

GOING THE DISTANCE

DPFR BOB GRAHAM ROUND REPORT: 20/21 JUNE 1997

"Hill walkers and small boat owners are warned that an unusually vigorous anticyclone will cross the British Isles during the next 48 hours."

The six o'clock forecast wasn't exactly encouraging, but there was a hint of a lull in the wind whilst the eye of the low tracked over Cumbria during Saturday. After umming and ahing with John Gunnee, Colin Henson and the Leg One Posse we decided to stay with the clockwise 7pm start schedule. Anyway, it would muck up the session in The Salutation if we delayed our departure until Saturday.

Two hours later I was regretting our decision as we struggled along the Skiddaw summit ridge in thick clag and a near gale force wind. I thought Liz was going to take off and there was no sign of Dick or John M who we'd lost when we took an unscheduled detour over Low Man. It was no weather for hanging about so we guessed our way down from the summit in the general direction of Great Calva. Inevitably we got the line slightly wrong as there was no way Neil could consult his map. Thigh deep heather then tussocky cotton grass and we were back on route, glancing behind in search of our lost lads. More ghastly weather on top of Great Calva and we were again off route for a few minutes following the wrong fence in the general direction of Carlisle!

Dick rejoined us as we trudged across Muggrisdale Common. He looked none too pleased as he was carrying two rucsacs. He and John had seen our mistake on the ascent of Skiddaw and had initiated a pincer movement in order to catch us up John gave Dick his rucsac and followed us over Low Man whilst Dick went round on the main path. However they failed to find us or each other. Dick continued the chase towards Great Calva whilst John, now devoid of any kit, made a lonely return direct to Threlkeld. Dick spotted us ascending Great Calva and cut across to meet us on the common. Kevin took Johns sack from Dick muttering something about a kitchen sink.

Back into the storm on top of Blencathra we made fairly slow progress as night arrived early. John and Neil pulled ahead of me on the grey and gloomy scramble down Halls Fell Ridge and then all of a sudden there were lots of people standing around offering cups of tea (four), jam sandwiches (three) and leg massages (two).

I felt quite hyped up for the night section through to Dunmail. I thought that it would be the crux of the round given the poor weather conditions. The Night Riders (Jim F, Chris B, Pete G, Richard H, Dave H and Tamsin) kept John and I cheerful as we climbed towards the Dodds and eventually the Dale Head trig. point loomed through the mist like a lost Dalek. The wind had dropped slightly but it was now raining steadily and I donned my full weight winter mountaineering cagoule (the mysterious heavy weight from Johns rucsac!). It was difficult to keep together in the clag which made for what felt a painfully slow pace but in retrospect was spot on.

Dave and Chris had the navigation well sorted. The three guys bivying on Stybarrow Dodd looked surprised to see us and were even more surprised when we told them that they weren't on Watson Dodd. I was flagging a little as we approached Helvellyn which unfortunately prompted Dave to initiate a sing-song. Tamsin howled in sympathy and thankfully the wind and rain stifled the cacophony. The Helvellyn summit shelter was crammed with a dozen damp druids waiting to see the summer solstice dawn. Fat chance we thought. By the descent from Fairfield night was loosing out to day. Seat Sandal was the first peak out of the clag and the rain, although the only view was of the clag on all the other fells.

Over the descent to Dunmail I drew a few minutes ahead of John on account of a better line through the boulder infested bracken. He arrived as I set off up Steel Fell with Karen and Roger. In the pre dawn confusion the safety rope for Broad Stand had been left at Threlkeld with a sleeping Ron. Colin assured me that he'd sort something out whilst I started to contemplate alternative routes up Scafell. As we moved towards Calf Crag we could see John and his entourage about half a mile back and seemingly catching us. Back into the clag for High Raise and the Pikes and by now we could hear them chatting just a short way off. We met Jim L sheltering at the foot of Harrison Stickle and I greedily accepted a proffered baked potato He'd waited at Dunmail to collect my now saturated mountain cag. from the Night Riders. However, as we'd hoped, the weather was improving and I needed it no more. A crafty route round the flanks of Rossett Crag and a perfect line up Billy Bland's Rake took us to Bow Fell. John had failed to catch us and we heard from Jim that he had earlier twisted his ankle. We hoped he would pull through.

The clouds started to part as we reached Great End and by Scafell Pike there were patches of blue. As we descended towards Mickledore I reconciled myself to the screes of Lords Rake - I'd found the scramble up Ill Crag taxing enough so there was no way I was going to solo Broad Stand in the wet...

...Meanwhile back in Threlkeld sleeping beauty had woken up. A manic drive to Wasdale Head and a forty minutes ascent saw he and Lynn reach Mickledore about a half hour before us. Ron flew up Broad Stand in his neoprene socks and set up the rope. I sure was pleased to see them sitting there grinning at us!

Lynn, Roger and I continued down to Wasdale Head from Scafell whilst the others waited for John. His ankle had become more painful traversing the Pikes and his pace had slowed. For him Wasdale was unfortunately to be the end of this attempt although I'm sure he's mad enough to be back soon.

We took half an hour out of the schedule on the climb over Yewbarrow to Red Pike. Rob D, Darryl and Pete S obviously had large breakfasts to burn off! By contrast Lynn was suffering as she'd missed her breakfast in the rush to Scafell. I felt fine with a belly full of soup and pasta. I have the eating habits of a gannet, so 24 hours of force feeding was my idea of heaven. Windy Gap came and went with the exchange of best wishes to an anticlockwise BG group they were to have a much calmer night than ours.

