

Finally I have written a BGR report! After many years of being looked at like an alien when I said I had done a round in 2010 and not had it ratified, I thought that it was time to change this. I cannot honestly say that there was one driving reason to have another crack at the round – perhaps I wanted to be an official part of the club, perhaps I wanted to test myself again, delving the depths of endurance and to see where I am now compared to back then; perhaps I wanted to see how fast it could possibly be done. Another huge reason was that I absolutely love the round. There is nothing quite like the excitement and camaraderie that the round brings. With no obvious attempters in the R-R Harriers club at the moment, throwing my hat in the ring would once again allow me to be part of the bit of magic that comes about when a BGR is on.

I have to say that the round this time was different in many ways, yet similar in others to 2010. The training and preparation was certainly different. Being in a phase of life with two young wonderful children (2 3/4 years and 17 months at the time of writing) means the days of weekend morning long runs followed by afternoons on the sofa were now over. Now it was the time of focussed training, run/bike commuting and 5am starts. I had not really raced since the Brecon Beacons 10 peaks race in October, but after a lovely family/training week in the Lakes in March albeit with some bad weather recces (most notably a get off the mountain as quickly as possible moment on Whiteside in a hail storm), a fantastic big day out over Leg 1-3 with Matt in May, combined with many trips to Cromford and Dovedale, I felt that training had been consistent but not spectacular. One big advantage I do think I now had over last time is that with much regular occurrence have I had to muster the will to carry on through discomfort. Whether this be a run home from work when I didn't really fancy it, a 5am start after a disrupted night's sleep or simply pushing a child's buggy (with child in), carrying a rucksack child-carrier (with another child in) and an Ikea bags worth of shopping up the hill to our house in an impending rain shower. This ability to carry on regardless is I feel as big a factor as any in the success of the round.

Similar to 2010, an amazing and world class logistics team was formed this time headed by Sue (Matt's Auntie), with experienced deputy Jo. Executive oversight was provided by BGR logistics queen Amanda (my wife). Soon enough the running BGR support crew followed and the team was assembled. I was delighted and am massively appreciative of all of the positive responses I received on my request for help, this meant a lot thank you. Although a few casualties were incurred shortly before kick-off, a select but strong running support crew turned up on a Friday night in Keswick to offer up themselves for the challenge.

A 2am start time was chosen pretty early on in the planning of the round, based on maximising daylight. The 20 hour schedule was based on no rationale. All the recces I had done were in bad weather at a 24 hour pace or slower, but I knew that I was a better long distance runner than before and 20 hours seemed like a good round number.

Although the plan was to catch some sleep between 9pm and 1am on the night following an outstanding spaghetti bolognese at Sue's cottage, I just couldn't drop off, so it was with no sleep and a bubbling of nervous energy that we got ready and wandered down to the Moot Hall in the muggy misty early morning.

I was aware of one other group planning on setting off at 2am, but hadn't quite anticipate the Piccadilly Circus style congregation at the Moot Hall steps as more and more contenders and supporters emerged from the four corners of the marketplace. Many thanks to Pete Adams from the Harriers for popping down to see me off, a very pleasant surprise.



Getting ready for the start



We're off

Leg One – Pacers: Jonathon Whilock and Mark Fowell

As soon as my watch clicked over to 2am we were off and the first of the groups to go. It was quite nice to get away from the bustle of the groups at the start. I had opted for a long sleeve base layer for the first leg, however soon up the climb past Latrigg I realised that a t-shirt or vest would have been much better as the night was still warm and muggy. The long-sleeve eventually came off up the climb to Blencathra and this technique of t-shirt on or t-shirt off to regulate my temperature seemed to work well over the whole day.

I had a great time chatting with Mark and Jon on the way up Skiddaw and as we reached the Latrigg car park we popped out above the low lying cloud and were greeted by a mix of mountain silhouettes interspersed with banks of some higher cloud. It was pretty spectacular and motivated me for the day ahead. The projected 68 minutes to the top of Skiddaw on the plan I had made always seemed a bit racy, so I was happy enough to arrive at the trig on 73 minutes. Coming off Skiddaw we hit a bank of the thick cloud that was hanging about, visibility came right down to a few metres and I overshot the stile in the fence. Thankfully we soon identified the issue, backtracked and located the trod down to Hare Crag, but this certainly got my heart racing a little.

After the few weeks of dry weather, the ground was very kind underfoot and we made smooth progress over the notoriously boggy section to Great Calva. At the cairn we hopped over the fence and started to make our way down the fence line towards the Caldew. It was only on reaching the fence gate at the bottom of the descent, did I turn round to see the head torches of Jon and Mark much further up the slope. I felt like I had come down the heathery run fairly well, but perhaps was wondering if too well or perhaps too reckless. I suppose I was to find out later, but for now I took the still wet weaving path down to the beck and eventually to the river crossing gently to try and make sure I shook the descent out of my legs. By the river Jon had caught back up, but Mark was still a little way back. Mark had completed the Lanzarote Ironman the week before, thus any ordinary human would still be unable to walk straight let alone carry a load of kit up Skiddaw and beyond. A split at this point was therefore not unexpected and myself and Jon made the decision to carry on to cross a relatively dry Caldew and head up the climb to Blencathra.

I had been toying in my mind a number of descent options from the Blencathra summit – the most recent addition was the ‘parachute’ route which I had reced a couple of times a few weeks prior and Jon had done the route once before. It had seemed like fun at the time of the recce, but having suffered from sore legs for a week after I was unsure of how sensible it would be on the round itself. On topping Blencathra we popped our heads over the edge of Halls Fell and I was surprised to see all the way to the bottom. I thought that it would be a waste if I had done the recce and not gone that way, so I said to Jon that we’d have a bit of fun and give it a go. Thankfully all went well and with a time of 23 minutes from top to bottom, I think that we saved a bit of time – well I certainly had some fun – and hit the A66 about 10 minutes behind the Leg 1 schedule which I was more pleased about than if we had been on the racy plan.



Leaving Threlkeld still smiling

Leg 2 Pacers: Matt Tomlinson and Jon Whilock

It was such a boost to see the crew at Threlkeld. An efficient turnaround was had (6 mins) with a planned 3 Weetabix and milk consumed, then a new t-shirt and off we went. Jo had made me a coffee but I drank none of it – sorry Jo. As we headed along the lane I managed to get a banana in too, so felt adequately fuelled going into the next section. Jon W had pressed ahead while we were stopped, so I chatted to Matt as we ran along the lane.

The sky slowly brightened as we climbed up to the Old Coach Road and Jon came into view, as well as a gathering of BGR attempts from a 1am start I believe. I was still feeling comfortable as we picked our way up Clough Head on the now well-trodden path and we must have been moving fairly well as we overtook the groups by the summit. We were now above the cloud and the views were amazing along Dodds to Helvellyn. I think that this was one of the most enjoyable part of the round, ticking the summits off in quick succession and hitting all the good grassy lines adjacent to the rocky paths. Unfortunately we hit the clag at Helvellyn and that was it for the views after this.

It was funny at this stage particularly, but true for most of the day, I kept forgetting that we were actually out on my round and not out on a really long recce as I felt no pressure and was having so much fun – it was only when I realised I wasn't carrying anything when it came back to me. All was going smoothly over Nethermost and Dollywaggon Pikes making back all the time on the schedule that we had lost on Leg 1. A shout from behind on the steep descent to Grisedale Tarn drew my attention however and I heard Matt say something about his shoe. As we met again at the bottom of the descent, I asked if Matt wanted to take the stones out of his shoes as this is what I had assumed had happened. "No, I have just put my foot through the side of my shoe" was his reply. Thus the ascent – and more stunningly – the descent of Fairfield and Seat Sandal was done with effectively a shoe with no side to it, tied together with a Buff for support. An occasional yelp from Matt when he had to brake using sock was the only difference I noticed. I think that the ascent of Seat Sandal was the first little low on the round, as the mist had turned to light rain and it had been so spectacular on the Dodds and I was probably running a bit low on calories and fluid. We hit the good trod coming off the top of Seat Sandal and headed down towards Dunmail where I was looking forward to seeing all of the support team.



BGR logistics squad in full flow at Dunmail

Leg 3 Pacers: Bryan Carr and Matt Tomlinson

Throughout the previous leg we had been chipping away at the 20-hour schedule, then took some big chunks off from Helvellyn onwards. I suspect that this was because we had crossed the watershed of leg 2 and it was net downhill after this. I suspect that this theme continued for most of the round – perhaps some analysis needed later (Steve Leach) – where steady climbing was followed by non-steady descending at least in comparison to the schedule. Certainly when I look at Jon Whillock's and Bryan's long efficient hiking stride, mine felt like a short ungainly waddle. Anyhow, we arrived at Dunmail nearly 30 minutes up on schedule after a 3:29 leg 2. Again, everything I needed was laid out ready and the planned pastry meat slice was consumed very quickly indeed. It was great to see the extended support team who had all come down even though not running the next leg, including Steve Leach who had driven up from Derby that morning. A top up of fluids a goodbye to Jon Whillock who was finishing here and I was off chasing Bryan up Steel Fell. Matt had managed to get a change of shoes at Dunmail – another example of the great planning by Matt and Sue - but just as we left a bit of rooting around for the GPS device meant that Matt was then having to chase me and Bryan up the climb. The climb felt surprisingly good – as I remember from my previous round I had felt terrible here – and we topped out in a pleasingly quick 22 minutes. This must have meant that Matt did 20 minutes with a sack full of water and kit! No wonder he was looking a bit rough at the top, but within 5 minutes of the run across to Calf Crag Matt was back to his cheery self.

The next part of this leg went smoothly, chatting and rolling from walk to run when the opportunity arose on the undulating terrain, never stopping, not even for a few seconds at the tops. The dry ground helped to keep this momentum going, although the cloud never lifted for any views unfortunately, and we maintained around a 30 minute gap on the schedule. We had a bit more of a substantial feed and water bottle top up at Rossett Gill, before pushing on to the Pike itself. Following some cairns up Bowfell resulted in a different line to the typical BGR one I think, a bit more direct up the hillside, but no less quick and soon enough we were on our way over the jagged rocks of the summit plateau towards the dramatic summit. The next section over the rocks of the Scafell Pike ridge was probably the only time when the weather conditions hindered our progress rather than helped, as the sawtooth boulders had adopted an unfavourable sheen of moisture. The climb up to Scafell Pike seemed a struggle, but as soon as we started to descend towards Mickledore I felt good again. Bryan peeled off to Wasdale and to prepare for leg 4 whilst Matt and I dropped into Lord's Rake ready for the scramble and the West Wall traverse. It was super fun picking our way up the stone chute and bypassing the boulder which at one point had perched at the top of the gully, but now laid in our path. The final climb up the WWT was loose but manageable and we were soon looking forward to the descent down to Wasdale. We made up a bit more time on the schedule coming down, enjoying the scree run much more than the steep grass that followed it. It was great to see Roger (Jo's Uncle) at the fell gate and we arrived nearly 40 minutes up on the 20 hour schedule.

Leg 4 Pacers: Andy Swift, Bryan Carr and Matt Tomlinson

I had a sit down at Wasdale and ate some warmed pasta whilst Keith and Andy performed a sock change and emptied my shoes of debris from the scree – thanks guys. A massage of the calves from Roger spurred them back to life and my legs were feeling great. Another top up of fluids and off Matt and I went walking and digesting through the car park. Bryan and Andy had set off a little in advance, so we gradually caught them up as we climbed, joining back up not too far from the top.



Great pasta at Wasdale

Similar to Steel Fell, the climbing felt stable but steady. Coming off the top down to the traverse under Stirrup Crag I was still move well over the rough terrain, unfortunately Andy took a bit of wrong turn and descended too far at this point, meaning we lost contact through this section, so I was please to meet again on the way up Pillar after Andy had cut the corner of Scoat Fell. Our trip over Red Pike and Steeple progressed without a hitch, but I was starting to feel fatigued. On the way up to Pillar Andy supplied a much needed Mars Bar and this hit the spot giving me a spring in my step for the gradual descent to Black Sail Pass - much to Matt and Bryan's suffering I believe.

At Black Sail we met with Keith and Steve who had very kindly walked up from Wasdale to provide a water and food top up. It was a real boost to see you at this point although the clag was still down, so it was a very brief encounter - emerging out of the mist at the top of the pass then disappearing back into it again up the climb to Kirkfell. The scree gully on Kirkfell is never my favourite, but in this instance the required scrambling manoeuvres to bypass the loose rocks provide a nice change to the previous section and potentially a little bit of respite. Bryan tapped out a great climbing rhythm heading up Great Gable with Matt and I fell into step up this section all the way to the top. I think a wave of partial relief did sweep over me as clambered up the awkward slippery rock summit as the biggest climbs were now all down and everything up to this point was still feeling pretty good. Picking out the grassier descent route - as done on Amanda's round off the summit was a little tricky in the mist, but became clear as we progressed. Honister was now in touching distance and I made a quick phone call to Amanda (wife) as we climbed Brandreth to let her know all was well and that we were on track. I was really pleased to find that running at a decent pace on the flat and descents was still manageable by this stage, so enjoyed the trip across to Grey Knotts and the drop into Honister. Cresting the summit of Grey Knotts we could hear bagpipes in the distance, stereotypically thinking that this might be related to the Scottish running group that we had passed before Pillar, we were amazed to firstly find out that Jon Whilock could play the bagpipes and secondly that he had brought them along and was playing to all of the numerous BGR groups that were descending!

Leg 5 Pacers: Mark Fowell and Jon Leek

The stop at Honister was a quick one, with the well placed pots of rice pudding catching my eye on arrival being rapidly despatched in a couple of mouthfuls and a gulp or two of water and I was off with Mark Fowell towards Dale Head. I probably felt great for about 5 minutes up this climb following the checkpoint, riding high on the seeing the Sue, Jo and the rest of the supporters, the rest was a battle. Mark did a great job of pulling me up and soon enough the unmistakable lithe figure of Jon Leek emerged out of the mist and I knew we were at the top. Seeing Jon for the first time on the round was great at this stage although my ability to chat had started to become a little compromised. We raced up Hindscarth and before I realised we were heading over the summit plateau of Robinson to touch the horseshoe shaped cairn marking the last summit of the round.



Finally some views

A big relief did wash over me to have done all the peaks now, but boy did Keswick still look a long way away. The descent was fun as Jon pushed on off the front, Mark and I took all the grassy lines to avoid the rock sections (not telling Jon of course). The steep grass down to the reservoir was tough on the knees and then we were onto the gradual sloping path toward Little Town Church. I had initially not been looking forward to the run-in, but was really pleased to be able to settle into a decent run which felt maintainable to the finish. The change to road shoes at Newlands helped and they felt so comfy (thank you to however picked them up from the cottage). As we crossed the wobbly bridge at Portinscale and hit the final track into Keswick I could really start to feel that we were home and from around a mile out the pace crept up and up to a crescendo sprint through the rainy streets of Keswick. A hop skip and a jump up the Moot Hall steps and we were done. 19 hours and 6 minutes, well if I had known it was going to be that close to 19 hours I would have got a move on a little earlier!

The Aftermath

The highlight of the round was definitely seeing and greeting everyone at the finish. The atmosphere you get when it all comes together is something unique and truly special. To see Amanda and Emelie at the finish made it feel all the more special for me. I was very proud of what I was able to achieve that day and I enjoyed it thoroughly. Although having much more running experience now, life is very different. It contains a wealth more responsibility and a fine balance is

always having to be struck. It brings me a lot of satisfaction and contentment to be able to continue to run, to train and to enjoy this part of my life and is great testament to the unrelenting support I receive from those close to me.

To all those who have supported me on this round, thank you so much for making it such a success.

Sue and Jo - from start to finish everything ran like clockwork, if I ever needed anything it was there, thank you so very much it would not have been possible without you.

Mark, Jon W, Bryan, Andy, Jon Leek, Matt – having you on the hills with me on this day was a pleasure as it always is. The maximal effort everyone put in to selflessly support the round was inspiring.

Keith – I know you were gutted to not be able to run, but it was fantastic to have you there supporting, it is much appreciated.

Steve – It was great to have you along and hiking out to Black Sail was a great help.

Roger – that calf massage at Wasdale was the business, thank you for coming out to see me.

Amanda, Emelie and George – Thank you for your patience, understanding and support over the last few months. You all inspire me in many different ways and although circumstance did not allow for you to be with me on the round, you were always at the forefront of my mind. I love you all.

And finally thank you to all of those members of the Harriers who have offered messages of luck and congratulations.

Phew, that's the report finally done then.

Robin



The amazing crew. L to R: Amanda Carter, Emelie Carter, Andy Swift, Keith Covell, Steve Leach, Matt Tomlinson, Robin Carter, Bryan Carr, Joon Whilock, Jon Leek, Mark Fowell, Sue and Bella, Jo Coates