

Mark Fowells Bob Graham Round 21-22 June 2013

The date of my original BGR attempt was 14 Aug 2012. 7 weeks prior to this having completed 108 miles of a 350 mile relay in 80 hours from the tip of Anglesey to the English side of the Severn Bridge; I began to believe a successful BGR might be possible. The route included the Snowdonia National Park, Brecon Beacons & Black Mountains with a team of runners from Rolls-Royce Harriers, Congleton Harriers & the Derbyshire Fire Service.

The final BGR Recce before the attempt was with Jon Leek, a fellow Rolls-Royce Harrier who introduced me to the BGR 4 years ago. The route we were to take was from Seatoller to Wasdale then Legs 4 & 5 back to Keswick. In perfect conditions, blue skies & little wind, it started out as an enjoyable day out on the fells. An hour into the run as I crossed a bridge over a stream my left ankle twisted as I landed. Getting up and putting pressure onto the foot it buckled again, I was unable to continue. An X-ray discovered a fracture to the 5th metatarsal, BGR 2012 was over.

21-21 June 2013 was the new date set for BGR 2013. The week preceding the event the weather forecast was studied several times a day; from Monday onwards the weather was going downhill, heavy rain and blustery gales forecast throughout Saturday, flicking channels hoping for a glimmer of hope to no avail. With accommodation booked & plans in place for the support team it was going to go ahead.



As the group of highly experienced fell runners met up at Moot hall for the obligatory team photo we enjoyed the warm dry conditions knowing it wasn't going to last. Wearing a base layer and fleece for leg 1 concerns of getting too warm were going through my mind. After setting off at 22.18 with Keith Covell and Bryan Lomas, the summit of Skiddaw was reached within 1hr 9 mins. The clag was down with poor visibility, the wind was blustery but rain had not yet arrived. The line to Great Calva via Hare Crag went without a hitch getting to the top in 1hr 48mins from the start. It was now just after midnight. From the left of the fence we descended down to the River Caldew going into the heathers to the right and finding the trodden path to the river. I was pleasantly surprised by the state of the river crossing. The level was just above my ankles. 3 weeks earlier it was above knee level. Blencathra was reached in 2 hours 57mins. The descent to Threlkeld via Doddick Fell took 31mins reaching the checkpoint in 3 hours 28mins, a full 17mins ahead of schedule.

After 3 jam filled hot cross buns and a bowl of porridge with syrup prepared to perfection by Amanda, it was time to commence leg 2!

With just a 9 minute break a whole minute was clawed back leaving a total of 18 minutes ahead of schedule. With a slight drizzle in the air it certainly wasn't cold and no requirements to put on any waterproofs YET! Visibility was good helping us to reach Clough Head in 48 minutes from Threlkeld. The wind was now picking up and temperature dropping, the rain held off until the last of the Dodd's, where Brian L handed me a waterproof jacket, hat and gloves. The weather forecast was spot on for once, just my luck! The persistent rain was getting heavier, winds stronger and temperature almost freezing, at the start of summer. A school boy error of forgetting my inhaler made things a little uncomfortable continuing over the Helvellyn range, combined with back ache from an intense game of badminton the previous Tuesday.

Having started Moot Hall with a base layer and light weight fleece I was now getting cold. On reaching Dunmail Raise meeting the support, the plan was to put on an additional layer, change the fleece to a thicker one, retrieve the inhaler and take ibuprofen for the back. At least the pipes on the hydration pack didn't freeze!

We shared navigational duties until the weather changed. I was now totally reliant on Keith and Brian L to lead the way. On the plus side visibility was fairly good right the way through Helvellyn range over to Fairfield and Seat Sandal

Despite the awful conditions, we made it to Dunmail Raise in 7 hours 52mins, a full 48mins ahead of schedule. The problem now was that Brian Carr and Leeky, 2 of the pacers for leg 3, had not yet arrived. As soon as Robin saw us dropping down from Seat Sandal he got a message to them to say we had arrived early. After 3 more jam filled hot cross buns with porridge & syrup, I put on another layer that I had left in Robin & Amanda's car; however the inhaler, ibuprofen and thick fleece were heading

towards Dunmail Raise in the car driven by Andy Swift.



Robin Carter and I decided to start leg 3 leaving a message for Leeky and Brian C to bring the required items, along with extra energy drinks, and catch up with us. By now I had ditched my running sack and was totally reliant on the pacers carrying all food and drink. As we headed over the stile the car was in sight. Straight to the car, off came the wet waterproof and fleece, on with clean dry clothes, medicine for ailments all submitted and onwards up to Steel Fell along with Brian C, Robin, Leeky and honorary team member Holly the Collie.



The conditions at the start of leg 3 had improved and rain had eased off a little. The wind wasn't as strong & the temperature had risen. It was now past 8 in the morning and well ahead of schedule. I was a lot warmer after the ascent of Steel Fell, no surprise there.

Leg 3 went to plan finding a good route to Calf Crag and Sergeant Man. Visibility was better than expected as we headed over High Raise, Thunacar Knott, Harrison Stickle and Pike o Stickle. Rossett Pike was the place we had planned for a short break being roughly half way round on leg 3 and also the full round. We reached Rossett Pike in just over 11 hours.

After 2 more hot cross buns, we headed back over to Bowfell for the second half of the leg. On a previous visit 3 weeks earlier the conditions on the rocks were good, they were bone dry. This was certainly not the case now! Care was needed on approach to Esk Pike and Great End. As Ill Crag and Broad Crag were completed then came Scafell Pike.

The previous recce to Scafell was done via Lords Rake. Due to the conditions of this route it was decided to go via Foxes Tarn. We descended from Mickledore through the scree to the gully of Foxes Tarn to see the gushing waterfall produced by the rain from the previous few hours. We proceeded with caution to the top of the gully taking care on the wet rocks and continued on the path above to reach the summit of Scafell. Then the steady descent into Wasdale via the Scree run at Rakehead Crag. Robin commented this was his favourite part of the Round. Swifty was waiting for us with a very welcomed flask of hot beef and vegetable soup with bread rolls (no hot cross buns this time).

By now the rain had given over and we were able to sit in comfort on the folding camp chairs, a good rest at last. Leg 3 was completed in 6 hours 47min giving a total time of 15 hours 2mins, still 23mins ahead of schedule.

After what seemed an age & pure heaven of a 14 minute break, a quick intake of ibuprofen for the aching back, Robin, Bryan C Swifty & myself headed up Yewbarrow to commence leg 4. Although I had just had a good rest the legs were very tired and Yewbarrow is a steep climb. I was beginning to fall behind the pace. The rain and wind returned as forecast, conditions were deteriorating although visibility remained good.

Red Pike was reached in 16hrs & 50min.

By now I was checking my watch and calculating on a regular basis how much time was left knowing full well there was Kirk Fell and Great Gable to tackle. After Red Pike, Steeple and Pillar were completed without losing any time, next was Kirk Fell. Conditions were worsening, the rain was heavy and winds gale-force. The long ascent up Kirk Fell was completed with 18hrs 47min on the clock. I was slowing on assents but still time in hand.

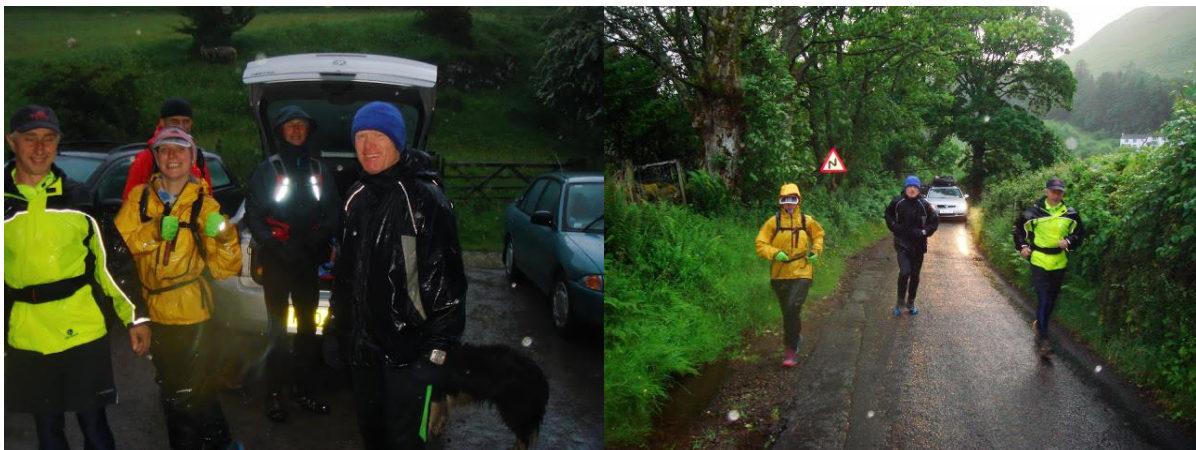
Next off was Great Gable, wind and rain was now horrendous; a simple task of stopping for a drink became a challenge not to be blown about by the gale. After Great Gable the clock showed 19 hours 33mins, with no more serious climbs remaining I knew if we got to Honister in the next hour there was a good chance of success.

After Green Gable, Brandreth and Grey Knotts, we reached Honister with 3 hours 35mins remaining.



Although I had requested chicken soup at Honister all I wanted was a large coke and Mars bar to eat whilst going up Dale Head. I was feeling good despite the appalling conditions. There was a little respite in the weather at Honister but as soon as we ascended Dale Head the torrential rain and blustery winds returned. Dale Head was reached with just under 3 hours remaining. Hindscarth used up another 17mins. Robinson was reached where the pacers Amanda, Leeky, Bryan L, Swifty and Brian C were waiting for me giving a joyful and much welcome round of applause as I touched the shelter. After a wave of acknowledgment we headed towards the Newlands Valley with 2hrs 14mins remaining.

Scrambling down the rocks from Robinsons is usually just a minor inconvenience. With the soaking conditions the grip on the rocks was none existent and a challenge. The last thing I wanted at this stage was to complete all 42 peaks with time in hand only to get an injury that prevented me from continuing. Fortunately we all got down safely and dropped into Newlands Valley where the support team were waiting with further refreshments. After another large coke we headed straight back to Keswick with 1hr 20mins remaining.



The rain had now eased off and being lower down the wind had disappeared. Keith was cracking jokes all the way to Keswick and I was doing my best to keep smiling but with sore feet and now on a hard surface it was increasingly difficult.

We eventually approached Moot Hall at 21.45 a full 23 hours and 27 minutes after setting off the previous evening.

My hardest ever challenge was finally over and completed successfully.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the support, without which I would not have completed this adventure. Leeky (Jon), Robin, Keith, Swifty (Andy), Amanda, Bryan C. Bryan L

