

Going the Distance

BOB GRAHAM ROUND 1998

Five years ago at the finish of my first fell race, Shipman Knott in the Kentmere valley, the idea of completing the Bob Graham Round seemed like Premier League stuff compared to my Sunday League beginnings. Since then my experience of fell running has grown steadily and I felt this year that it was now or never. Even on the start line I was not too sure how I would react to twenty-four hours on the move.

As we pitched the tent at Setmabanning signs of the long promised heat wave began to show and by late afternoon the gathering crowds were lazing in warm sunshine. More importantly, the fells were clear.

The pace, and nerves, started to settle as we began the climb up Skiddaw. Unfortunately my digestive system took a little longer to settle and Walsh prints were not the only thing I left behind on Skiddaw. The spicy pizza wasn't going to give in without a fight!

I began to appreciate the size and complexity of the operation as we snaked our way up Clough Head away from the road stop at Threlkeld. Sandwiches, cups of tea, deck chairs and clothing had seemed to fly in all directions yet everything was in order as we progressed into the night.

The Dodds and Helvellyn came and went as did more evidence of my stomach complaint! The visibility was brilliant and our headtorches were saved for only the rocky descents. I was glad to reach the comforts of the Dunmail Roadshow after my usual dithering descent from Seat Sandal. Once again, I was left behind by the more confident downhillers.

The group started to separate as contenders found their own pace up Steel Fell. Our progress was only hindered by a brief period of thick mist on the Langdales which cleared to reveal the Scafell range bathed in glorious morning sunshine. I was definitely suffering on reaching Broad Stand and no doubt the climbers were a little alarmed by my lack of climbing prowess. "Don't pull on that one!" was quickly shouted as I grabbed at every rope in sight.

After the lung bursting climb up Yewbarrow, the leg from Wasdale to Honsiter passed without major incident; apart from prolonged periods of feeling rough, legs as stiff as cricket bats and a pair of shorts that had rubbed a painful raw patch in the "cod-piece" region! At Honister it finally dawned that I could actually complete the round. Apart from heavy downpour whilst dropping off Robinson which made progress very slippery over the wet rock, we had been lucky with the weather. I realised how much harder it would have been if the elements had turned.

On reaching Keswick and the Moot Hall my emotions seemed drowned by an overwhelming urge to rest which forced a shuffling retreat to the car.

Looking back, I suppose I have let myself forget just how hard the BG was. Without the help from the organisers, pacers and helpers I would never have started let alone finished. I know that contenders should not rely on others to get them round but I know that without the help, experience and encouragement from others I would not have succeeded. I am sure all the contenders will join me in saying a big thank you to all those involved in the Bob Graham weekend and are looking forward to helping out next year.

Having tasted the challenge of the BG my thoughts wander to next summer, The Paddy Buckley or Leo Pollard rounds, Scottish 4000s or British Three Peaks by foot and bike... any takers?

Will Sullivan