

Bob Graham Round 9th/10th June 2000 – Mandy Calvert

The Before

Sitting the car-park in Keswick at 5:30pm was not a pleasant experience, the rain was hammering down and the hills had all disappeared in the clag. At 5:50 the rain stopped and it was time to make final preparations. Becky, Pete, Colin and I arranged our kit and we headed to the Moot Hall for a few "Before the Event" pictures with Trevor and Barry, the other contenders. They had another half hour to wait until they were off. A slight change of plan meant that Colin was to navigate for the boys and Geoff Hodges who had come to wave us off (but luckily had his kit on!) stepped in to support..

Leg 1 – Keswick to Threlkeld (3h:32m)

Navigator: Pete Skelton; Support: Becky Hilton, Geoff Hodges

We made good progress up Skiddaw arriving at the summit in 72 minutes. We started off in mist but that soon turned to proper rain. So it was then running on compass bearings all the way. Hare Crag loomed out of the mist and then it was picking a way up Great Calva. The Caldew river was doing a good impression of a raging torrent and called for us all to hold hands to get across safely. Well that got the adrenaline flowing ready for the long plod up to Blencathra. Pete's navigation was spot on all the way, even though the visibility was nil. Halls Fell ridge was not quite as painful as I remembered it, but Pete found a demon route and we arrived at Threlkeld 10 minutes ahead of schedule and to a big crowd of Macc Harriers. It was hardly a stop, just a time to have a cup of tea thrust into my hand, say farewell to Pete, Geoff and Becky and hello to Richard, Margaret and Mary.

Leg 2 – Threlkeld to Dunmail Raise (5h:2m)

Navigator: Richard Calder; Support: Margaret Huyton, Mary White

The night leg was not one I was looking forward to, but the climb up to Clough Head was steep enough to keep my mind off anything else! After a brief clear patch, the clag, rain and darkness soon came down. The path was boggy but OK and we kept our night vision until well after midnight. We soon knocked off the Dodds, but were surprised by the apparition of abothy??.no just a bulldozer! I was surprised how quickly we reached Helvellyn, but not before taking a tumble in the dark. (lack of co-ordination between legs, brain and torch!!)

Nethermost and Dollywagon Pike were tricky and cold, it was time for an extra layer. However Richard's brilliant navigation got us to the boundary post and then down the steep and slippery slope to Grizedale Tarn. A steady pull up to Fairfield and back meant that it was only the ascent and descent of Seat Sandal to go. We were surprised that the boys had not passed us especially on the way down from Fairfield. Seat Sandal to Dunmail was worse than I remembered it, I picked my way down well behind the pacers. "How did Richard manage to stay on his feet in road shoes?" Mark Hartell and Isla met us at the stile, we were still on schedule and oh yes there was a cup of tea! 2:35 am and surely it would be light soon. Richard, Mary and Margaret had done brilliantly to get me around, especially navigating in the dark and clag.

Leg 3 – Dunmail Raise to Wasdale (6h: 43m)

Navigator: Phil Cheek; Support: Martin Rands, Ed Watson

We had practised this leg loads of times, but Steel Fell gets no easier. Phil was off leading the way.. I used to be able to keep up with him.. but not this morning. However we were still on schedule and

Phil picked out the track across the boggy bits to Calf Crag and Sergeant Man. It was soon onto the Langdales, which felt lonely being sent up to touch the cairns whilst watched from below. I had hoped for a wonderful sunrise, but we did get a beautiful dawn whilst on Rosset Pike and briefly the tops and valleys revealed themselves in a golden light. A view to remember and Bowfell looked huge!

Off to Bowfell and the mist soon came down again. Phil led the way, peeling an orange as he went....Nectar! Unfortunately, Ed was struggling, he had pulled a muscle. We got him safely to the Bowfell plateau and Phil and I made the final pull to the summit. Phil decided that Ed should go down from Esk Hause and we saw him safely on his way. I had been going 12 hours now and was feeling tired and not coping at all well with the slippery boulders. "You need some rice pudding" said Uncle Phil! And he was dead right, it raised my flagging spirits and then off to Scafell Pike. There were some walkers on the summit who were definitely disappointed not to be the first one's up there that morning.

Down to Mickledore and even further down to the base of Lords Rake, a scramble up and after West Wall Traverse we were on the summit of Scafell. Now the long descent to Wasdale, my knees were sore but the scree slope was great and the river crossing very soothing. What a welcome we got at Wasdale, a cup of tea and Bob offering to wash my feet. Clean socks, a cup of tea, half a currant bun and we were off again.

Leg 4 – Wasdale to Honister (5h:00m)

Navigators: Annette Morris and Trev; Support: Chris Cripps, Kath Turner

The sun was shining and Annette, Trev, Chris and Kath had a spring in their step. Hooray it was up and up and up Yewbarrow! I thought I was going quite well, but was lagging behind. The weather was getting better and better. The peaks revealed themselves all around us. There was Steeple, Pillar and Great Gable, looking very, very great! This was the only leg that I had not fully reccied. But the rocks were dry, the sun was shining, the company great, the hills beautiful ...and we were still on schedule. We knew the Ennerdale Fell Race was on and hoped not to meet the field coming down Red Gully. We were lucky and saw the leaders, the Blands ofcourse, climbing Kirk Fell as I tottered down feeling extremely feeble by comparison. We stopped for a quick chat with Dave and Greg at Beckhead Tarn. Then up Great Gable, one of my favourite Lakeland Mountains. Green Gable was a breeze and it was quite fitting to see Joss Naylor. I felt quite honoured to be on the fells in such elite company. The weather was perfect now, sunny with a cooling breeze. Soon Honister was in view. Chris ran on ahead with the lunch order.. Weetabix!

Leg 5 – Honister to Keswick (2h:44m)

Navigator: Colin Ardron; Support: Judy McBride, Becky Hilton, Roger Teagle, Kath Turner, Chris Cripps, Martin Rands

We were now well within schedule and I joined the big group at the back, plodding up to Dale Head but knocking another 9 minutes off schedule. Only 2 peaks to go and the boys still had not come past. Soon we were clambering down the "bad step" off Robinson and the last knee jarring descent to the farm. Suddenly from nowhere, a manic duo of Trevor and Geoff thundered past. Good news, Trevor was back on schedule.

But I knew I could do a quicker shoe change! And was off on the road slightly ahead of him. Of course he soon caught up and we both jogged the flats and walked the ups on the interminable, undulating road to Keswick, with our expanded band of supporters. Over the bridge and Keswick was in sight, 23 hours was tantalisingly close, but my legs were not going to do any 7 minute miles now! Trevor and I ran in together touching the Moot Hall at 5:02pm. It was a sight to bring tears to the eyes.

Twenty-three hours and two minutes, 72 miles, 42 peaks : a wonderful day out in the hills. Not sure I could quite believe it was over.

The After

I cannot thank enough, everyone who supported me. The navigators were brilliant in difficult conditions; Pete for a blistering first leg; Richard for guiding the night leg so faultlessly; Phil for keeping me going with the rice pudding and finding that scree slope; Annette and Trev for the sunshine and bananas; Colin for being leading us all safely in on the last leg. Super supporter award must go to Becky, who came out on Leg 1, went home to Macclesfield and came up with Graham and the kids to support the last leg. Best Newcomer must go to Bob Lock, my long suffering next door neighbour, who did a brilliant job at the road support and of course my even longer suffering husband Martin.