

Allen Bunyan - Bob Graham Round (clockwise) report
Date 13 May 2023 (03:00 start)
Time 19hrs 37mins

I usually shy away from the club's race reports, so lower any expectations you may have...

Thank yous in particular go to my fantastic road support (Jeorgia Williams, John Bunyan (dad), Nancy Bunyan (mum), Simon Williams, Linzi Williams and Emma Beveridge), who most likely spent more energy than me all day driving, waiting, organising.

Leg 1: Keswick to Threlkeld (Supporters: Mark Burley, Nathanael Booker) 3hrs 13mins

Fitting that Mark and Nathanael were supporting my first leg, as they were the ones I had first supported in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Further, I had modelled my schedule using their splits and pretending I was just a little bit quicker, but bragging rights remain with Nathanael.

We had half an eye on splits going up Skiddaw, and I can only blame my recent move to the peak-less shores of Liverpool that on the first climb we were already 10 minutes down on schedule. Not to worry, lovely bit of downhill and bog to come!

This is the first run I've ever done supported, it felt amazing not having to carry my own things but also having people actively try and make me feel better the whole time. This "psychological" support inadvertently first came when Mark and Nathanael both said it was one of the boggiest times they'd had in the Northern Fells. Perhaps we weren't moving too badly...

Realising the downhill was my strongpoint, we began the all day theme of gaining time on the downhills, then losing it on the climbs. Getting within two minutes of the split at Great Calva put me in a better mood so I decided to stretch the legs down to Mungrisdale, temporarily dropping Mark and Nathanael - a moral victory.

The forecast had suggested a warm, sunny day with "little to no chance of clouds", so I had previously expressed my disappointment that there would be no cloud inversions. Whilst I don't usually enjoy being proven wrong, as the sun rose, we were presented with a Round-pausing view of the blanket of thin cloud below us, with only the high peaks encroaching our playground.

A couple weeks back on a Macc Harriers BG weekend away, we reced the parachute descent as an alternative to Halls Fell. I was happy with either, but the parachute just added the bit of spice I had been craving, again we pushed down here, managing to drop Nathanael but couldn't quite shake Mark off.

You may be wondering if I was trying to drop Mark and Nathanael the whole time, in which case I can only apologise for not making it clear - that was *exactly* what I was trying to do!



Nathanael and I ascending Blencathra



Mark and I beginning the parachute descent from Blencathra

Leg 2: Threlkeld to Dunmail Raise (supporters: Jake Dickinson, Craig Marchington) 3hrs 39mins

The downside of the cloud inversion was that the changeover had been under cloud and it was remarkable how quickly I got cold again. Nothing like a stomp up Clough Head to make me feel better (has that sentence ever been written before?).

Getting to the ridge and feeling good meant we could start getting a move on, so as we got going I put my poles down for Craig to pick up. Soon the climb to Great Dodd came and I looked left - Jake didn't have my poles; looked right - Craig didn't have my poles... whoops. I had put them slightly off the track and Craig must not have realised. Jake drew the short straw and made his way back to get them, catching up to us again just after the peak. I wasn't worried, Jake and I had been on many runs together recently and a number over the leg 2 peaks - he was fine and managed to get a few strava PBs.

Everything continued smoothly to Fairfield, the pain in the a***. I opted for the out-and-back route to simplify navigation, this meant we began seeing other runners (with numbers) coming down towards us. It was a bit early for those running the Fairfield Horseshoe race - only around 9am at this point, so we had to ask and then encourage the runners on a 20km route for charity. Deciding it was best not to mention our plan for the day to those struggling, we pushed onto Dunmail.



Craig and I ascending back above the clouds with Leg 1 peaks in the background

Leg 3: Dunmail Raise to Wasdale (supporters: Alistair Thornton, Simon Harding, Jon Hopper) 5hrs 32mins

At this point we were a bit down on schedule, but I was having so much fun I almost didn't want it to end (is that excuse believable enough to be down on time?). The climb up Steel Fell with the star-studded support brought about the first thoughts of fatigue. It was also here I set my eyes on the pork pies Alistair had brought along - they were just what I craved. This was slowly approaching my longest day out in the hills before and the first time my appetite began to vary, initially planning the Burley-tried-and-tested cliff bar approach, my stomach began to refuse the bigger stuff.

The first time I had to look for a spot to let's say, "avoid walkers", was around the Langdale Pikes. Soon after, I felt much better and could see the Scafell Massif getting closer. Alistair took us on the "Kuenzle" line up Bowfell and moving over towards the Great Ends and Broad Craggs we had kept consistent with the schedule after losing time previously. Although at this point I was fairly oblivious - happy to just keep moving in a rhythm that felt comfortable.

Towards this point it was my gut rather than my legs that started to feel tired, every mouthful got a little bit tougher as I thought about the next place to, ahem, "avoid walkers". Unfortunately, these places are few and far between at 3pm on a sunny day atop Scafell Pike. Using the extra gravity, me and my super-domestiques rushed down to Mickledore and I could push the pace up Lord's Rake and West Wall Traverse as we gained time up Scafell. I found a place to pause after a few minutes on the descent (close call) and we had our fun on the scree into Wasdale where Emma clapped us in with Lola (her van) waiting.



Leaving the changeover to begin the ascent to Steel Fell



Ascending Scafell via the West Wall Traverse

Leg 4: Wasdale to Honister (supporters: Kirsty Hewitson (plus Tryf), Declan Murray, Gavin Dale, Simon Harding, Alistair Thornton) 4hrs 34mins

Having not trained much over distance, Alistair had decided on supporting for one leg; but seeing Simon continue persuaded Alistair to keep going as well. It was also great to see Kirsty (who has completed all three rounds, where I was lucky enough to support on her

Ramsay) and Declan (who, when I tried to impress by saying I was heading up to train in Fort William a couple of months ago, responded by saying “that’s great - I just got down from Kilimanjaro this morning” to put me in my place).

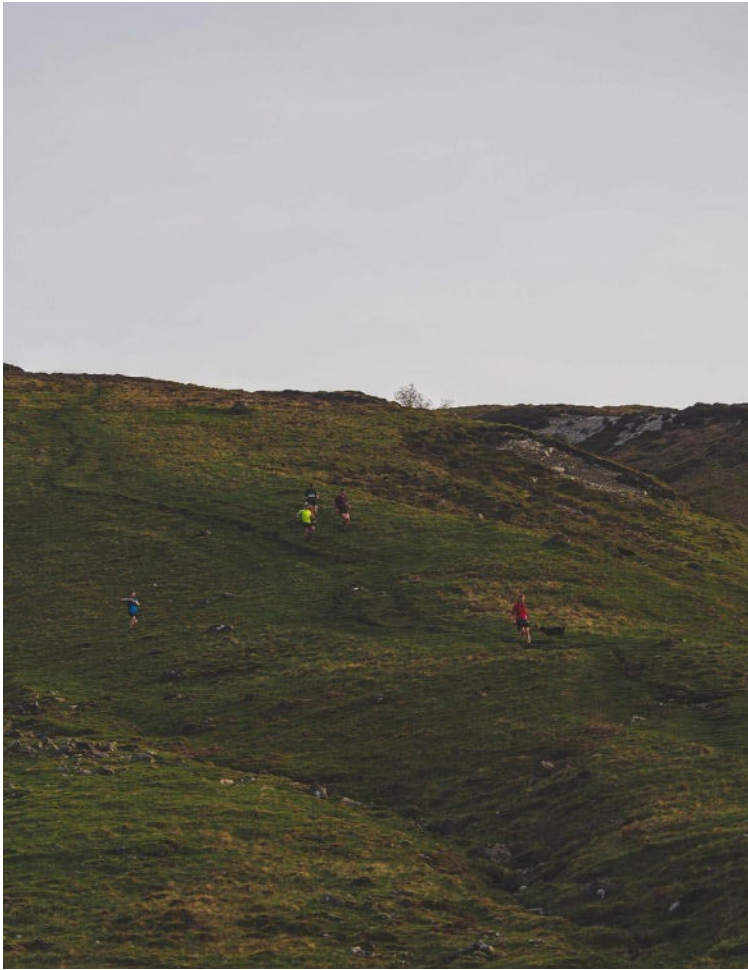
The climb up Yewbarrow had been in the back of my mind for a while - thought to be one of the common breaking points. Whilst it did go on for longer than I remember, I felt good when we got to the top and could push it on the rocky contour. “Push it” at this point however was little more than a trot - nobody was getting dropped on this leg!

It was easier to avoid the walkers towards Red Pike, as my stomach continued to groan and the ridge from Steeple to Pillar was the low point of fatigue.

I found my footing again on the climb up to Great Gable, I had managed to take in another pork pie (my 6th or 7th at this point) and one of Kirsty’s life saving caffeine sweets. As we climbed the wind picked up a little, a refreshing gust after hours in the still sun felt like a blessing. Like the Gods that dictate the clouds, it was Gavin Dale that stood awaiting us above the steep section to the summit of Great Gable. He had done the Fairfield race earlier (coming 13th!) and agreed to meet us part way along the leg, knowing he wouldn’t have time to get all the way to Wasdale. We queried the results, luckily there was no fighting between Gavin (Ambleside) and Kirsty (Keswick). This gave the boost needed to crack the climb and make our way down to Honister (via the few peaks in between).



Approaching the summit of Red Pike with the remainder of Leg 4 in the background



Descending to Honister from Grey Knotts

Leg 5: Honister to Keswick (supporters: Bertie Houghton, Andy Beavers, Mark Burley, Jake Dickinson, Alistair Thornton, Simon Harding, Jon Hopper, Kirsty Hewitson, Gavin Dale) 2hrs 39mins

Even writing out those names brings me a smile. I certainly did not expect so many to join me on the last leg. The “official” supporters: Bertie (who had finished just one place behind Gavin earlier at Fairfield) and Andy luckily weren’t distracted by the others and kept me fed and hydrated. Of course Alistair had to continue since Simon did, and Mark had returned from Leg 1 via an orienteering event in Todmorden in between - surely more tiring than doing my run?

My spirits were up as Keswick came into sight, along with some Monster energy rip off drink that Alistair gave me, I was just about in fit enough shape to get over Dale Head and run most of Hindscarth.

Reaching Robinson felt amazing, I knew I was down on schedule, but still well within 24 hours. We tried another Kuenzle line down Robinson, which worked okay - not as impressive as the Bowfell line though.

Hitting Little Town, a few had opted to take the car rather than run the road and I had to remind myself that no, that wasn't actually an option for me. With Simon taking the car, Alistair got one over by doing the road section as well. Gavin Dale was tasked with counting down the miles into Keswick, which felt shockingly long between each. I was just about able to run the inclines (can't really call them "climbs" after what had been done previously) - we were flying. This was further evidenced since Gavin had to increase his pace from a steady to a fast walk! The smell of Moot Hall grew stronger and with just over a mile to go we (genuinely) picked up the pace. I wasn't quite able to drop anyone like how I'd imagined in my head, but we were getting close to 7min/miles.

Reaching Moot Hall with my girlfriend Jeorgia, my family and the supporters that had been able to stay clapping me up the steps put a smile on my face that is still here two weeks later.



Ascending Dale Head from Honister



Summitting the final peak - Robinson

Whilst I joke sometimes, I struggle to put into words how grateful I am to all of my supporters - I couldn't have done it without them. I'm grateful to each and every one for sacrificing their time to support me.

I *think* I understand how lucky I am: I have been lucky to be born from fell-running parents. They have provided me with everything, from advice to all the gear I could ever ask for, to lifts across the country (and other countries). I'm lucky they introduced me to the Macclesfield Harriers, a club that has great history with the Bob Graham. I'm lucky to have been brought up in Rainow village, where hills are on my doorstep. I'm lucky that I get to spend all this time running from such an early age. I might not be so lucky to inherit their knees, but I suppose I'll let them off...