

Jon Ks 50 at 50 – 21st June 2019

I guess in running terms 50 years old would be considered to be getting on a bit; power and speed begin to fade, etc., but it's not all bad news as it is common knowledge that endurance diminishes less over time and to a certain degree the experience gained can offset any loss in strength. I was looking for a special way of celebrating my 50th birthday, and thought it would be good idea to put the above theory to the test.

I noted that our happy band of Bob Grahamers didn't have a suitable candidate for a 2019 Round so thought it was great opportunity to harness this talent and tentatively requested support for a 50 Peaks attempt (BGR plus 8 extras) for my 50th year.

I was a little hesitant to press send on my request as I'd be committing myself to a massive ordeal and it felt a little self-indulgent; I'd already received brilliant support from the team on a successful round in 2015 and didn't know how much interest this crazy idea would generate, however this feeling was short lived as all of the team replied with willingness and enthusiasm. Too late to go back now a date was set for 21st June, the challenge was on!

June started out as a wet one, every weekend was soggy and damp leading up to 21st June, I write this now on the 29th June and it's nearly 30 degs.C out there, so how lucky I was that the weather on the weekend that mattered was just about perfect (a far cry from the hurricane like storm on the night of my 2015 round). There was still much preparation to get stressed about. Will I be illness and injury free? Will the team all turn up and do their parts well? What food shall I take? Will Jo crash Todd's expensive VW transporter that she has never driven before? It is said that the final few hours are the worst, so I was much relieved to get the show on the road at 8pm on Friday evening.



Leg 1 – Robin, Matt, Mark & Jon K

Robin who had volunteered to navigate this leg was stuck in rush-hour traffic; therefore Matt nobly stepped up to take on leadership duties, so Matt, Mark and myself lined up at Moot Hall watching the clock tick down at 7:55pm, then just before the clock chimed 8 to set us on our way from out of the crowds in Keswick market place Robin materialised; phew!

So off we went with a larger team of Bob Grahamer's in hot pursuit. We were careful to tell them not to follow us as our 50 route takes us off the beaten track to Lonscale Fell almost as soon as we hit the dirt. Lonscale and Skiddaw Little Man, the two Leg 1 extras were easy to find and broke up the long drag to Skiddaw summit, it felt good to get 3 peaks done relatively quickly. On the long descent to the valley below I felt both quads groan and tighten under the extreme hammering they were taking, it's moments like that when you realise there's no substitute for time on the

falls to condition your legs, my training regime consists primarily of commuting to work and it just didn't seem to be appropriate here! The others didn't seem to be suffering so at least I know that Matt and Robin were in fully operational condition despite having only completed the Dragon's Back Race a couple of weeks earlier.

We crossed the river Caldew and I didn't get swept away this time so I considered that a small victory but just before the ascent of Blencathra Mark unfortunately fell knee deep into a bog which triggered a painful cramp in one of his quads. This was an unexpected consequence of Mark being quite ill the week previous but at least there was four of us so Robin and I headed out for the summit and met Mark and Matt descending into the darkness of Doddick Fell but at least the support van wasn't far away where we would be able to regroup and restock.



Leg 2 – Robin, Matt, Todd & Jon K

Through the checkpoint in an all too brief handful of minutes, I pretended that I didn't notice that the crew had forgot to put milk in my Weetabix 😊 (all of the small details you normally get hung up on don't seem to matter)! We now began the long drag up Clough Head, with a fresh Todd leading I was really struggling here, more than I can remember from my BGR of 4 years ago, I was naturally concerned and was mightily relieved to reach the top, it was here I learnt that in this one peak alone we'd taken 10 minutes out of the schedule, so concern switched to a feel good factor and we agreed to maintain this push to build up a buffer, we then had the pleasure of knocking off the peaks of the Dodds and the Helvellyn range with clinical accuracy that Robin and Matt always seem to deliver. Surprisingly we passed lots of people up on the mountain range in the early hours, including the BGR team we has departed Keswick with, many tents were scattered across the peaks enjoying the Summer Solstice, there was a group of sleeping bags huddled together behind Helvellyn's shelter (we didn't stop to check for life) and a large party of Americans who gave us a big round of applause as we sped passed them!

By the descent of Dollywagon my quads seemed to have gotten used to the hammering and the additional peaks for the 50, Hart Crag and Greatrigg Man followed Fairfield, forming part of the Fairfield horse shoe, there would normally be great views South to Windermere but our attention was stolen by the moon shimmering on Grisedale Tarn and the early sun rise over Ullswater, a truly magical place to be! Todd navigated the extra peaks with no issues at all, then it was down to me to get us across the 'Fairfield Traverse', a short cut we had recced a few weeks earlier, amazingly our plan had worked and the sunrise just gave us enough light to home in on the base of Fairfield. We emerged into daylight at Seat Sandal and descended to the support van amid multiple other vehicles supporting various BGR attempts at Dunmail Raise.



Leg 3 – Todd, Jon W, Bryan & Jon K

Determined to maintain the schedule buffer it was another quick turnaround thanks to great work by the road support team and in no time at all we were off up Steel Fell into the longest and hardest leg of the challenge. As we reached the plateau, instead of the usual GPS equipped watch/device coming out, Jon reached for his map and compass, I immediately became concerned so reliant of late are we all on electronic navigation, these concern were unfounded however as Jon swiftly led us from one peak to the other. We soon got onto the extra peaks of Pavey Ark, Loft Crag and Allen Crag, it was during this time that I confirmed my reputation as more of a big eater than a big runner as I effectively emptied Jon's bag of all consumables (both for me and himself) and he resorted to asking passers-by for drink (thanks Jon) still at least there was less weight to carry, hmm, I wonder if this was Jon's plan leaving Bryan and Todd with the heavy emergency gear!



The cool of the morning became the heat of the day as we ascended Scafell Pike and the heat wasn't the only cause for beads of sweat as we ascended the less famous adjacent Scafell via The West Wall Traverse (not for vertigo sufferers). In such situations it's reassuring to be surrounded by experienced fell runners as Jon, Bryan and Todd as it's so easy to make mistakes when you're tired. Following the ascent of Scafell we hammered directly down into Wasdale surfing the scree slopes at a ridiculous gradient, and in a matter of minutes we arrived at the van in Wasdale Head Car Park.



Leg 4 – Jon W, Bryan, Wykeham, James & Jon K

The drawback of being up on your schedule is you arrive before the food is cooked, never mind it was a hot day so the main meal of the day baked beans was eaten cold, I just got anything down me that was presented as I knew how easy it is to run out of energy and hit the wall in these latter stages. A handful of minutes later we were ascending arguably the toughest climb of the circuit, Yewbarrow, in the heat of midday, but James and Wykeham were fresh and full of enthusiasm which was exactly what I needed as I felt my spirits being lifted. Jon continued as he had done in Leg 3, leading from peak to peak with seamless accuracy giving instructions on the best line to take across the jagged terrain, while Bryan acted as sweeper ensuring we all stayed on track, but the way he kept disappearing and reappearing I'm sure there's a few short cuts he wasn't telling us about! As well as the last extra peak Scoat Fell, Leg 4 consists of 4 massive climbs including Red Pike, Kirk Fell and Great Gable, thereafter it becomes easier, Jon reminding us of this to raise morale and it seemed to work as following these Wykeham and I reached Green Gable way off the front, which gave us a slight navigation issue, but Brandreth and Grey Knotts were quickly tackled with some extremely loud but distant instructions from Jon then we descended down to Honister Pass for the last Checkpoint! We all came in one by one and flopped into various chairs and the long grass for a moment of blissful rest.



Leg 5 – Wykeham, Mark, Robin, Jo

Ironically early afternoon after burning an inconceivable amount of calories my appetite failed me, so my apologise to the support team for not appreciating the finely prepped food stop (piping hot chicken soup too!), instead it was another speedy turnaround and off up Dale Head before my muscles started to seize up!



It was a nice surprise to meet Todd and Matt also at the peak of Dale Head and share that moment which is my most favourite location on the whole round, with breath-taking views and the knowledge that it's almost all downhill from here! Leg 5 although relatively easy compared to what had come before wasn't without a few moments; Mark unfortunately had another bout of quad-cramp, although very painful it wasn't going to stop him, and after regrouping and savouring the summit of the last peak, in my enthusiasm to take time out of the schedule I almost got Wykeham and I lost again on the road decent down Newlands Valley. Fortunately Matt happened to be in the right place at the right time and spotted the mistake from his car! Matt hopped out and after laughing at my daft sense of direction got us back on the route, Mark caught us up and the four of us ran the last few miles into Keswick together.



As we entered the outskirts of the town I felt the fatigue melt away and then joy of joys there was the rest of the team waiting in the Market Place, the market stores were still in full swing so we had to hurdle dogs, dodge around prams and slalom passed other market goers then up the steps to the top of the Moot Hall and it was over! I needed to be told the elapsed time twice as I thought I'd misheard it the first time; I thought the 24:00 schedule was going to be difficult so 21:11 was beyond my wildest expectations.



Top step: Robin Carter, Jon Kinder

Step 2: Tracy Kinder

Step 3: Wykeham Bosworth, James Ward

Step 4: Matt Tomlinson, Bryan Carr, Jon Whilock

Step 5: Jo Coates

Step 6: Todd Coxhead, Mark Fowell

The original intention was to finish hopefully with enough time to enjoy a couple of drinks before grabbing some fish and chips at closing time, but there we were on a beautiful sunny afternoon in the middle of bustling Keswick. So what better way to give thanks to the wonderful Lake District than to support the local economy by drinking to a job well done!

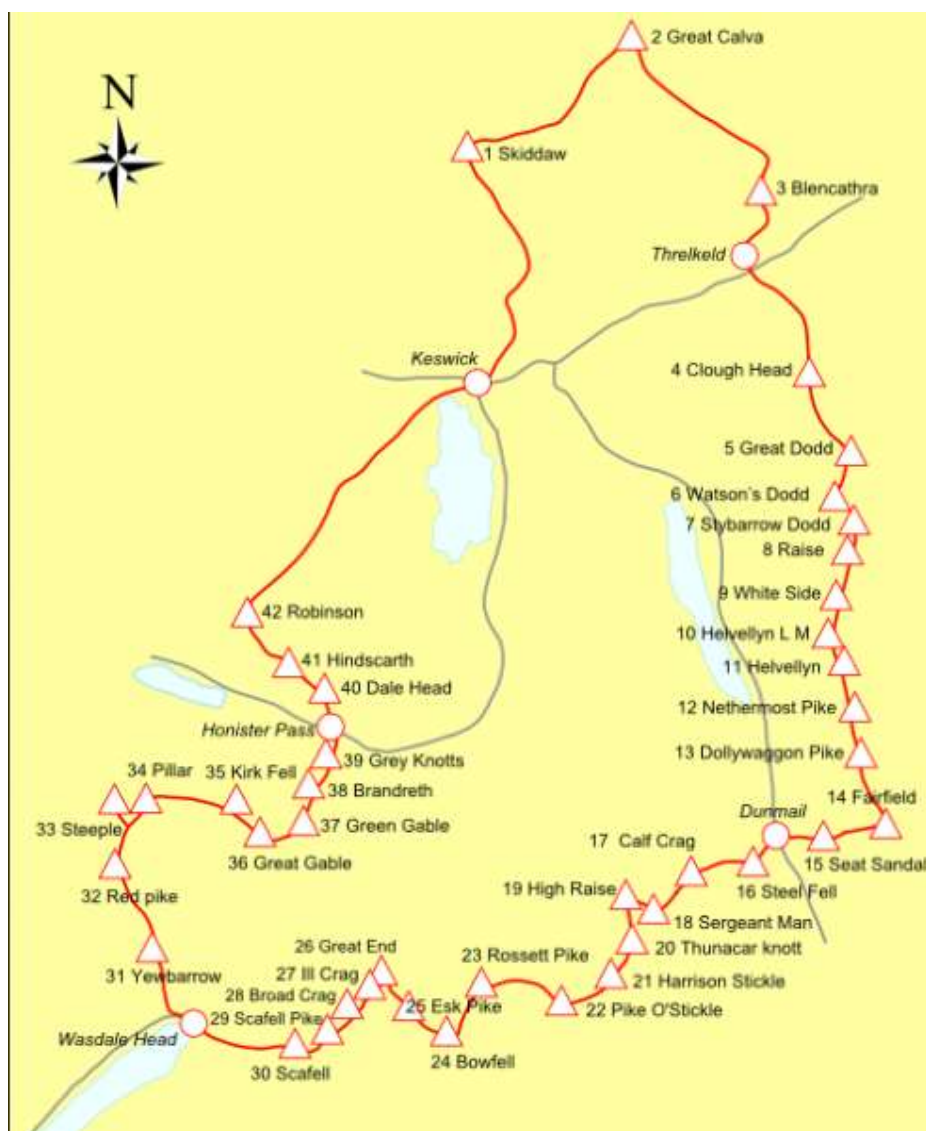
Cheers!

The success of the round was down in no small part to the wonderful weather, if you'd experienced legs 1 and 2 in 2015 you might say I deserved a break, however the biggest part of this achievement must surely be down to such an amazing well drilled team Todd Coxhead, Mark Fowell, Jo Coates (Belper Harriers), Matt Tomlinson, Bryan Carr (Congleton Harriers), John Whilock (Staffordshire Harriers), Wykeham Bosworth (Belper Harriers), James Ward, Tracy Kinder and Robin Carter. I'd like to add friends Keith Covell, Andy Swift and Jon Leek who weren't present on the day but offered support and helped me train. It's great to know that no matter how tired you become, each step is a foot in the right direction, food and drink are supplied without having to think about them and the logistics of getting the party all around the course over the duration are all taken care of, quite literally all you need to do is concentrate on staying upright and keep going to the next peak!

And so to that original question, can knowledge and experience gained with age overcome the drop in power and strength? If anyone is in doubt maybe we'll know more after next year's RRH 60 at 60 😊

Interesting Stats from the App

50 at 50 is: 71 miles and 28000 feet of ascent or 146000 steps and 2500 floors



The Bob Graham Round.
Jon's extra peaks were Lonscale Fell and Skiddaw Little Man (before 1), Hart Crag and Great Rigg Man (between 14 and 15), Pavey Ark (between 20 and 21), Loft Crag (between 21 and 22), Allen Crag (between 25 and 26) and Scoat Fell (between 33 and 34).