

## Dear Toddies,

Many of you will now know that I have just completed the Bob Graham (42 peaks in the Lake District within 24 hours). Without doubt a very special day with my mates.

In total, something like 22 people directly helped me to get round that day. That's a big number. I initially didn't think that I was able to gather this size of team. Asking people to accompany you in the middle of the night, in whatever weather, seems like it needs a hard sell, but no. I'm truly grateful for those that supported me (including those that unfortunately had other commitments).

Since joining the club some 3 years ago, regular Toddies would have seen me gradually improve. I've enjoyed taking on more daunting challenges every year. It is a real credit to the Toddies that, at all times, there has been masses of encouragement and advice. I'm truly grateful for all this support.

I get a real rush for being where I am now. I get a rush for being a Toddy. I get a rush for being in the medium group on a pack run. I get a rush for being picked for a relay race. I got a massive rush for being picked to help Phil on his Joss Naylor, and for helping Mandy & Kath on their BGs.

I know that I arrived on that Wednesday night some 3 years ago as a runner, but it wasn't always like that. Up to about 5 years ago I could just about run for bus but I would end up wheezing for days afterwards. I couldn't even take a sharp breath without coughing. I had accepted that running simply wasn't for me, but I'd always had an ambition to run a marathon.

Eventually as some form of mid life crisis and some friendly persuasion, I decided to get my act together to do a half marathon. It took me 4 months of training down at the gym, every session something always hurt; either my knees, ankles, muscles, even my back. I remember all the crap that I coughed out of my lungs, but clear they did – why did I not pursue this earlier in my life? Why did I wait until I was 38?

It seems almost quite feeble, and maybe a bit sad now, but it also took a long time before I had the confidence to run outside in case I brought unnecessary attention to myself. I started running around the White House as this was away from the public and the tracks are flat around the reservoirs. Remember this was just under 5 years ago. A couple of years later, and after eventually finishing a marathon, I took a big leap of faith and came along to a Toddy pack run.

Without doubt one of the best decisions I've made in recent years was arriving at the White House on that Wednesday night pack run. Before I could cry off I was running with Phil and the other mediums. Running flat out with my lungs bursting and Phil saying I was running okay - loved it.

I remember again with great affection, a week or so later, when speaking to Phil at the bar (where else?) the BG was mentioned. Phil piped up that he had done it. But he looked normal I thought. He certainly didn't look stringy like the fell runner stereotype. I was just about coping with the fact that I was talking to one of the fell running champions, when Dave Collins added that he had also done the BG. I was standing in the mist of two fell running champions. But they look normal I kept telling myself. That was a great night.

More recently, imagine the rush when a number of people mentioned that maybe I should do a BG myself. I've had a many a night just lying on my bed with a manic smile. How much better can this get.

For me the BG challenge could be anything. It matters only that it is a challenge in the hills, and it is done with friends – my 'new friends' as Tracey would put it.

There is a magical element to the BG. Every Toddy should simply experience it, even if its just helping at the roadside checkpoints. It is a bonding like nothing else. There is only one mission - you live it, you talk it, you think it. Tell me something else that can keep you motivated, anxious, joyful, expectant, all at the same time – okay maybe giving birth must be close.

That's what it's all about, being born into the world of fell running. The coming of age, the initiation as a fully fledged fell runner – blimey who would have guessed it, I certainly wouldn't have – not 5 years ago. I would have lost big money on this one. But hey, I'm now able to go onto the FRA forum and bulls\*\*t like the rest of them.

Running with the Toddies has enabled me to get to places that I wouldn't otherwise get to, to gain some great friends, and have a real giggle. Long may it continue.

So it comes down to a big thank you to you all. Thank you all very much, for your encouragement, support, friendship, memories, and great piss-ups. The Todmorden Harriers has got to be one of the best clubs around.

I stand up and salute you,

***Rhys, King for the Day, Watkins***

NB1 Big thanks to my best friend, Tracey. Little did we know where her encouragement would lead.

NB2 I had almost forgotten about the day itself. Set off from Moot Hall 24.00 hours Friday 22nd June, did leg one in clockwise direction, did leg two, did leg 3, did leg 4, did leg 5, Finished Moot Hall 72 miles later.....Felt okay most of the way round – didn't eat a single bounty bar, ate only half a pork pie, but had about 15 gels. Had a great time amongst my friends, what more do you want ?