

Winter BG (Clockwise) 16.02.08 - Garry Beardwood

After much dreaming and beer talking, it was decided that myself, Garry Beardwood, Paul Jackson and Simon Waller, would make an attempt at a winter BG. This needed some research, to assist us with this we found two pairs of feet experienced in long distance adventures, Russell Cannon and Dave White. I had supported Dave on his BG in June 2007 and was now calling in the favour.

After a few good long races (The Old Counties Tops, The Lake District Mountain Trial and the OMM) we got ourselves into gear. Simon was somewhat in at the deep end with only six months fell running under his belt, but after the OMM A class the task ahead of him became a little clearer!!!

It was decided that our first recce would be Leg 2 in the dark. We started in quiet bad weather wind, rain, snow and ice. Our little adventure started at 2 o'clock in the morning (don't ask why 2am – I think it was the testosterone!!) and after leaving a car at Dunmail in horrendous weather not a word was said until we got out at Threlkeld. The weather eventually changed after Nethermost Pike, but by the time we had reached Grizedale Tarn we were timed out on our schedule. At around 7am, exhausted and frozen, we retreated back to the car at Dunmail Raise thinking that a winter BG just wasn't going to be possible. Next we reced Leg 1 in the dark but this time brought Dave White along for support. The weather was fantastic because although it was cold, it was clear, but again we were over the allotted time on our 23.5hr schedule for this leg!

With some more training and reconnaissance under our belts we decided to set the attempt date for February 16th.

The time had arrived! We'd managed to get all our pacers together and a last minute solo road support, Mathew Noble, to whom we owe a grate deal of thanks. We arrived in Keswick at around 10.00pm in a car kitted out with enough gear to explore the Himalayas! After sorting the gear out we popped in the pub for swift half of Guinness. At 11:40pm our Leg 1 pacers met us outside Moot Hall. It was the first time Joe Faulkner and Louise Wilkinson had met us all and the next twenty minutes were spent in nervous chatter. We set off at midnight feeling slightly anxious of the day and night ahead!!

At around 01.30 the first one was in the bag, we had reached the summit of Skiddaw. The weather was clear and cold (-7 °C) making conditions underfoot very crisp. After completing Calva and Blencathra summit the descent of Hall's Ridge was hard going. I was getting cramp which was very unnerving at such an early stage as the others seemed to be romping down without any obvious problems. It was good to see Matt at Threlkeld (03.54) with cups of tea and soup. We were now 3 minutes up on our schedule and had about ten minutes to try to eat and drink before we set off on Leg 2 with Ian Barnes and Tim Murray. I'd only just started walking down the road with Tim when I slipped on back on ice and landed flat on my back – I was not feeling very relaxed at this point as my comrades had disappeared in the time it took me to become vertical again!

Eventually we got to Clough Head summit (05.09) and we were still on schedule but my legs were cramping up again. I was experiencing periodic leg cramps throughout the night and the hours and the miles passed very slowly. Paul and Simon seemed to have settled into their stride and I somehow kept going until the sun came up which was a spectacular sight.

With dawn breaking we seemed to be making head way. We stayed within minutes of our planned schedule all the way to Dollywaggon Pike (07.06), but the sheer size of Fairfield looked as though it could make us fall way behind. Ian had sensed our apprehension at tackling such a summit at this time of day and had got us all talking to try to distract us from the task ahead. In the event it wasn't as bad as I had anticipated but I was glad when it was over, reaching the summit at 07.47. Although it was hard going up to the summit of Seat Sandal it had seemed to take no time at all as Tim had rewarded us with wine gums on the way up. At last we could see the road support at Dumail Raise and on arrival we apparently looked as though we might not leave! Matt served some hot food which took some doing due to the gas bottle being frozen, but he had solved this by lighting fire lighters under it!! We all changed our socks after thawing out our laces with hot tea and then we were off again. Our Leg 3 pacers were Russell Cannon (Crag Rat), Dave White and Eric Draper (BG back to back 1985). We reached the top of Steel Fell (09:11) in good time and could feel the warmth of the sun which was a welcome relief after the -7°C of the previous hours.

The day was now at its best with the sun shining and clear blue sky; we couldn't have ordered better weather. When we reached High Raise (10:12) Paul brought it to our attention that Great Gable looked rather monstrous and a very long way away. At this point we all thought it was probably a good idea to keep looking at the floor as we weren't even half way there! Although the pacers kept us fed and watered we still had our ups and downs. For me, the worst of these downs was the traverse up Bowfell. When I supported Dave on his BG I remembered this was where he had felt the pain and he could sympathise with my situation. After Dave had supplied me with lots of goodies I eventually came round and it started to get easier once we had reached the summit. I now allowed myself the luxury of taking in the views and we topped out on Scafell Pike at 13:28. We progressed to Broad Stand where we met Dave Till who had rigged up the rope. On our approach I could hear a mountain rescue team coming up a gully to my right, and to the left I saw a party of walkers. At first I thought it was a training exercise but unfortunately it transpired that one of the walking party had slipped and sustained fatal injuries just as Dave was securing the rope. I pulled myself up the rope until Eric had to unceremoniously grab me and get me over the last step. We reached Scafell (14:01) and finally descended into Wasdale valley. Things were looking good as we met the road support and I sat down to rice pudding and honey. We had around seventeen minutes in hand and this gave us a big boost. Looking around I saw Allen Miller, Matt Beresford, Gavin Thomas and Sean Butler, considering I'd only asked Allen Miller for support at this stage it was great to see so many faces.

The seventeen minutes gained were now playing on my mind and I didn't want to lose any of them. I kept my head down all the way to the summit of Yewbarrow (15:38) and hadn't realised that in the rush of setting off I'd left Simon and Paul behind. Simon was running with Matt and Sean and caught us as we reached the summit but I couldn't see Paul with Joe and Louise (now on their second support stint). I seemed to be going a lot better and on reaching Pillar (17:16) the sun was just starting to set. As we reached Kirk Fell (18:07) the sunset was spectacular and the last big climb was nearly in the bag. From leaving Kirk Fell (Head torches were back on) and it wasn't until I was half way up Great Gable (summit 18:55) that I looked back towards Pillar to see the torches of Paul, Joe and Louise. I thought Paul was probably feeling it now and hoped he could just keep going. They were about forty minutes behind us.

On reaching Brandreth (19:27) I was feeling good and thought I wouldn't need to stop for long at Honister. I planned to just grab a cup of tea and a mouth full of tinned fruit and get going. I just wanted to finish it now! We could see a big glow at Honister Slate mine and descended to find all the support there. It was a pleasing sight to see Matt Noble was still doing a sterling job even though sleep deprivation was having an effect as he'd started to see polar bears at the side of the road!!! After having the much needed refreshments I and my pacers Russ (who had already paced on Leg 3) and Shaun Addison set off up Dale Head. This is not one of my favourites as I'm usually on my knees at this point on the Borrowdale race but it must have been my PB as I reached the summit in twenty eight minutes. Simon was now having an adrenalin surge and was closing fast. He passed me on Hindscarth (20:50) where I tried to shake his hand whilst stumbling about with apparently huge pupils. At this point I felt considerably wasted and Russell had to prop me up and point me in the right direction a couple of times whilst Shaun handed over dried apricots. I eventually came back to the land of the living and we reached Robinsons at 21:19 before starting the descent. Keswick still looked an alarmingly long way away. I'd never recced this leg before and the descent was a lot steeper and rockier than I'd imagined. Finally we descended a grassy slope towards the reservoir. We hit the track and it was nice to be on the flat again. Matt had parked at the end of the track and our road shoes were put on.

We started running up the road but not for very long as my legs didn't want to play any more. A few cars passed and my tired head thought that if I get run over at this stage I would be most unhappy! Just before crossing the bridge towards Keswick town centre I experienced a rather strange sensation. I felt as though I was running down hill even though I was ascending. When I mentioned this to Russ he just said in his usual low key way, "That's normal, you're alright". To see Moot Hall's doors was such a good feeling and they were even better to touch. The next thing I remember was my wife handing me a bottle of beer and thinking to myself what a day out on the fells it had been!! Simon had finished in 22:47 and I was thirteen minutes behind him at 23.00. Paul had us all worried with a rather too close for comfort 23:53 with David White (who had already paced on leg 3) doing a sterling job bringing him home.

I'd like to say a huge thank-you to the whole of the support team – you did an amazing job.

Support

Road support: Mathew Noble

Leg 1

Joe Faulkner

Louise Wilkinson

Leg 2

Ian Barnes

Murray

Leg 3

Russell Cannon

Dave White

Eric Draper

Dave Till (Broad Stand)

Leg 4

Allen Miller

Matt Beresford

Gavin Thomas

Sean Butler

Joe Faulkner

Louise Wilkinson

Leg 5

Russell Cannon

Shaun Addison

Chris Robinson

Ian Mitchell

Dave White

If anyone in the club is thinking of an attempt we would be happy to help in any way, shape or form.