

## Dan Croft's BGR 15-16<sup>th</sup> July 2016

The decision to attempt the Bob Graham Round originated from a casual discussion in the Dunstan, over beers, following the Fell Handicap race (Dec 2015). My 50<sup>th</sup> was looming and I was keen to mark this significant birthday with a memorable challenge, as we runners often do! At this stage there were four of us eager to have a go at the BGR in 2016; Carl, Tom and Guenelle and myself. To cut a long story short Carl and I made a plan to set off from Moot Hall on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> July with the aim of completing the round together.

Finally, after a good 6 months of training and planning the day arrived, and despite a less than ideal weather forecast (heavy rains and high winds) and concerns over Carl's possible cold symptoms, we set off towards the first summit, Skiddaw, a decision very much helped by the fact that at 6.30pm the rain had cleared from Keswick and it was a lovely bright evening.



### ***Leg 1: Keswick to Threlkeld***

We set off from Moot Hall in bright spirits with the leg 1 team (Julian Brown navigating and Kirsty Hewitson) and made good progress up Skiddaw before hitting the 'clag' and increasing wind towards the summit. Unfortunately a particularly strong gust of wind whipped Carl's jacket and other items, up and away, right out of a rucksack, a sign of the challenging weather conditions we would later experience. We continued onto Blencathra with the rain holding off until the descent down Halls Fell and into Threlkeld where we were welcomed by the leg 2 support team: Andy Skelhorn, Graham Brown and Lawrence Day. After a quick pit stop we set off towards Clough Head.

### ***Leg 2: Threlkeld to Dunmail Raise***

Feeling revived after our short break and refreshments we set a brisk pace up Clough Head but into rapidly declining weather conditions, the rain was now heavy and the wind had picked up, as per the forecasted 60mph. At Clough Head summit Andy decided to turn back with an injury. We battled through the night and against the elements, climbing Helvellyn and towards Fairfield. Before the Fairfield climb we were thankful for some brief respite from the wind, if not the rain at Grisedale Tarn. We were suffering from the cold and wet but were relieved to be descending Seat Sandel into Dunmail where we were greeted by the leg 3 crew: Rachael Lawrence and Rob Gittins and of course Matt Lewis, our trusty driver. Graham also carried on with us on leg 3. Following a quick kit change and refreshment, we set off to tackle Steel Fell.

### ***Leg 3: Dunmail to Wasdale***

Following the relentless ascent of Steel Fell we were rewarded with the first signs of twilight and an improvement in the weather, the wind was dropping, the rain had stopped and as a result our spirits were lifted. Thanks to Rob's excellent

leading and navigating we continued to make good progress past Sergeant Man, High Raise and on towards the Langdale Pikes. I would say that it was at this stage of the round that I started to become aware of various aches and pains which were starting affect my running. I was less affected by the lack of sleep, something I would attribute to my general need for only a few hours per night and early starts for work, something backed up by a recent article written by Nicky Spinks.

We continued to make steady progress with the weather further improving on our scramble up Bowfell then on towards Great End and Scafell Pike. Throughout this leg we were grateful to Rachael for her experience in the mountains and ability to provide excellent support. From Scafell Pike we made the decision to descend to Mickledore and Foxes Tarn for the ascent of Scafell where Carl and I stopped briefly for a photo.



Rob and I set off on the descent into Wasdale with Carl, Rachael and Graham following close behind, or so I thought! Carl had already made the decision to pull out and had told Rob to carry on with me, and it was only when I asked Rob whether we should wait for the others that I was made aware of this. Carl had been suffering with pain in his ankles and feet, especially when descending, but had also been experiencing hallucinations at Foxes Tarn; we were later to learn of moving rocks and a lady in the lake! In addition, it was obvious that Carl's earlier cold symptoms had now developed significantly. It wasn't to be for Carl this time but he has already said that he will be back next year and I know he is more than capable of completing his BGR.

On arrival at Wasdale, where the leg 4 team were ready and waiting (Ian Hughes and John Mooney), I was informed by Ian that we were 90 minutes outside our 23-hour schedule, therefore 30 minutes outside achieving a sub-24 hour BGR, time to get my skates on! Before doing so I insisted on changing into dry shoes and socks and in doing so had to forego my refreshment break so grabbed an egg butty to eat on the next ascent.

#### ***Leg 4: Wasdale to Honister***

I would just like to say that before leg 4 I had only met Ian once, by chance on a Monday afternoon run out from Teggs Nose with Andrea, who recognised him and stopped for a chat – during which the imminent BGR attempt happened to be mentioned, whereupon Ian generously offered his support on leg 4. As it turned out the motivational combination of good cop (John) and bad cop (Ian) was key in making up time lost on the schedule. Ian's experience on this leg meant that he knew exactly what we needed to do to make up sufficient time and stand a chance of completing in under 24 hours. He set the pace from Wasdale and it wasn't until the Yewbarrow ascent that I had chance to eat the egg sandwich, in my hand

since the changeover! Physically this leg was the most challenging, I was continuing to suffer with various aches and pains whilst running but was still able to climb strong and fast. Ian's tactic was to run a little ahead, pushing the pace to keep us on track whilst John ran with me, keeping me calm by listening to my endless cursing of Ian as well as every stone I kicked or tripped over! During this leg I spent most of my time staring at the ground and completely missed out on the wonderful scenery, only occasionally enquiring as to where we were, and then more cursing! On descending from Grey Knotts we could see our support crowd at Honister, however the message had been relayed that there wouldn't be time to stop, just to open a Muller rice ready for me to eat as quickly as possible and be ready to set off for leg 5. My spirits were lifted at Honister by the sight of such a friendly and supportive crowd and of course Andrea who had always been so keen to support me on this final leg.

#### ***Leg 5: Honister to Keswick – a support member's perspective (Andrea)***

The time was now 15:30, we had just short of 3 hours to achieve a sub-24 BGR, this is the recommended leg time but we needed to push on, especially given Dan's dislike of road running, at the best of times! As well as myself Dan was re-joined by earlier leg support members Julian and Rob. I grabbed a rather tired looking salmon and cucumber sandwich and tried to encourage Dan to eat it before ditching it halfway up Dale Head! It had been so great, and such a relief to see him descend into Honister but I knew that time was going to be tight on this leg and Dan was definitely showing signs of fatigue, and pain. Despite this he was still speedy on the ascents and I could barely keep up with him on the very last one, Robinson! This made up for the descent and flat running of the last 7-8 miles where it was pure grit and determination that saw Dan through to the finish. On hitting the tarmac there was a harriers welcoming party and John Mooney had calculated that we needed to run 10min miles from then on to achieve the sub-24 target. Not a big ask for a runner such as Dan but at this stage of the game it really was touch and go and it wasn't until we were 3 miles outside of Keswick that I felt an enormous sense of relief and pride as I realised that he was actually going to do this! Running up Keswick high street to Moot Hall with Dan, and with a whole 15 minutes to spare, was wonderful, and to such a lovely welcoming crowd.

#### ***Thanks***

I would like to thank everyone involved in the planning and support of my BGR, without whom this would not have been possible. Thank you Carl for all the work you put into the schedules and providing support contacts as well as convincing me that it was possible following our training weekend in the Lakes. Thanks to Matt Lewis for all your driving and logistical support as well as all the individual leg support teams mentioned in the report. I will make myself available to support on your future fell running challenges.

