rope up Broad Stand the week before. How different it was this time. We could see where we were going! It was brilliant. We made quick work of the descent and pootled off to Scafell Pike. This was the longest and most sociable leg. We had people coming up to bring drinks and food on Esk Hause, Rossett Pike, High Raise, Sergeant Mann & High Raise it was like a continuous buffet – marvellous! Colin joined us on Rossett Pike, the day was hot and it brought out people in their hats, which is always quite interesting. I had lost mine recently (no surprise there) & acquired a little white number with a purple paisley print lining from Hebden Bridge, naturally. Dave Wilson had a white, fresh number that made him look like a sailor, Dave Makin didn't need one (cos he's dead 'ard) and Colin had a foreign legion style one (knew what he was in for). It was on this section that my knee started to protest. It wasn't sudden, just a slight stiffening and loss of flexibility. I then realised that I had started to slow down, so I took an Ibuprofen on High Raise. I was met by Jim Smith & Tony Shaw on Calf Crag with water & Satsumas, fantastic. I felt like a spoilt child, with everybody eager to accommodate my every whim, 'can I carry your poles' 'would you like some sun protection sprayed on?' – 'make the most of it I thought'. I then realised I was 15 mins down on schedule & needed to speed up. As we moved off Calf Crag I suddenly felt that my knees were flexible, yippee the drug's have started working, 'come on monkey's' I shouted to Colin & Dave W. (how rude I thought after) let's go. So we pulled 5 mins back, to arrive 10 mins over schedule at Dunmail.

Leg 4: Dunmail - Threlkeld 15.33 pm – 9pm

On how many occasions in your life do you have to eat a meal, drink a cup of tea, change your socks and ice your knee in 10 mins? I struggled, but focussed on my strength – eating, whilst Wade rubbed Vaseline into my feet (heaven) & changed my socks, and Mary iced my knee (mmmmm). I knew I was going to find the next leg hard, but I had no idea of how hard. OK so I had 10hrs 27 for the next 2 legs – in my mind I knew I could do it with 10 hrs at that stage, so no problem, or so I thought. Andy Howie & Mary White from the Rucksack club were there and John was navigating. It was 3.33pm and I had 3 big climbs ahead with a very full tum, oh dear. Off we set into the bracken up Dollywagon, I really hated the bracken, it clung to your legs & trapped in the heat, it felt like Wasdale all over again. Sod it I thought, just keep plodding, you'll get there. John was navigating & did a lovely route off Fairfield. We got down to Grisedale Tarn at about 5.20pm & it was at this point I realised I wasn't really 'with it'. I could vaguely recall silhouetted figures and could hear voices, all I wanted to do was to stop & bathe in the tarn with them, I felt like crying it was such an overwhelming desire. I knew I had to keep going. I remember staggering on the way up Dollywagon, Fortunately my support had realised what was happening. I looked at them looking at me knowing what they were thinking- she's knackered. So what choices have you got? You can stop, or keep plodding. So, my decision was to plod. The mind games then came into play, 'you'll never do it in this heat, you're getting slower' and I looked at John who was becoming anxious as we were losing time on every summit, I could see the despair in his eyes, but I remembered what people had said to me – don't give up, even when it gets really tough. Mary told me that it was my body protesting, if you can keep moving your body will realise that it can't stop & so has to go with you. Finally after 4 of hours suffering it started to respond to Ibuprofen & gel bars, also as we came off Clough Head, the temperature started to fall.

Leg 5: Threlkeld – Keswick 9.04pm – 1.29am

What a difference! A lovely cool evening. There to greet us was a fantastic bunch from Northumberland Fell Runners. 2 of them had never supported BG's before & were really excited – how could you not respond to their enthusiasm. So that was it, suddenly I realised John wasn't there & people weren't sure quite where everything was in the van, so I was shouting I need WATER, GEL BARS & IBUPROFEN – LETS GO! And that was it, I didn't know how well I would climb as I had been so slow, but it was like starting with fresh legs. Wade Cooper (who tells me he's often mistaken for Paul Newman, told rude jokes up Blencathra and carried the 'big lamp'). Geoff Davis did a superb job navigating, he had done it the week before for Mandy, so before I knew it I was kissing the trig point on Skiddaw. It seemed like we were accelerating throughout – although I'm sure we weren't, but I turned to Geoff & said 'right I want to run as much of this as possible'. We seemed to be running for ages in the dark but it wasn't long before we hit the road into Keswick, as we entered the park I then got very emotional as I had thought about this moment for a long time & now it was really happening, at that point I realised I was really tired so I concentrated on running, pushing with my arms (how mad is that!) but at the back of my mind was my schedule time of 23.30. Come on I thought, you mustn't walk. So we ran through the alleyway to the Moot Hall & Geoff announced the time of 1.29 – 1 minute up on schedule - sheer joy, but I was too tired to display much emotion, I just felt so relieved. Then a bunch of girls cautiously approached & one said 'Have you just done a Bob Graham? Well done, my Dad's got the record for it.' Wow so Billy Bland's daughter out on the town with her mates congratulated me – it seemed like I was drifting into a fairytale – but it could have been the effect of all that Ibuprofen. Sorry if I've rattled on a bit, but it's the biggest achievement I've had. I consider my BG experience to be not just the day, but the training up to it and the first attempt, but my overriding memory is of the amazing support and companionship that you get from people, it carries you through it all, so thanks to everyone who helped, got up early, drove, provided food & water, looked after Jack & Barney, supplied equipment, or encouraged me and said good luck, and Mandy for the chats – every single bit helped.