

Christine Preston's BG - 23rd June 2007

I've been seriously thinking of doing the BG for 5 years now.

Originally intended to do my BG in my 40th year in 2004, I ruptured my cruciate ligament (knee) early that year whilst skiing, so had to put my adventure on hold. I read "Feet in the Clouds" sat out at lunchtimes at work, wanting to rush up to the Lakes, hardly able to walk, let alone do hill reps up Skiddaw!

However, 3 years on, five contenders started off Friday 22nd/23rd June at midnight for a clockwise round – me & Rhys amongst them. It was a party atmosphere in the car park & in front of the Moot Hall, just as I'd envisaged for years.

I felt so calm & relaxed, had done all day, which is very strange for me. We counted down to midnight on all our individual watches & we were off, waving good bye to everyone who had turned up at the start to see us off. Phil navigated for us both, Rachel, Jane & Adie carried for me, and Rhys had his own team, as did the other 3 contenders. There must have been 20 of us in all jogging & walking up Skiddaw with head torches lighting the way – it was magical watching them all disappear up the hill. There was lots of chat, and the atmosphere amongst us was excitement & anticipation. I loved that I felt light, didn't have to carry a pack full of kit, (sorry guys) and my legs & feet had some spring – that's something you certainly don't experience very much in the months of training for a BG, my legs constantly felt heavy & had to drag me up. There's something special about running in the dark, I love it, it feels adventurous, and it always reminds me of the fun we've had on the winter Wednesday bat runs.

The first leg whizzed by, and it only seemed a short time until we were following Phil down a route on Halls fell, past all the local landmarks of Dave,s Rock, Dave,s notch, Dave,s crag, Phil,s ledge & flippin Dave's clump of grass!!

Welcome tea & porridge served by my friends Kay & Angela at Threlkeld, and change of team to Bob, Richard, Jeff, Chris and Adie (who had asked to do 2 legs, but I think was regretting volunteering to do it at all). We chatted our way up into the mist on Clough Head with Rhys & his team, and then pootled, then bobbed up & down along with our own teams along the Dodds, Helvellyn etc down to Grizedale Tarn where we finally got a bit of a view before Fairfield and Seat Sandal. I think we took the wrong line off Seat Sandal as we didn't see the 'Sharks Tooth' stone& all those little cairns, but as we came out of the mist & could see down to Dunmail, I didn't really care, I could see another cup of tea and a trod heading generally in it's direction. There were so many cars at Dunmail – it was like the changover of the Calderdale Way. Lots of familiar faces came to give me words of encouragement as I sat & ate my 2nd breakfast of the morning – egg sandwich & baked beans, and plenty of time for another cup of tea. Thanks again to Angela & Kay.

I was given stern words by John & Dave Makin – for going too fast! Sorry guys & I was only following my navigators/pacers. I must say though I didn't realise we were well ahead of schedule. Dave then tried to make up to me by giving my feet a high quality spa treatment, cleaning my feet, changing my socks & shoes.

We set off up Steele Fell in cloud of talc (remnants from my pedicure) Dave navigating, Mick, Ossy and Martin in support for a 6 hour trek across the high peaks of Langdale & the Scafells. Rhys & his team were already out of sight, so it was just us 5 heading into the mist. I cant remember exactly which hills were in the mist and which were clear- but I do remember we had some lovely views into the Langdale valley. I think it was on the climb up to Sergeant Man that it finally clicked that it was me doing the BG this time & I wasn't just supporting. I confess that I did then have a couple of minutes of doubt that I could do it – but it couldn't last long as we had a picnic appointment on Rossett Pike – where 2 of the Achilli Ratti members have set up a permanent weekly camp. If you look down the valley from Rossett, you can see they've created their own straight line trod all the way down to the Langdale hut -there's just a bit of a dog-leg into the ODG front door!

My support were great company, and only had to resort to bad jokes once on the climb up Bowfell as I felt I struggled on the big climb, then we were off to the big rocky stuff, where we kept almost bumping into Rhys and his merry men. I found out afterwards that a few friends had climbed Bowfell laden with cake & good wishes, but unfortunately I missed them as I was a bit ahead of schedule.

I was excited approaching Mickledore and the promise of my first encounter with Broad Stand. Ozz was already up on top of the first large boulder proffering his hand down to help me scramble through the narrow cleft, and Dave shoved me through from behind. Once through, I could see from all the knotted ropes, frantic activity & solid rock an inch from my nose that this was it.

All I remember from the climb of Broad Stand was a barrage of instructions from Dave, and Chris & Alex who were roping it for me. As I'm not a climber I just did as I was told, and managed to clamber up the various chunks of rock with the aid of rope, shoulder, hand, knee, ladder, foot, thigh.....and not all of them were mine! It seemed no time at all that adventure of the climb turned into a scramble, following Dave foot for foot until we emerged on the rocky plateau of Scafell, and miraculously the rest of my team followed. Team wee with a view (or was it cloudy & the view is etched in my memory?) from the summit & we left the last peak of Leg 3. A fabulous steep descent down a proper scree gully & my favourite valley came into full scale view.

Wasdale was a hive of activity, as busy as I've ever seen it, so many people cheering, clapping & a contagious buzz of anticipation in the air. There was so much going on, so many people I don't remember the detail as John guided to my chair for a pit stop. Here were my mum & dad, Sharon (my sister) and friend Rachel. It was great to see them all here, and I was really happy that they seemed to be having as much fun as me. Another foot spa, talc everywhere, tea, corned beef hash, tea, cake and the background chatter of all my supporters.

Long ago – well about 4 years, on my fist climb of Yewbarrow on a cold and nasty December day, I decided to make that hill my friend, I came to love it! I knew that if I didn't it might get me today. So I started that climb knowing it was tough, but also that my 'favourite' hill would take care of me. John navigated a very straight climb, my other companions for the next 6ish hours were Mandy, Anna and Allan Greenwood.

We seemed to progress – steadily, but it did feel like we did ok. Lots of chatter as I'd hoped, & loads of bilberries that I wanted to pick on the long way up, but Yewbarrow summit appeared on schedule. Down, up up, across, I think it was misty on Steeple as Allan & I went to that peak alone, Pillar – was that misty too? I remember fantastic, at their best, views of both Ennerdale & Wasdale as we came off Pillar, and then claggy again.

Pillar wasn't too bad, although cool & Anna wore less clothes than me! There was some debate, a bit of zig-zagging off Kirk-Fell & up Gable but still lots of chatter. Out of the mist, near the top of the Gable rocks we heard the unmistakable Accrington "Maandy", John replied in his best imitation Accrington "Maandy". That was the hardest climb of the day, but I knew we were near the top as I heard the echo from Phil's welcome greeting! John navigated us perfectly off the gloomy summit, on to the grassy then steep line down to Green Gable. I felt better when Phil reassured me that Honister was fine, and that my ground crew were not in clag. The remaining summits of Leg 4 flew by, knowing Honister was & lots of support were only minutes away was a great boost. As we came out of the mist off Grey Knotts, I saw Rhys just setting off up Dale Head – it was great to see him again, from a distance, but knowing he wasn't too far ahead, re-enforced that I was doing well.

Coming off Grey Knotts to Honister inevitably reminds me of Borrowdale Fell Race – my favourite of all races. This time, it seemed, everyone there seemed to be there for me & with me. I felt overwhelmed by the amount of support and number of people who had all journeyed there...again a sea of faces, I can't remember them all, but all seemed to be enjoying themselves. I was really pleased to see John Dennis & his 2 boys, George & Patrick - a bit of a surprise, but not really – he's talked of the BG for as long as I've thought about it & I remember a long winter afternoon discussion in front of the Dog & Gun Xmas 2005 fire, agreeing that he, me & Brett would all do the BG in 2007!

My feet spa'd, this time by Sharon who had learnt the Dave Makin 'technique' with added flair resulting in talc covering her designer jeans, me fuelled by rice pud, tea & the knowledge that ahead was definitely the last big climb of the day, I set off for Dale Head with an impressive entourage! I'd only planned on John, Rachel McEnery and Stuart joining me. I was more than impressed with everyone who joined me on Leg 5. Janet Makin – star tea & Dunmail bacon butty maker, Nicola & Martin, Phil, Allan Greenwood all joined us, and I was surprised (honestly Mandy) that Dale Head felt no more difficult than it does on the Borrowdale route. Lots of chat around me, then we saw Geoff – cheers Geoff, I'm sure you took that photo the only second of my BG that I wasn't smiling – at least inside me!

John and his boys were already at Dale Head - I think it was clear, but I could definitely see the view into Newlands, then off to Hindscarth & Robinson, Rhys and his still merry men in view again. Last hill of the day, and time for a group photo – wow! Peak 42, had I really summited another 41 today?

I love the run off Robinson – down a gentle grassy bit, then steep rocky section, where we managed to get past another of the BG teams who'd set off at midnight, and then right down the steep flank to a bracken lined green lane, tarmac down to Little Town!

How had everyone managed to get round so quickly? That's how it seemed to me – for all my supporters, they'd had a leisurely drive & time for a pub stop if so desired. A quick change of footwear to road shoes & the last stretch on road to Keswick.

Here though, something strange happened in my head. I remember looking at my watch for the first time in hours, and noting 21:49. How far to Keswick? About 10k I heard. I hate road 1

Ok's, but this felt different. Could I do 10k in 51 mins? I wanted to! So, how come, after hours & hours of moving comfortably & quite happily at whatever pace I was going, did I then decide that I wanted to finish inside 22.30? My head was determined for some unknown reason (psychologists will have a field day with this admission, I'm sure).

I set off with 3 or 4, then more joined us, and I think 8 of us ended up on the 'run' into Portinscale. I felt we were going at a reasonable pace, but everyone else seemed very comfy, they waited for me to walk up the smallest of small inclines. Anna sang an enthusiastic performance of 'Old Man River' – really impressive as I could only concentrate on one foot in front of the other. Richard picked us up at Portinscale, it was great to see him again after Dunmail. Then Dave, Mick & Tony who had supported Rhys on Leg 5 ran out to meet me on the gravel track for my last & hardest half mile.

Voices urged me on, I could hear them clearly, although my focus was on the path under my feet. Anna & Tony telepathically knew I wanted to finish within the time I'd just decided. I heard them & felt everyone willing me on. The final run up past the houses & shops below Keswick Market Square took forever & then the final push up to the door of the Moot Hall. I looked at my watch as I collapsed to the floor 22.29 and a bit!! Despite the photo of my finish, I felt great! It was just that final effort of getting myself there inside that silly arbitrary time! Mums do what mums do best, and mine gave me an immediate & massive hug as I sat crumpled in front of that doorway. I'm not one for lots of attention, but I was so happy to see so many people who, throughout the day, had supported me & willed me on to achieve my dream. Rhys, also successful in a brilliant time of 22 hours 15 mins, plus his team of supporters swelled the welcoming numbers at the Moot Hall.

Traditional fizzy stuff to celebrate & then off to Langdale for an all night party!.....Well, for some, but not me that night. Still, I've got the "Leeds BG" to look forward to - 42 pubs in 24 hours celebration to look forward to!!

On reflection & two weeks on?

It would have been great to have had perfect weather, but it might have been a bit scary seeing the enormity of the whole route spread out ahead of me, so I am very happy with the conditions we had on 23rd June 2007. I will enjoy the full panorama of views next time I'm on any of those 42 fells.

I do know for certain it was truly a team effort.

It was a great day, I loved it as much, if not more than I thought I would. It was my friends and family that made my tour of those 42 peaks the delight that I know will always make me feel very contented with my running.

Hey – and its only 7 years until I can have a go at the Joss Naylor and the 50 at 50! **Fantastic!**