

## Bob Graham Round - 2 June 2007

Having spent several years thinking about the Round, the actual stimulus for deciding on a date was my acting as a pacer on a Round last summer. So the date of 2 June 2007 was set and this gave me at least a six month period in which to totally focus, both physically and mentally.

As an active fell runner and walker it was more a case of increasing the distance and intensity of my regular days out rather than starting from scratch. However, I did not wish to be complacent and I knew that the training played a crucial part to a successful attempt, as did a solid support team and detailed planning.

I carefully planned out the training schedule, starting with the usual Lakeland Horseshoe routes, then sections of the BG, before increasing to several sections at a time and innovative loops which involved sections of the BG but avoiding finishing in inaccessible places such as Wasdale. Varying the training also helped to keep the motivation levels up, this included road races, adventure races and a three day mountain marathon; also my regular Monday and Wednesday night club training sessions were extended by an additional 6 or so miles, plus the occasional running along the canal path to and from work all provided that important 'time on feet'.

As the big day drew closer I started to focus on the logistics and drafted in the many willing members of Helm Hill running club to act as pacers and support for the attempt. I also knew that it was important to have an overall 'manager' on the day that would co-ordinate kit, pacers and the support vehicle; this role was taken-on (at very short notice) and was performed seamlessly by Mike Wilson - my sincere thanks go to him for this. It was also a great help owning a motorhome, this proved to be the ideal support vehicle which would not only cater for my needs but also provide a comfortable base for the support team.

To consolidate my training I took part in the Great Lakes 3 Day Mountain Marathon at the beginning of May and this was followed by a week in Scotland with some good long munro days in the Cairngorms. During this period I felt totally relaxed and was ready and looking forward to my attempt. The week leading up to 2 June saw me closely monitoring the weather, although the outlook was for patchy rain and blustery southerly winds this certainly did not constitute a 'bad' forecast so it was all systems go.

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> proved to be a very relaxed day sorting my kit, food and motorhome; I had already been in touch with all the support team during the week so I was content that they knew exactly where and when to be on the day. Arriving in Keswick at about 9pm allowed us plenty of time to sit around drinking tea, eating homemade cake and chatting; the build-up was going well and I still felt very calm. Section 1 pacers arrived in good time (one of which I had not actually met before) and I finally decided which fell shoes and clothing to wear. The evening was warm, the sky was clear and the streets of Keswick were busy with late night drinkers.

So at exactly midnight, surrounded by well wishers which included a successful runner from the previous weekend, I set-off on the Round. I felt like a coiled spring and was desperate to sprint off however Chris did a great job holding me back and keeping me calm, saying that the Round was a long way and going too quick in the early stages could well lead to problems later in the day.

The steep climb through the wood below Latrigg and then on to the slopes of Skiddaw were taken at a very relaxed pace, so much so that I was already quietly worrying about my schedule, however I resisted looking at my watch until the summit and was then surprised that we were just 2 minutes behind schedule. The summit windbreak protected two mountain bikers who looked well asleep in their bivvy bags and we quietly descended the ridge north and then dropped-off right to pick-up the trod leading to the track. Although my intention had been to take the right fork and head over Hare Crag we actually headed to the left of this small bump and then had a few hundred metres of heather bashing to tackle.

The night was still warm although the tops were breezy and my lightweight windtop came in very useful. The moon had now risen and although orange and hazy it still gave sufficient light to warrant only occasional use of headtorches. From the easy climb up Great Calva our route led us down the East Ridge and along Wiley Gill to cross the river Caldew. A line up on to the Common was set and Chris suggested that Eryk and I push on, this we did and we played safe by following the trod to the main path which leads to Foule Craggs and then to the summit of Blencathra. I had gained 5 minutes on this stage and as it was already getting light. I made good progress down Hall's Fell Ridge arriving at the support vehicle in Threlkeld on my own some 9 minutes ahead of schedule.

Pacers for stage 2, Tim and Ian, were already in place and after a quick bowl of rice (with fresh fruit salad and honey) and a change of socks we set-off towards the Dodds. It was now fully light but even if it had been dark there was no way that I would lose Ian, much to my and Tim's amusement he was wearing a bright red top, bright green shorts and blue tights (he did say later that he struggled to see what he was actually putting on at 2.30 in the morning!). This section led us straight into a strong southerly breeze but the sun was

already rising above the Pennines and the original forecast for patchy rain now looked unlikely to materialise.

It was really very special to be running along these easy ridges at this time of day, there were no other souls in sight. Again I was managing to pick-up a few minutes on each small section without feeling that I was pushing too hard, this gave me an increased confidence that even if things got difficult later on I had some additional leeway. The steep climb up Fairfield (having descended the fence line from Dollywagon and skirted right around the tarn) went very quickly, I had made a point in engaging Ian in conversation and this really did take my mind off this big 'out and back' climb. A quick descent to Dunmail (I could see my next set of pacers arriving - only a few minutes before me !) put me about 40 minutes ahead of my original 23:30 schedule.

I was still feeling good and it did not feel like I had already covered about 25 miles and 11,000 feet of climbing before breakfast. Another change of socks, cup of tea and bowl of rice set me up for the steep climb out of Dunmail. With 4 pacers (all fellow Helm Hill runners, 2 of which are BG'ers) I knew I was in safe hands. Russ set a good pace and navigated perfectly and Dale, whose last big day out was in December, was coping very well especially considering he had twisted his ankle badly after just 30 minutes; I am full of admiration for Dale because he pushed on and did not let me know that this had happened until we finished the section.

The Langdale section went to plan and I was still managing to pick up more time however on the climb to Bowfell I began to feel sick and felt that I was grinding to halt. Fortunately this soon passed and once the summit plateau was reached the pace again picked up. Dale kindly restocked on water at the spring by Great End and good progress was made across the dry rocks to Sca Fell. Another Helm runner, Dave Till, had kindly offered to set-up a rope on Broad Stand and although we were close to an hour ahead of schedule his intricate rope work was already in place. Dave's role only directly lasted a couple of minutes but it made a huge positive impact and for this I am very grateful.

The descent to Wasdale was tough but Russ choose some good lines and myself and Gary even managed to enjoy the scree running. Seeing Mike, the motorhome and the next set of pacers was always uplifting and I like to think that I managed a smile and friendly greeting to them, they certainly provided the same to me. Mike had meticulously laid out my plastic tubs of kit, the bowl of water and towel for my feet and had prepared food exactly as suggested. This was great and the bowl of stew and bread at Wasdale slipped down well and helped to make up for the difficulty I was having in eating whilst on the move.

I was managing to stay totally focussed on the section in hand and not thinking about the bigger picture; this meant I had not given any thought to Yewbarrow and as I set off with Kev and Andrew I suddenly realised that it was again another big climb from the valley

bottom. Kev expertly led the way and Andrew, as instructed, was constantly badgering me to eat and drink. I got the feeling that he felt a bit uncomfortable with this, I was struggling to take on food and was perhaps not being overly responsive to his requests - apologies Andrew, you were doing a good job.

The next few peaks went by without any major problem but I did begin to feel tied on the long descent to Black Sail Pass. Dave Richardson, Helm Hill runner and pacer from stage 3, had mentioned he might meet me here with but unfortunately he was not to be seen and the climb to Kirk Fell then became hard work. However, much to my surprise, when we got to Beck Head (the col between Kirk Fell and Great Gable) Dave, dressed in full waterproofs and balaclava, appeared from behind a rock and thrust a cup of tea into my hand. Dave, you are a top man, this gave me a big boost both physically and mentally and it was good to have you with me again across to Honister.

As always, it was good to see the motorhome come into sight as we came down from Grey Knotts; I knew Mike would again have all I needed in place for my arrival at the slate mine carpark at Honister. Just a quick stop here and John King, friend and fellow Helm Hill runner, was ready for the off. I had almost 5 hours to get to Keswick and my scheduled time was just 3 hours; I knew that barring some serious problem (which can never be ruled out) I was in with a good chance of fulfilling my ambition. There was a lot of friendly banter between me and John on these final 3 peaks and, had been the case all day, I was in good company and enjoying the Round. The final descent to the track leading to Newland was not particularly fast but I was still a few minutes up on that section and well up overall.

Familiar faces greeted me at Newlands and after a quick change into some soft road shoes I was off on the final few miles. Richard Dawson, friend and colleague (Boss actually!), also joined me and the three of us made good progress along the back roads to Portinscale; over the bridge, right along the footpath between the fields and the finish was just about in sight. This spurred me on more and as I got to the main street I felt sure that I could manage a sprint finish. This I did and, as I touched the Moot Hall door, my welcome party gave a good cheer. I was totally elated but certainly not close to collapse (although I did not have the energy to open the bottle of bubbly!) and it was great to meet and greet many of the Team that were waiting for me at the end.

I'll be honest, the champagne did not taste great after 22 hours and 11 minutes of running but I did feel drunk with happiness and fulfilment. We probably spent a good 20 minutes or so at the Moot Hall, attracting some strange looks from the late, or not so late, drinkers. I struggled to stay awake on the drive home to Kendal but again trustworthy Mike got me back safely. After a good 8 hours sleep I was up and about on Sunday and eager to have the 'works' breakfast at Booths - this did not disappoint.

So, in summary, what made the whole day hugely successful and enjoyable; in my opinion 4 key things:

1. Training - this is a must, it has to be disciplined and well planned - put the schedule in your diary and stick to it - my efforts during the preceding 6 months definitely paid off.
2. The Team - this is crucial, hopefully by now you might have gathered that I was totally impressed and proud of my Team; they played a huge part in the success and were great company on the fells. Mike, you did great, probably the hardest role to fulfil, but you rose to the challenge and were always there at the right place, at the right time, with the right kit and the right food etc, etc.... - you also made the entire Team feel welcome and, from what I gather, looked after them well. Also Sandra, my wife, who worked with Mike on the first few road crossings, but, moreover, for tolerating my disciplined training schedule and my non-stop talking about the Round for months on end (this bit is still happening!).
3. Planning - this is crucial and, to large extent, directly covers the first two points. I needed to make sure that logistics were in place and would work smoothly so that on the day I could purely concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other.
4. PMA (positive mental attitude) - this may sound corny but it is really important; as soon as I set the date I stayed positive and focussed right to the end. This got me through the training (remember those dark, wet and windy January days!) and made a huge difference on the day. I never got frustrated with myself, the Team, the fell or the Round - I stayed totally focussed and positive throughout, making sure that I kept smiling; this not only helps others to enjoy the day but, ultimately, got me through it as well.

**A few other points:**

**Food/ Drink:**

My hill food and drink did not work well, I had pre-packed 5 bags of food (one for each stage), these contained food that ordinarily I enjoy when out on the fells (such treats as flapjack, mini caramel shortbreads, cereal bars, buttered buns, malt loaf and jelly babies). Most of this just stuck in my mouth and was difficult to get down. The jelly babies worked though as did chunks of marzipan which Kev fed me with on stage 4. Drinks, again I regularly use High 5 but, on the day, this was not going down well; Lucuzade sport was bearable but water or squash was by far the easiest and most enjoyable to drink.

However, the food I had organised for the support vehicle worked excellently. The first two checkpoints I ate good sized bowls of rice pudding with fresh fruit salad and honey and cups of tea. Later in the day, tinned soup and stews with bread worked very well, as did fruit smoothies. I had one protein drink (Powerbar) at Dunmail and this did help me get through the long stage to Wasdale.

### **Clothing & Footwear:**

I worked on the basis that I take the lot, I could then, at any road crossing, change footwear and clothes depending on weather and comfort. With the weather remaining dry and warm all day I never actually changed any item, apart from socks (this was proved by the smell of the clothes at the end - or was that my body ?!). The Inov-8 Terrocs proved very comfortable but had it been wet these would have not been my preferred choice due to lack of grip (if wet, I would have opted for Montrail Highlanders). New Hilly socks to start with and then new Bridgedales were well worth the expense, Nike shorts, Ron Hill long sleeved top (with long front zip for ventilation), Montane windtop and buff to keep me warm during the night and protect me from the sun during the day (this is the one piece of kit that I never head to the hills without).

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So here's to the next Round, Paddy Buckley or Ramsay ? - Just don't tell my wife !