

Matthew Lynas' Bob Graham Round – 5/6/2021

My BG journey started just over a year ago with a lockdown inspired review of my running achievements and the fact that, contrary to a lot of people's perception, I'd not actually even attempted a Bob Graham Round. My training really started on July 12th with Mark Burley's leg 1 recce and despite an injury early this year carried on for the following year focusing on getting familiar with the route and used to a high climb / distance ratio. I decided a 20 hour schedule was as good as any, but really a guess and working backwards (plus a margin for error) to ensure a finish before pub closing led to a 1am start time. In the Covid world this slot was already taken so I went for midnight which also made working out the times easy.

Leg 1 (3hrs 38 mins)

There can't be many attempts that have 6 runners going out on leg 1! It's surely the least popular leg? Anyway it was great having Dave, Ben, Marcel, Gary and Jim to accompany me and fitted with my all-inclusive approach to the recces and the attempt itself. We snaked out of Keswick in good spirits and in good weather. No moon, but no wind to speak of and pretty dry. A solo runner had also decided to start at midnight but decided to set off 10 mins before us supposedly on a 24 hour schedule but he actually wasn't caught until leg 4. We saw his headtorch in front of us periodically but it never seemed to get closer.

The march to Skiddaw was uneventful with the usual mix of running and walking and not so unusual communal pee stop. We got to the summit in 77 mins, 3 mins behind Matt's 20 hr schedule and everyone agreed that was fine. A little bit of breeze at the top made it a little chilly but we knew it would be warmer the moment we get off the top. The novice head torchers agreed that LED light is rather flat and toe-stubbing rocks don't show well, making it tricky footwork.

With Dave the nominated navigator leading the way we set off down the back of Skiddaw towards Great Calva. We followed a pretty decent path to Great Calva and for the most part it was very dry. We kept a fairly tight snake through the tussocks. As we started to climb Blencathra, there was a vivid thin strip of red dawn showing to the east and several sky larks got going despite the darkness. We aimed for the saddle slightly to the east of the summit and then touched the summit trig point before rapidly heading off towards Doddick. In the half light, Doddick is pretty steep, gravelly and requires concentration. We all overheated on the descent as the air temperature increased before plunging again when we hit the valley floor. We left 2 of the 6 far behind on the descent but 4 of us got down together and cruised into the cricket club car park just over 10 mins behind schedule but in good shape. The consensus was that the 20 hr schedule was based on day-time descending speeds.

Leg 2 (3hrs 59 mins)

I picked up my poles at the changeover and these were of great use, another new skill picked up as part of my BG attempt, never having used them before. We made our way solidly up Clough Head having ditched my headlamp. I was steady as she goes on the ridge ticking off the summits, drinking regularly and taking in my cheese & hummus wraps and baby food, thought the cliff bars were already getting a little difficult to get through my mouth. Climb up Fairfield (going the out & back route) was good and the recce had meant the scrappy route up Seat Sandal wasn't a surprise.

Leg 2 was to be the leg run closest to my plan, probably more to do with Steve's experience than Allen's youthful enthusiasm, though this young pup did keep us oldies ticking away at a good rate of knots. Allen's run down to advise changeover crew I was on my way 2nd

fastest segment and quicker than Kilian Jornet and to think of any possible alternative refuelling.

Leg 3 (6hrs 16 mins)

I was still going well at the changeover at Dunmail and set off up Steel Fell with a completely new support crew, Mark navigating and Andy and Tom taking my food, water and emergency clothing. I had decided to go High Raise before Sargent Man as the route up the re-entrant was fairly dry and the grass not yet that long.

From my ultra-experience, I knew I would have a difficult patch at some stage and never having run for longer than 10.5 hours suspected it would be on leg 3 which given the rocky underfoot conditions was never going to be easy. I did slow on leg 3 but kept moving all the time, with Tom keeping me motivated and Andy making sure I drank and ate regularly. I topped up the slow release foods with jelly babies and shot blocks and my caffeine source of choice, flat cola helped get me safely up Lord's Rake & the Western traverse. The hardest part was the short descent before the climb which is turning into a scree gully and Mark tried his best to lose my pole. I also started to take in Squeezy gels on the way down, something I continued on leg 4.

The leg was much slower than planned but following advice from Tom (and earlier Dave) I decided to have a slightly longer break than planned at Wasdale to take on board some rice pudding and have a cup of tea to aid the digestion of another cliff bar. The tea is definitely something I'd take drink more in the future, just need a light weight vacuum flask!

The 12minutes stop at Wasdale was very worthwhile with Ange providing the mobile kitchen and Tom going way beyond the call of duty talcum powdering my feet.

Leg 4 (4hrs 34 mins)

At Wasdale we took on a new navigator in the form of Rob and new supporter to relieve the packhorses in the form of Nath. With the leg 3ers continuing we were once again a snake like structure wending our way across the beautiful but increasing warm Lakeland fells. I was lucky to not have to drink from the streams but did wet by hair & face when we crossed them.

The leg started in a nice fashion with the new stile into the field and a very pleasant surprise of the pile of stones Rob had constructed to help me over the fence on the exit. I continued to refuel on the way up Yewbarrow, which was climbed exactly on plan but after that I lost a few minutes on the next few legs before a mild pain killer taken to address a knee pain seemed to help correct things and from Kirkfell on I started to move well again.

Catching the solo runner and cheers from the group of ladies supporting another attempt help spur me on further and I was moving really well as I descended into Honister, deciding at that point that it was going to be a cola fuelled run to the end.

Leg 5 (2hrs 16 mins)

I set off alone up Dale Head knowing this was the last real climb, Ben and Richard soon catching me up though. The desire to have involvement from my old school (QEGS Wakefield) had led to the rather unusual situation of the 3 accountants rounding off this attempt. Richard actually having run a sub-20 hour mid-winter Bob and holding the Frog Graham records. I was moving well and thought sub 21 hours might be possible as we climbed Dale Head without incident and then cruised on to Hindscarth and Robinson equally incident free. Conversation flowed including discussion about accounting standards and

their allowance for covid special-measures in the public sector! We were bowling along and Matt's leg 3 wobble was a thing of the past. I dispensed with my poles around then and as we touched Robinson and then headed home with impressive clouds building to the west I was glad we were a couple of hours in front of them. With Richard leading the way, we 'turned right at the tree' below Robinson to make the last steep descent to the valley floor. Ben had been carrying my road shoes but I decided not to fix what wasn't broken so we hit the road and accelerated with no shoe change. We whooshed past Dave Harrison in his camper van and peaked at 7:30 miling on the run-in, though 5km it was clear I was going to miss 21 hrs. Coming up the market square was memorable and emotional. With several rounds having arrived in the preceding hour or two, there was quite a crowd who gave me a good round of applause as I clambered up the steps to hit the green doors just outside 21 hours. I had a quick sip of the customary beer but decided to her on the side of caution turning down a slice of pizza.

Total time after adding in 21 minutes of stops was 21hrs. 4mins.

What a brilliant day out - thanks to all the supporters from around the UK from my past running groups but special mention to the Macc Harriers who really made this happen.