

BOB GRAHAM 89

FUN IN THE SUN

17/18 JUNE 89

Not a single cloud could be seen in the sky and the ominous warmth could be felt as 8am approached. Seven hopefuls gathered around the Moot Hall for the photo session sporting a wide variety of sun repelling hats and scarves for a hot day on the fells. Kevin Borman, Ged Desforges, Ed Hutt, Tim Mackey, Barry Needle, Roy Varo and myself trotted out of the shade in that usual happy, chatty Dark Peak fashion. Indeed most of the road section was spent catching up with news, chatting to pacers and getting know fellow companions on the day's outing. During this stage were overtaken by several serious, sweating, quiet running types who headed up strange paths, never to be seen again. One notable exception was Christine Porrit, our gallant shadow for the day.

I'd The climb up Robinson reminded us of what lay ahead and grassy trot over Hindscarth to Robinson was spent drinking and trying not to sweat... "No sweating on the first section", Terry had instructed. Fearfully, we slowed our pace to comply and arrived at Honister fresh and bang on schedule. Already realised just how important the roadside support is physically and mentally. The efficient hustle, encouragement, orders, force feeding and drinking are vital to stop you sitting and enjoying the rest.

Up and over Grey Knott and more welcome company as a party of maybe twenty Dark Peakers trotted towards Great Gable where the hard work really begins. By Kirk Fell, Pillar and Steeple the mid-day sun was becoming a nuisance. The group stretched out and tucked in behind Mary, Dave and Keith...heads down, keeping going. It was a bit disappointing that there weren't any good views over the Solway to Criffel. The distant Border and Galloway hills were hidden in a heat haze, thoughts turned to rest and lunch.

Red Pike and Yewbarrow passed and the welcome sight of Wasdale lifted spirits, only to have them dashed by a tortuous scree descent. The heat had taken its toll in the latter part of that section and it was a tired and sickly crew that sat in the shade of some bushes being fussed over, coaxed and cajoled to eat. This is where being a born glutton helps. The ice cream got eating and the old habits helped me down everything offered by the young Swindells who were excellent waiters. Eating, however repugnant, was vital, nutrients and electrolytes had to be replaced and stored for the next, and longest, section.

Others were not. as lucky, Kev struggled in behind us; exhausted with the heat he retired at Wasdale. Tim was unable to eat and left after the remaining five. A now famous tale tells how Tim carried a stick of celery and a tomato up Scafell and never ate them. He bravely carried on to Esk Hause before retiring. Eating on the Bob Graham is sometimes harder than running.

The climb up Scafell in the baking afternoon sun was strength sapping but we were falling behind schedule so Neil Goldsmith and John Armistead had to force us on. Ray now dropped behind with John, whilst Neil saw us safely to the foot of Broad Stand where Kay

was a welcome addition to the party. From here (at 4pm ish) it was another 5 hours to our next stop and we were none too happy

15

climbing over hot rocks and touching summits. For me, as we shuffled along, this was now becoming the hardest section. We were tiring, the schedule slipping, the sun taking its toll among the rubble of Bow Fell, Ill Crag etc. We longed for shady grassy slopes. Off the rocks and towards the Langdales I was getting bit worried. The dreaded woozy headedness and sicklyness creeping on. Barry and Ged seemed OK ahead, Ed and I trotted 100m behind shepherded by Kay at the rear and Neil leading. a was

The day continued to be enlightened by crossing paths with Christine Porrit, doggedly battling on with her two pacers. As the day wore on we ran together for part of the way.

party At this, our lowest point, we met a small, amiable, picnicking by the Hoist. Tom and Enid Foley and Bill and Ann Kenyon were very kind and shared their coffee, tea and malt loaf with us. Bill had electrolyte and this saved the day, certainly for me. The effect of this stop was dramatic, by the top of Thunnacar Knott we were on a physical and mental high. This was surely due to having our body chemistry restored to something like normal. The grassy slopes dropping down from Calf Crag to to Steel End were positively fun, we were in great spirits. Bob Marsden dropped in from nowhere and at last the sun began descended for tea (with our mate Christine) to cheers crowded Dunmail. ease. We from a

Reaching Dunmail is another vital point. 13 hours on our feet, yet eleven still to go. A daunting prospect but at least I knew what lay ahead as last year I had paced Dunmail to Keswick. That helped a lot, we just had to keep going, a steady, cool, trot with the sunset on Seat Sandal to look forward to. However, the old food problem had hit. Ed at Dunmail, feeling dizzy and sick as soon as sitting down he was unable to leave with Barry and myself. He set off 5 minutes behind but it must have been soul destroying trying catch that small gap. Ed eventually dropped out at Threlkeld, agonisingly close to finishing. Afterwards he was quoted as saying, "39 out of 42 isn't bad, I'll be back in 10 years!" to

The sunset didn't let us down; if ever asked, "why do you do it ?", the sun setting over the distant range of hills from where you have just come on your own two feet is a very good reason.

The night section was spent following closely behind Colin Henson who seems to know instinctively where he is, where he is going and how long it will take to get there. Cheerful Mick Eaton kept us awake and Paul Sanderson joined us for his second supporting stretch. Coffee was served at Sticks Pass at 1:30am and despite Barry having a bad patch we arrived at Threlkeld half hour up on schedule (and, an rumour has it, on Terry). Di Worsell's sausage, beans, egg and bacon were worth running 20 hours for.

Great Feet up for a rest, then a steady plod up Blencathra with a feeling that, barring accidents, we were going to do it. Barry was strong again and led the last three climbs (Blencathra, Calver and Skiddaw). We chatted to Ben, Alan (Sanderson) and Colin ) before meeting Kay and Keith, who had bivied on Skiddaw, Howard who also joined us in the

descent.. final descent is spectacular; and Derwent Water, The view from the Keswick and all the

16

Bob Graham hills spread out before you, not to mention back across the Solway...not mentioned because it wasn't visible year in the haze! this

A great reception awaited us in Keswick as our wonderful support team gathered to cheer us to the Moot. Hall (Christine too got a rousing Dark Peak reception as she arrived 10 minutes later). Without you we would have had no chance, many thanks you all especially to Terry for his support, encouragement, organisation...and telling me that he didn't think that I would make it. AFTER the event.

John Firth

P.S. Looking forward to supporting some brave lads and lasses next year on another DPFR Bob Graham attempt.