

# Rhys' (Yes My) Bob Graham Round

To the left there are groups of people clapping. There's even more to the right. I recognise only a few, not that it matters. Everyone shouting 'Come On Rhys'. Bystanders turn round, shoppers put down their bags, all joining in with the clapping and cheering. Moot Hall now majestically towers in front. I've been looking forward to this wonderful sight for far too long. I'm running through a corridor of enthusiastically clapping chanting people. It's me they're clapping - nobody else. Forget king for a day, forget superstar, at that moment I felt like a god. I was certainly doing at least 20 mph, and I could have gone on for at least another 20 feet no problem. 'Touch the steps, touch the steps', shouts Dave – yes, yes, I think I know this one.

That's it, the percussion of clapping and shouting stops almost as quickly as it started. The amphitheatre of bodies disperses. It's all over. Hugs all around, and champagne. My legs ache something rotten. I really want to sit down, but I'm not too sure whether I could gracefully get up. We're all now waiting for Chris P to come in moments later. Another chance to savour the atmosphere, and boy it is electric.

## Leading Up to the Challenge

Chris P came up with a date of the 23<sup>rd</sup> June in what seems a lifetime away. 'Well if you think about it', I remember her staying, 'it's the only date. It gives enough time to recover for the UTMB (run around Mount Blanc) race in August, and allows a weekend spare if it's postponed'. So when do I do it? The logical date would be same day, as I too need to recover for the UTMB. Although our speeds are very close, we agreed it could only be done if we had separate teams. Thankfully Chris's contacts are extensive so she didn't take too many out of the Toddy pool.

In hindsight the drawback, and pointed out by John P a week before our attempts, was that both Chris and John P couldn't help me with my BG. Equally I couldn't help with Chris's. When Chris and myself have done loads of training and planning together it seems rather ironic and a tragedy that on the day it counts we would have to be selfish and ignore each other. That was a bit of a downer.

On the Sunday after Tash's BG (two weeks earlier) I was a bit despondent. I clearly needed more people in my team. In particular I needed a couple more of the elusive navigators. A truly memorable conversation with one of Achilli Ratti finest that morning and another with one of Toddies finest pointed me in the right direction. Within a couple of days I had a full team. I knew now it was going to happen. The relief was immense. I even started to smile, that is until I looked at the logistics and food.

The following weekend I thought it would be a good idea for Tracey to drive to the various roadside locations. As it happens John Thompson was doing his BG at the time and was at Wasdale. Exactly what we needed. Tracey had a crash course in the kit and setup we needed, together with the sorts of food required. Tracey came on board that weekend. She now had an understanding of what it was all about and what I expected from her. The following week our household became a hub of activity, questions asked, food bought and lists made/ticked. With additional support from Janet M and Jane C, I now knew that I didn't have to worry at all about the roadside stops.

By the time it started, everything was in place. Even though I took Friday off, I was mentally knackered before I started. Irritatingly there's always something small and niggling to keep you awake for the previous few nights. You know there's something special going on that Friday evening. Everyone milling around the hut. Lots of greetings, lots of coffee drinking, lots of planning, lots of packing, cars coming and going. Everyone on that heightened state of anxiety. That 'thank goodness you're here' look in everyone's eyes as we meet up. In the end it got a bit too noisy so I donned my earplugs and rested upstairs for an hour or so. It was all coming together, the inevitable was going to happen. I felt content that all the remaining logistics/planning was being sorted out by Tracey and others downstairs.

I don't remember being anxious on the day, but the weeks leading up to the BG was a real roller coaster. One minute I'm on track, next minute I'm not there. Thankfully in the last 10 days everything slotted into place, and nobody bailed out last minute.

## During the Challenge

It is a great feeling being that important person. I loved the idea of going up the hill with other people carrying my supplies. I love the idea of other people dealing with the navigation when the clag comes down. I love the idea of eating what I like. I love the idea that now I have nothing to sort.

Mind you, I had a wake up call at the first roadside check. For the first time in ages I had to switch my brain on and think. What clothing to change into?, did I even want to change clothes?, what did I want to eat?

Throughout a leg you need not think about nothing, then you are hit with several questions. I don't know what to eat. I'll have those socks...no I wont, I'll have those instead..... come on Rhys, think, what socks do you really want – the clock is ticking. Seemingly I was a pain in the arse.

On the day I was completely relaxed, more than I had been for a long time. When I now think back to that day I find myself easily floating off into that relaxed contented state. Maybe it's some kind of endorphin fix. It can last for a few minutes or can continue for over an hour or so. It's a bugger for work, but I love this sort of contentment. It's a natural drug and I'm hooked on it. Let those endorphins flow.

Other than being relaxed, how did I feel on the day ? Well this is the strangest thing. My legs were tired but I can't remember any real pain (rohypnol kicking in no doubt, or those endorphins again) – other than a small bit if rubbing on back of my heal which stopped when I changed shoes at Wasdale.

A few times on the round I would suddenly think, 'wow, this is my BG. This is not some practice run, this is MY BG'. I would have a little chuckle, as I'm having now, and feel quite emotional about all the people involved. Never have I been helped by so many people. Very touching, and I make no apologies for making a big deal out of this, as it is a big deal.

I think possibly it is for others to judge, but throughout the day I can't remember having a low bit. I was knackered but no real 'how much do you really want this, Rhys ?' kind of low points. Ron Hill said that he never ran races he merely watched himself run them. An out of body experience if you like. This is how I remember it. Take away the worry about food, navigation, even keeping warm, and you are left with a simple task of moving forward. All I have to do is put one foot in front of the other – a long walk as John C would say.

### **Immediately After the Challenge**

Back at the hut and after a shower I'm looking at my sleeping bag thinking if only I could just slide in. The comfort of a lovely warm sleeping bag, luxury. However, tonight Matthew, I'm going to celebrate until the sun comes up, be the sole of the party and a real beer monster. If I can't get pissed celebrating my BG then there's no hope. I'm also on a mission to buy the team a beer. In the end Tracey actually bought the beers. I just sat at the table with a glazed thousand yard stare. Conversation seemed carry on around me. Slouched, knackered, head in my hands is how the photographs rightly portrayed me.

For most of the challenges I've done I get a massive buzz afterwards. That satisfying, I've earned it, feeling as you gorge a bag of chips and clumsily spill red wine down your new T-shirt. Doing the BG offers membership to a unique and exclusive club. I should be delighted. Yes I am, very much so, but I feel a bit down and vacant (no comments please).

I've loved every part of the BG. The training runs, the trips to the lakes, nattering to fellow BGers. Loved it all. The BG has been such a special thing in my life that I don't want it to fade away. I'm desperate to hold onto every memory. It makes me sad as I know that I cannot relive every minute detail of this precious day forever. If only it could be all kept in a box.

### **Snippets of the Day**

Traditionally a BG account would mention the whole day. Instead I've included a few snippets of the day:

- Phil H driving off to Keswick without me. 'Oh bloody 'ell, that would have been funny if I hadn't taken Rhys' – and no doubt 5 points had he not been called back.
- Stuart B agreeing to sherpa for me provided that I look after him ????. After dragging him up Skiddaw we promptly left him behind. He did manage to catch up, but we then soon left him behind again. Good do Stuart.
- Watching the snake of lights behind us when climbing Blencathra. There were 6 teams out there on that first leg, with most of them behind. A sight I'm going to share with Derek. What a sight, particularly when most of them set off before us. Fantastic navigation Phil.
- Racing down Harts Fell following Phil H and Chris P, only leaving the sherpas to make their way, probably half lost, down some perilous steep cliffs.
- Arriving at Thelkeld with the sherpas/navigators for the next leg just appearing like magic.
- Kath B religiously being at my side, often not on the path, and often meant wading through tussocks, puddles, whatever. The perfect sherpa.
- Great wandering along with Bob Wrightman (of the BG website) and Chris's team for most of section 2. Dave W pulled out the navigation trump card when the mist came down and our team managed to momentarily break away.

- Having stuffed myself with food at Threlkeld and just about to go, when Janet M, the mistress of road support, is loading my plate up with more food. It's little wonder I didn't explode.
- Colin D and James R having a conversation about female anatomy. It gets a bit hazy but I'm sure they were comparing female behinds and such likes. It was great blokey banter and a real giggle. What Alan K thought about it I have no idea.
- Despite the patchy mist Alan K was spot on and he never even got a compass out. Bang on.
- The banter between Tony and Ozzy particularly when going up Great Gable. The clag was down – you could only see 20 feet. Ozzy and Tony were arguing on who was on the correct track. I was on some goat trail a bit to the right, with neither Ozzy and Tony in sight – could only hear them. Both of them were so adamant they were right. A credit to them as no GPS was in sight.
- Ozzy was sent ahead to arrange some hot soup for me at the next checkpoint (Tony was so slick in organising this I didn't see it happening until Ozzy was shooting off). Tracey and rest of support were convinced that there was a problem, when seeing Ozzy thundering in his enthusiastic style down towards Honister.
- Almost getting run over by Geoff R when we were coming out of Honister carpark. Then moments later he's stormed up the hill catching us up. 'Can you not hang on a bit', he asks. Errrh, no, I thought. Great to see you though Geoff.
- Running down the road towards Keswick, with Dave M prompting me, about ten times, to lift my feet. I'm sure that's the way I normally run. I did try to lift my heavy leaded feet, but I don't think it made a blind bit of difference.
- When you are sitting down at the roadside you are truly a king. Everyone milling around, ask and you shall get. Get up and your team drop everything and almost stand to attention in readiness.
- Towards the end of each leg I was looking forward to arrival of a new team, new conversations, new banter. Then I'd question whether I was betraying the current team by looking forward to the next team. The mind plays funny games.
- That early Saturday morning run recce of leg 2 with Andrew Horsfall. Doing the whole leg more than 1 hour faster than my schedule and finishing midday. Those smartwool socks were a real treat, thanks Andrew.

### **A Month or so After the Event**

I'm afraid I'm still a bit confused and lost with the whole thing. Sad one minute, grinning the next.

The BG is without doubt what fell running is all about, to me. Thankfully it's not about speed, but it is about the love of the mountains and friendship. The BG has definitely not sunk in, but it might have done by the time you do yours. Think about it.

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

It's difficult to mention all those that helped without no doubt missing someone out, so apologises to those who aren't mentioned, but here goes:

Leg 1: Phil Hodgson, Derek Donohue, Stuart Boulton; Leg 2: Dave Wilson, Kath Brierley, Richard Leonard; Leg 3: Alan Kenny, Colin Duffield, James Riley; Leg 4: Tony Shanley, Ozzi Kershaw, Bill Harris; Leg 5: Dave Makin, Arthur Daniels, Tony Shanley, Mick Howard, Bill Harris. Road crew: Janet Makin, Nicola, Tracey Macdonald, Jane Collyer, Sally Harris. On the fells: Pete and Partner (both Achilli Ratti). Broad Stand: Alex Miller & Chris Lloyd (both Achilli Ratti); Geoff Read. Also thanks to Geoff (Achilli Ratti) for driving people to and back between hut and Wasdale, and to the Achilli Ratti Club for accommodation. A big THANKYOU to all.

Also and not least I would like to thank Chris P for being my BG partner. It made a big difference having someone to train with and to talk endlessly about BG stuff when everyone else had switched off. It was a special and awesome moment seeing her complete her BG. Special thanks to John P who probably questioned (together with Tracey) whether there was something going on between us, with all our various training runs, texts and such like. Of course thanks to Mandy for nudging things along nicely.

On the food/drink front. I had a Nuun (salt/mineral) drink the day before. Nothing special to eat during the week although I did have plenty of pasta and 'treated' myself to a bag of fish and chips (with plenty of salt) on the Thursday before. I had some pasta before travelling up on the Friday evening, leaving plenty of time for the food to digest. On the day I was keen to drink carbo drinks – I had 3 x 500ml of carbo drink with probably just under 2 x 500ml water for each leg. I also swallowed a gel on every big climb (I think I went through about 12 gels on the day). I was surprised that I didn't have my usual craving for something savoury after 40 or so miles – so maybe the nuun drink helped. For treats on route I loved fudge, and surprisingly enjoyed the Kendal Mint Cake (brown) that was offered.

Anything that I would have done differently - Nope, thank you, thank you all very much.