

“I’ve only gone and done it!” - Graham Brown’s BG Report: 16 /17 June 2017

“Are you having a go at the Bob Graham” Claire Griffin asked me at the street orienteering session back in December. She’d obviously been looking at my Strava profile! “No I replied – I’m just getting some winter training in. Honest!” Was she convinced - I’m not sure.

I’d first read about ‘the Bob’ in Richard Askwith’s book ‘Feet in the Clouds’. And last summer I’d gained some first-hand experience supporting Dan and Carl. God it was hard! And here I was – still a relative novice, who’d had a good injury free season - planning my own attempt.

“If you’re mad enough”

Carl had already announced he was having another go. So that was his response when I asked if he minded if I choose the same dates as him for my go. From the outset we discussed having our own support teams on each leg to improve the chances of both of us getting round. With that in mind I took the opportunity of the Jasmin Parris lecture at the Buxton Adventure festival back in January, to come clean and to start recruiting our crack support teams.

Hills or miles?

I knew I needed to get myself hill ready and I’d decided that ascent over miles was the way to go. Ironically, no sooner had I made my announcement than I got injured doing the Marsden to Edale race. ‘What was that about injury free?’ This, plus the ongoing ankle tendon issue I was suffering from, reinforced my decision.

When training proper started towards the end of February (the injury laid me up for 2-3 weeks) and between then and the end of May I was averaging 78km and 4,500m of climb a week. Getting to the Lakes as often as possible was going to be key (I managed 10 days including races). Locally my training included the Kinder dozen, the Harwood seven and lots of hill reps sessions on Teggs. And when the tendon wasn’t happy I made do with a stair stepper session in the gym.

I also targeted a number of AL races – Marsden to Edale, Edale Skyline (the day after the first English Champs race in Shropshire), Teenager with Altitude, The Fellsman and Old County Tops. Thankfully almost everything went to plan, but there was scary recy of Leg 1 with Julie Gardner in 70 mph winds and an aborted attempt at the Gritstone Grind in early May that sowed a seed of doubt!

Almost time...

In addition to the training and recruiting the support team there’s the other stuff you have to do: registering your intention with the BG club, ordering the tracking device, booking accommodation, working out what food works and in my case ordering new Inov8s, which I didn’t even wear!

Once into tapering my mind started playing tricks – bits of me ached which hadn’t ached before. And there was the last minute massage session, (thanks again Jude) to release the tight fascia in my left foot and ankle.

The weekend finally arrives

D-day. I’m excited and nervous in equal measure. Richard Ainley was providing road support on legs 2 and 3 so he came round to pick up my food (including my many ‘pork products’; the staple of my training runs) and my other kit. “It looks like you’ve packed enough for everyone” he said. Once in Keswick people slowly started turning up at the cottage I’d booked (or race HQ). I started to feel a bit tense. One last coffee and some flapjacks sorted me out, and then it was off to Moot Hall.

Leg 1 – When we got to Moot Hall it was already busy. A couple of teams had already set off. And the Dark Peak (more about them later) band wagon was in town - I think they had 7 contenders setting off, so we knew we were going to be in for a busy night on the fells. We set off in the sunshine at 18:30 with the cheers and applause of those gathered ringing in our ears. The pace up Skiddaw was steady. We summited and had a nice run-off down the bouncy grass before the climb up Calva. At this point we lost Dave Buxton to a bad stomach. The climb up from the river towards Mungrisdale Common felt pacey. And then the naked Dark Peaker made a brief appearance. Surely I wasn’t hallucinating already? The clag was coming in as we approached the summit of Blencathra. And the second Dark Peaker of the night appeared. Thankfully this one was fully dressed! He wished us well as we trotted off down Doddick. We arrived at a busy cricket club car park at Threlkeld about 15 minutes up on schedule.

Navigator: Larry Day. Mules: Dave Cowburn, Julian Brown, Dave Buxton.

Leg2 – A quick kit change and we were off. I was trying to get some beef chilli and rice pudding down, but the stiff pace continued on the climb up Clough Head and by the time I got to the top I felt very bloated. The clag was down on top and this reminded me of Dan and Carl’s attempt last year and started to niggle with me mentally. Thankfully, unlike last year, it wasn’t accompanied by wind and driving rain. Indeed, it was quite warm on top and I ran most of it in a long sleeved top. As the Macc bandwagon (we’d been running with Carl and his team from Great Dodd) left Helvellyn myself and Neil Clarke got left behind. But thankfully we were soon back with the pack. Other than my navigator Clive tripping up (it looked a sore one!) on the way up Seat Sandal, the leg passed without incident. Descending into Dunmail Raise we were greeted by the sight of support cars parked up on both sides of the A591. It really was a busy night of attempts!

Navigator: Clive Heevy. Mules: Neil Clarke, Larry Day.

Road support: Richard Ainley, Trevor Longman

Leg 3 – Joss the Collie joined us on this leg (and leg 4). By the time I’d climbed Steel Fell it was almost daylight. Once on top we were greeted by an incredible sunrise. The run across the mainly grassy Langdales was great and a joy before hitting the boulders and rocks which follow after the summit of Bowfell. The route across to the Scaffells passed without any problems. I’d reccied the options up Scafell and my choice was Lords Rake and the West Wall traverse. At this point we were caught by the first Dark Peak team - including the guy from the top of Blencathra. Descending was starting to become difficult, but the route down the scree was actually a welcome relief (I

never thought I'd say that!). It was now warm so being able to soak my cap in the river before picking up the path to the NT car park was a relief. At this point a bowel movement was imminent so the sight of the toilets we're most welcome!

Navigator: Paul Swindles. Mules: Rachael Lawrance, Tom Whittington, Joss the Collie.

Road support: Richard Ainley, John Mooney

Leg 4 - I didn't start off in the best of moods. We were down on schedule and I wanted more time to eat. After only a couple of spoonful's of porridge and fruit salad and half a bacon sandwich we were off. The climb up Yewbarrow was powered by a bottle of coke and the use of walking poles. The heat was increasing, but I still felt strong when climbing (fuelled by more rice pudding). We maintained a decent pace including the climb up Joss's Gully to Kirk Fell. By the time we got to Great Gable the clag had started to come in and at this point climbing was more difficult. But after looking at my watch at the summit I knew I'd make it round within the time. Descending off Gable was hard, but from Green Gable onwards it became more runnable and we picked up the pace again. My knees and quads really weren't happy on the run off to Honister.

Navigator: Geoff Pettengell. Mules: Paul Swindles. Tom Whittington, Jon Smith, Joss the Collie

Road support: Den Masset, Emma Beveridge

Leg 5 - I managed some more rice pudding and fruit salad (and to slip on my Harriers vest) as I trotted through the Honister changeover. The pace up Dale Head was steady but manageable. But descending was very difficult now - each time I placed my foot I was getting pain on the outside of my knee - so I was glad when we finally got off Robinson. I knew that it was mostly flat now until the end. Despite that I felt grumpy: the pair of fell shoes, instead of road shoes, that greeted me at Little Town was met with expletives as were the under ripe bananas I was offered. Get over yourself Broon!

I managed to muster a shuffle on the road section into Keswick and once I saw the sign for Pencil Museum that somehow turned into a sprint finish! The crowd at Moot Hall was amazing and the sound of the cow bells, applause and cheers that greeted my run in is something I'll never forget. After receiving the congratulations of my support team, my priority was to find my girlfriend Maria, who I knew was waiting with a beer, and then Carl as I knew he'd finished ahead of me. (Sorry mate the beer came first). My thoughts then turned to my achievement. "I've only gone and done it!"

Navigator: Larry Day Mules: Gill Lindsay, Emma Beveridge, Julian Brown, Rob Gittens, John Mooney

Road support: Richard Ainley, Trevor Longman

Leg 6 - Well the least said about that the better! Despite making my mind up months ago that I wanted fish-n-chips at the end I couldn't finish them off. Anyone who did a training run with me will know that's unheard of! I could only muster 2 paltry beers. Needless to say others stepped up to the mark!

Special mention to: Jon Smith, Tom Whittington, Kirsty-Jane Birch

The aftermath

Getting back to race HQ was slow but the legs didn't feel too bad. Getting up the stairs for a bath was fine - coming back down was a different matter! On the walk back from leg 6 a very sore hip, which literally stopped me in my tracks just as another imminent bowel movement came upon me. Thankfully an embarrassing incident was averted. My Saturday night sleep wasn't great: it wasn't so much the legs although I think I ran an additional leg in my sleep, rather it was the very painful sunburn. I knew there was another reason why I wanted more time at Wasdale! A paddle in Buttermere on the Sunday seemed to bring my legs back to life somewhat. But the 6 flights of stairs on my first day back at work was still beyond me. Following a massage on the Tuesday my legs were given a clean bill of health. Amazing! I manage a short run on the Friday after and another few since. There's been no adverse reaction so far. Fingers crossed that continues!

Looking back

The Bob is by far the hardest thing I've done both physically and mentally: I put a lot into the training and preparation and of course there's the small matter of the run itself. But none of it would have been possible without the camaraderie and support of the Harriers, and others, who made it to the Lakes, as well as those who supported my training or offered encouragement along the way. I've listed my support team above. Thank you all for giving up your time, not just over the weekend, and throughout my training. I'd like to extend my thanks to Carl's team too.

Lastly I'd like to say well done to Carl. He trained hard and I know how disappointed he was not to get round last year. Despite starting together we always knew that we'd split up on route (he's both much younger and faster than me - I chased him around the 37 mile Old County Tops race that we did as a pair about a month before our Bob), but in the end it was only on leg 5 where we weren't within touching distance. Good one mate!

The statistics:

Total Running Time:	23:05:00
Rest Time:	31
Total round time:	23:36:00

Leg breakdowns:

Leg 1 - 03:37:00
Leg 2 - 04:55:00
Leg 3 - 06:35:00
Leg 4 - 05:10:00
Leg 5 - 02:48:00

Graham Brown