

Bob Graham Round – Carl's Story

It was during a soggy Thursday night run that Julian Brown started talking about the Bob Graham Round. It took me less than 15 minutes to arrive at the conclusion that ruining myself - literally and metaphorically - was a fantastic idea. Less time than it took to choose my last set of bath mats.

I struggled with an Achilles injury for much of 2015, so I made my first attempt in 2016. This, as many of you know, ended in hallucinations (bearable) and pain (not at all bearable). But I couldn't just leave it well alone, so 2017 was the new target.

Training involved many a hill rep and lengthy fell run, come sunshine, rain, drizzle and rain. I did sometimes ask myself why on earth I was doing it. I had designs on doing the London Marathon this year too, but realised that the two were not compatible. Not soon realised, mind; I only made the decision to head north to Eskdale to run as many southern Wainwrights as I could four days before the marathon.

I felt quite relaxed during the build-up this year, even when I finally found myself sitting under the Moot at 6.25pm ready to set off in five minutes, to cheers from our support and teams from other clubs.

Leg one went smoothly, but it was noteworthy that we happened upon a naked gentleman as we ascended Blencathra. I thought it was far too early in the proceedings to hallucinate and when everyone concurred they had seen the same thing I was much relieved. We still don't know why he was naked.

The Threlkeld cricket ground car park was a hive of activity and I had not realised how many people were having a go – 7 from Dark Peak alone. I hadn't anticipated the noise and bustle and I found myself a little unsettled, starting to rush and needed to calm down.

Steve, Gill and Andy (who surprised me as I had not expected him) did a fantastic job during leg two – Steve with his nav in the clag, and Gill and Andy feeding me. We also found a man who had lost his group and tagged along with us for a short while. Thankfully he was clothed.

But leg two was also all about doubts. *'What if I fail again? You failed before, you're going to fail again and let down all these people supporting you'*. The various other unpleasant thoughts that accompanied me during the descent from Fairfield to Dunmail Raise were worsened by my little toenails, which had started to come away and dig in.

Like Threlkeld, the layby for the next changeover was very busy and thankfully Mandy was there to direct me to our support, who were parked as far away as they could have been. Upon finding none of us had nail clippers, I resorted to ripping off one of my little toe nails, but fortunately a Dark Peak supporter materialised with some nail trimmers to allow me to tidy up the rest. There is little to recommend in tearing off one's own toenails by hand and I will remember the clippers next time!

I enjoyed leg three and with an improvement to my toes and state of mind, I felt rather jovial. We experienced a fantastic sunrise and had time to appreciate a full circle rainbow just off the top of Esk Pike. Kirsty's constant bullying to eat by the time we reached the Stickles was very helpful, and Martin and Mandy gave me their secret to a great ham sandwich – just add tomatoes! They even gave me some of their precious sandwiches, probably to bring about a respite from my 'unsettled' stomach. My consumption of gels and electrolytes did not make pleasant running for those downwind of me.

The descent from Scafell was painful and my toes again were very unhappy and at the changeover in Wasdale I used a pair of scissors to sort them out. Mandy even helped me to tape two of them down, which helped a lot.

After a bacon butty I set off for leg four, this time joined by Andy, Dan and Kathleen. Even though I enjoy ascents more than descents, I was not very talkative on the way up to Yewbarrow, it was a case of head down and go. I lost my mules at one point, something to do with sandwiches. They returned empty-handed and it turned out that Dan and Kathleen had my food, but not theirs. On the way up Great Gable Andy presented me with one of Martin's blessed ham and tomato sandwiches.

I heard at the top of Great Gable that we were down on time and I thought *'I cannot fail again'*. My feet and ankles were very painful, but I reasoned that if I went slowly it would be too difficult to carry on – If I did not go faster and accept the pain, I wouldn't finish. I decided that was that, I was going to run as hard as I could and it was going to hurt a lot. In hindsight my team probably thought I had gone a little mad, but we made up loads of time.

The temperature was very high when we reached Honister Pass for the final changeover to leg five. I just remember trying to put on suntan lotion at the same time as emptying a bottle of water over my head. The climb up Dale Head felt good but as we set off towards Hindscarth my ankles started to hurt in the same spot that caused me to drop out last year. I was

ordered to sit down for Dan and Kirsty to adjust my shoe laces, it helped a little but the pain didn't go. On reaching Robinson (the last fell top) I was less relieved than you might think, because I was thinking about the final descent, which was steep, sharp and agonising, but it did signify the end of the fells and the beginning of the flat(ish) road to the end.

Mine and Graham's support crews were standing at the finish with my family and I felt a little choked up. It was nice to finish with Dan, albeit a year behind him! Graham and I had been running together and passing each other throughout the round. He finished a few minutes behind me and did it first time!

Graham did a great job organising the support and I would like to give a big thanks to all those who helped on the fell, our fantastic road support and people I barely know from the wider fell community.

Toenail clippers and ham and tomato sandwiches at the ready for the next ridiculous endeavour...

Carl Hanaghan