

Bob Graham Round Report – Amanda Carter June 2014

13th June 2014 had been my planned BGR attempt date since re reading the '42 peaks The story of the Bob Graham Round' before Christmas 2013 and noting that it was the 13th June that Bob completed his round. I did consider the superstition of bad luck as the 13th June fell on a Friday, but quickly decided I would go for it anyway and should the attempt be unsuccessful, I would have something to blame it on!!

The week before my planned attempt on the Bob Graham Round, I met with some friends and discussed our plans for the upcoming weekend. The response to my plans included 'is it too late to put a stop to this, how do you know you won't fall asleep, fall off a cliff and die?' At that point I couldn't give a definite answer that this would not in fact happen, however after a year of training, planning, racing and dreaming of completing my own round, it was a risk I was willing to take!

It's interesting comparing the week leading up to my Bob Graham attempt to that of the men I had previously supported. Being a woman, I received numerous good luck cards, hugs and gifts of post round chocolate from my female non fell runner friends. The attempts I had previously been involved in for other people (both men) were discussed in a series of emails and grunts to each other leading to a mass gathering at the Moot Hall at a designated time for the start.

Robin - my husband who had completed his own round 4 years ago and I, drove to the Lake District from Derby on the Friday afternoon after a good lie in on the morning and final food and car preparations. The plan was to meet our road support for legs 1 and 2 – Jo Coates and her orange BMW at Dunmail Raise, as this was where we had booked accommodation for the weekend at the recently reopened 'Raise Cottage'. Philip Harrison who owns the bunk house was fantastic in ensuring we treated the bunk house as our home and was keen to offer us anything we needed over the weekend after already having had Bob Graham attempts stay with him in previous weeks. I don't know how he did it, but somehow he knew that tinned peaches and ice cream would be the greatest post BG breakfast that I could be offered!

As Jo had no previous experience of supporting a Bob Graham, we then completed a recce drive from Dunmail Raise to Threlkeld to ensure she was comfortable with where to park at the end of legs 1 and 2. On arriving in the lane beside the sewage works (such a glamorous venue) a third car pulled in behind us, housing three more of my pacers – Keith Covell, Jon Leek and Andy Swift. The guys just happened to spot our car so decided to follow us! Shouts of 'Does anyone fancy a Bob Graham tonight' raised my excitement to get going, but not before a pit stop at LB's pizza house for Spaghetti Bolognese.

At 9pm I met my sister and her fiancé to wish him Happy Birthday and drop off his birthday present. She had booked a room at The Royal Oak in Keswick for the evening for his birthday which was perfect as it provided me with somewhere to get changed ready for a 10pm start. It may have been his birthday but it was definitely all about me!! There were lots of people outside the Moot Hall, including our final pacer Bryan Carr and the infamous Holly the Collie, who has probably covered the most milage over the Bob Graham route. We also found that there was another attempt starting at 10pm, so made a tactical decision to set off at 10:02pm so as not to be drawn into their pacing strategy.

Two minutes after the 10pm attempt set off and just after poor Holly had calmed down after not being allowed to go running, Jon Leek, Robin Carter and I set off on leg 1 to the cheers of my other pacers, and other people congregated in Keswick town centre and the cries of Holly echoing down the street for a second time!

We started the hike up Skiddaw with plenty of light still in the sky. The temperature needed no more than a vest and tights for me to stay warm and I didn't require any extra layers from this point to the end of the round. The summit would have been reached prior to needing head torches, however the mist came in on the final part of the ascent, so we turned on the head torches for the final push to the summit cairn. Robin had planned to take a photograph of me at every summit, however Skiddaw came out as a fog and so this plan quickly changed.

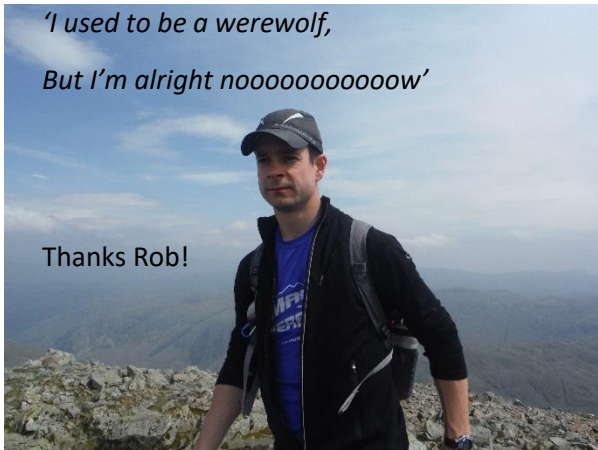
The rest of leg 1 was uneventful. We even managed to dodge the person camping along the Caldew. Pacers from a team who had set off earlier that evening had warned us about guide wires along the path from the tent. Luckily the wires had been moved by the time we reached the spot. Blencathra was the delight that it always is, slogging up Mungrisdale Common, but a dry descent to Threlkeld made all the climbing worthwhile.



1: *Crossing at the summit of Great Calva*

The familiar orange BMW came into sight and we arrived at the end of leg 1 at 01:50, three minutes up on schedule. Time for a quick cup of coffee, refill of drinks bottles and to grab that cheese and onion pasty for the walk up the road before the climb up Clough Head, leaving the car just four minutes after arriving. Apparently there was a sweep stake with my pacers regarding the cheese and onion pasty. They were convinced I wouldn't eat it and I'm pretty sure Bryan had his eye on it! I later informed Bryan that it was due to him that cheese and onion pasties made their appearance on the menu at all, after witnessing his consumption of them in weekend running challenges with the Rolls-Royce Harriers and Congleton Harriers.

However bizarre it may have been eating a pasty at 2am, it must have worked, as Robin, Jon and I ploughed on up Clough Head. By the top Jon had dropped off the pace. Running along the ridge from Clough Head towards the Dodds, we were joined by the most amazing full moon, lighting up the whole sky. I had managed to get Robin to tell me my favourite joke heading up Great Calva, however it may have been more appropriate to wait for this point. It has never failed to get a laugh from me:



The moon didn't last for very long however as the mist came back in and we continued along the Dodds to Raise and Whiteside. It was around these summits that the head torches were no longer needed. We also realised here that Jon was not going to catch us back up. We tried to contact him, but he didn't have his phone so had no choice but to continue along leg 2. We knew he would be able to get off the mountain safe as he had previously completed his own round and has supported on other attempts prior to and following his own, but I was slightly concerned that he would have no means of joining the group again, without a phone to let us know where he was.

We met another group as we descended off Fairfield to start the final climb of leg 2, who had seen Jon, but not since Clough Head, before starting the final push to Dunmail Raise. Robin called the team near the top of Seat Sandal to inform them of our ETA which would be nearly half an hour up on schedule, resulting from excellent navigation from Robin, as always, and only having four of the fifteen minutes I was scheduled to stop at Threlkeld. Luckily the pacers for leg 3 only had to wander down the road from Raise Cottage, so after I had made my pathetic attempt at descending off Seat Sandal, I crossed the road to cheers from all of the team.

On arrival at Dunmail Raise at 06:10am I had planned to have some cereal and let my body know it was morning and start my body clock again, however as the night had been so warm and the air so dry, my throat was sore and I couldn't face the idea of crunchy cereals. Instead half a tub of rice pudding went down an absolute treat, alongside more coffee. I also had the foresight to get Jo to slap on some sun cream on my shoulders and neck whilst I was eating and donned my baseball cap to keep the sun off my head. Tights on or off became a talking point as I had put my shorts on underneath my tights in case it got hot. The decision was made to go with them to try and offer some protection from the sun, so off I went, over the stile and up Steel Fell with Robin, Bryan Carr and Keith Covell as pacers, with Holly running ahead and barking at us to move faster, eight minutes after arriving.

On summiting Steel Fell, the sun was out, the mist had lifted and we had beautiful panoramic views that could have been enjoyed for hours just from that one spot. Unfortunately we had a schedule to keep to so set off in search of Calf Crag. After around five minutes of trotting along, I noticed that Keith running behind me sounded as though he was in pain. He shouted Robin and both of them told me to continue following Bryan and Holly. When I next looked over my shoulder I saw Keith sitting on the ground, so knew he was in trouble. Robin caught us up after taking on board all of the provisions Keith was going to carry for me after already carrying food and fluids over two legs and looking forward to a lighter rucksack, to say that both of Keith's legs had cramped up so he was going to head back down to Dunmail Raise. On a positive note, they had also had news that Jon had

arrived at Dunmail Raise after thumbing a lift following dropping down from Hellvelyn. So my pacers may have been broken, but at least they were all accounted for!

The heat made Calf Crag and Sergeant Man a struggle. I was overheating and it wasn't fun. Clothes needed to come off, so I stripped down to my shorts and crop top, leaving Bryan with the tights, vest and the spare base layer I had been carrying around my waist – just in case. After that the breeze finally came back and helped me to cool down. Bryan also managed to get me to eat another half of a second cheese and onion pasty on the way to High Raise. Again the sweep stake was on and I was still winning! The pasty picked me up again and on we continued.

During preparation for my round, I knew that if I could nurse myself up Rossett Pike and then Bowfell, they would be the two climbs on leg 3 that would be the most challenging. Bryan provided me with the second half of the pasty for the climb up Rossett Pike and I made it! Both of the climbs had been a real struggle during recce's, however on the day, I felt much stronger and gained in confidence as I reached the top of Bowfell. We continued on dry rocks, which made the going good and soon we were at the base of Lord's Rake for the scramble to Scafell via the West Wall Traverse and the last summit of leg 3.

The descent off Scafell was slow as I stumbled over the rocky ground, but I was able to pick up the pace a little on the grass and then thoroughly enjoyed the scree run down to Lingmell Gill. My plan was to change my shoes and socks at Wasdale so I didn't worry about how much of the scree I was taking with me and then I had a small moment of heaven when I stepped into Lingmell Gill up to my knees and threw the cold water over my head and neck. I felt revitalised and loved the run into Wasdale, enjoying myself so much that I was heading off on the path to Eskdale until I heard Robin shouting me back!

Arrival into Wasdale was at 12:41, thirteen minutes up on the original schedule, but the leg had taken 6 hours and 23 minutes, 23 minutes slower than anticipated. This made me start to wonder if I would slow down too much and not make 24 hours. I still felt awake, was eating and drinking well and I was still moving so I knew that I would get round, therefore decided not to worry about it, to just keep moving and see what time it would get me back to Keswick.

Thirteen minutes later, after my first sit down, sock and shoe change, more coffee, rice pudding and an orange, peeled by Keith's fair hand, I was off to climb the next fell that I had singled out as a key summit in my preparation. Robin, Bryan, Holly and Andy Swift joined me for this leg. Known to some of us by an alternate name – Yewbarrow was summited on schedule and my confidence was back. Andy had talked about how he was looking forward to actually seeing some of leg 4 as he had never been on the section when there was a view. We all soon decided that Andy is the bringer of the mist and the drizzle as the mist descended again and we didn't have a view again until Green Gable.

Whilst moving from Steeple to Pillar, I decided to pull out my trump card – the iPod. By this point my pacers were moving too far ahead of me for any conversation so I found some music to listen to. Apparently somewhere along this leg we passed Steve Birkenshaw and his team on his Wainwright's attempt, but I hadn't seen them. Too busy looking at my feet I guess. It's a shame I didn't see them as I had discussed Steve's attempt with people at work in the week leading up to my BGR stating I was only attempting 42 peaks in comparison to his 214, so really I could say I was being lazy!!

I felt as though I was on a flier from the top of Great Gable to Honister. My legs felt strong and I was euphoric, knowing that at Honister I would have my biggest crowd of supporters including; my mum, my sister Sam and her fiancé Blair, Jo, Keith, Jon, my brother in law Mark, his wife Justine and my two year old niece Elizabeth. Descending off Grey Knotts *'Down with the trumpets'* by the Rizzle

Kicks began playing on my iPod, which reminded me of supporting at the Lakeland 100 two years previously with Sam and Blair. We sat at the finish line singing that song and I ran smiling to myself thinking, I'm nearly at the finish and I've got family and friends to see me off on the final stretch.

I arrived at Honister car park at 18:02 and was presented with a small piece of slate from Elizabeth as a present. I also managed a quick sit down to eat a mango jelly and drink some more coffee whilst waving to all of the people who were there to see me, before leaving just over 5 minutes later with Bryan, Holly, Andy, Jon and Keith for the climb up Dale Head. The final big climb before the end. I had 4 hours to complete the last leg, which according to the schedule should take 3 hours. Surely it was on and I was actually going to do it!

There was great banter and high spirits as we climbed Dale Head. I finally got the 'story that was going to make me laugh' that Keith had promised me on leg 3, which didn't disappoint. We also talked up what time I was going to do and whether I could get extra Rolls-Royce Harrier Championship points if I beat the times of Jon, Robin and another RR Harrier who had completed the round the previous year Mark Fowell. As Bryan and Keith have also completed the round, discussion returned to persuading Andy Swift to 'have a go'. This had begun the previous evening when my ever the professional pacers had hit the pub and continued after we finished when they returned to the pub and also the next morning at breakfast. We're still to hear his final decision!

Moving from Dale Head to Hindscarth, I heard Keith shout Jon as I continued to follow Andy, Bryan and Holly. Jon caught us up and let us know that Keith's legs were cramping again so he was going to head straight down to Newlands. We carried on and ticked off the final two summits of the round with Andy stopping us for a panoramic 'look at what you've done' moment at the summit of Robinson.

We then trotted along the ridge and dropped to Scope Beck down the grassy bank that allowed me to enjoy one final descent before the impending road section, overtaking Jon and Andy on my way. Running along the track at the back of the group was amazing. I just had a moment to myself to think. I'm doing it. I'm actually on leg 5 of the Bob Graham Round after doing all of the other sections and I'm going to get to Keswick under 24 hours. Wow!

Robin had stopped at Honister, knowing that he could trust us to get to the final 3 summits. He drove the remaining supporters to Newlands before the final road section where my mum and Jo joined me. Bryan, Holly and Keith jumped in the car at this point. It was a monumental effort from him. Just to recap, he had driven us all the way to the lakes, which ended up being a four and a half hour journey, before rounding us all up to go to eat and then covering 4 legs in a row, carrying food and fluids for both of us, navigating and writing all the split times down. All with an ongoing plantar fasciitis. In my mind he was the true hero and I will be forever grateful to him for coaching me to the start at the Moot Hall, believing in me to complete it and being there at the finish to congratulate me.

Although I had plenty of time to cover the road section at the end, a part of me was worried that the wheels could still potentially fall off. I had prepared myself to feel the worst I had ever felt during my round, including nausea, pain, fatigue and it never really happened, so I was convinced that it would hit me on the road. Thankfully I had Jo running with me, chatting away and moving closer and closer to the finish. Mum ran at the start with Andy and Jon, but soon realised that I was not going to catch them up, so she waited for me and ran in with Jo and I. At Portinscale, Andy and Jon were still ahead. They saw me onto the footpath and then I didn't see them again until the finish. Jo's Uncle Roger popped up in Portinscale with a camera. It was an interesting place to meet someone

you'd never met before, but his cheers and enthusiasm made me smile and put a spring into my step for the next mile. He was also present at the bridge in Keswick and gave me a final shout up the road to the finish. Mum also shouted encouragement so we concluded with a sprint finish to the Moot Hall, followed by a solo ascent of the steps and a bow to the crowd cheering below me.



I can honestly say that the whole Bob Graham experience has been the greatest adventure of my life, in my favourite place in the world with my favourite people in the world!

Thank you to everyone who was involved in some way to get me to the Moot Hall for 10pm on Friday 13th June and to those who directly and indirectly supported me to the completion 23 hours and 6 minutes later.





From left to right:

Mum (Janet Ilsley), Bryan Carr, Holly, Andy Swift, Me (Amanda Carter), Robin Carter, Jon Leek, Keith Covell, Jo Coates.