

Ian France - Bob Graham - 29th June 2013

On Friday 28th June the weather was awful. Heavy rain, and strong winds for most of the day. I looked at the George Fisher Web Cam. Not only could you not see Skiddaw, you could not see for 200 yards. The weather forecast for Saturday was not great. Low cloud forecast for most of the day and strong winds. I thought about all the training, Preston Guild Marathon, Full Tour of Pendle, Howard Hobble, 3 Peaks and Blubberhouses. Then there was the running over the Howgills, when the Lake District was covered in snow and ice. I thought about all those fantastic people who had given up their time - for me. Recce'ing routes in meticulous detail. All their time, making food and getting up to run at ungodly times of the day.

I'm not the quickest and it was always going to be tight, and in this weather.....

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My friend Chris Hawkins picked me up at 7:30 and we went to Wynn's and Steve's House in Shap. The cloud blew away and the sun came out, it was a beautiful evening, and my spirits rose.

Entering the house I couldn't help noticing the Bob Graham certificates near the front door. We were soon joined by Pam and Andy Farmer, Saira and Ian Roberts. It was good to meet them, and as usual they were in good spirits.

At around 10, Chris drove me on to Threlkeld, where we picked up Graham Tagg who looked eager and ready to go. We took Graham to Keswick and were met by the friendly face of Alex Rowe (from Wesham Road Runners) in the car park beside the now closed Bike shop. Richard Davies turned up and made me sit down. We synchronised watches.

Time then stopped.

After an age we made our way through to Moot Hall where we were met by Ian Egglestone and partner Amanda, Wynn, Andy Crook and Beverly, and Richard Gray. Richard was due to do a BG a couple of weeks ago, but struggled to get the support. He had kindly offered to do leg 4 with me.

Leg 1

At Twelve, Graham, Alex and I set off. The other 2 were finding the climb up Skiddaw much easier than I was. My legs felt so heavy, I felt so sluggish, so slow. Come on legs, come on body. I can't fail on leg 1, could I?

We got up Skiddaw in good time, but the weather had closed in. There was minimal visibility and it was cold and the rocks greasy. Navigation was nearly impossible, but eventually we found the right line down, to the bridge and back up Great Calva.

Graham went just ahead in the mist navigating over Great Calva and then on back down to the river and got a good line up Mungrisdale. How I hate Mungrisdale. Alex stuck by me, feeding me and giving me friendly encouragement. Looking at the times afterwards, I lost time going up Mungrisdale, my legs still felt so heavy. This was the trend for the whole day, slowish ascents made up for by faster descents.

The Skylarks come out on Mungrisdale. They sang beautifully twice, then, they became despondent and stopped as the mist came down.

We were though on a good line for Blencathera and eventually we got to the top and descended Hall's Fell. The leg time was down due to the bad conditions.

In Threlkeld, I was met by Andy Crook, Richard Davies, Mark Midgley, Sarah Sherratt, Mike Gibbison and Mike's next door neighbour Shaun. They were raring to move.

Just a short stop, have to go.

Leg 2

The effect of having a new team was a big boost. We climbed Clough Head. Got onto the Dodd's where I miserably failed Andy Crook's quiz about which Dodd is which. I now owe him a fortune.

I then became aware of Richard disappearing rapidly in the wrong direction into mist, chasing the leg 2 time sheet. The piece of paper appeared to be teasing him. Just as he got to it, it blew off again. Mark and Sarah went to help him.

Things though were good. Andy Crook kept taking me on great lines, whilst Mike and Shaun were doing a great job talking to me, making me eat and drink. The visibility started to improve and time was being clawed back.

Peak followed peak, my heavy legs still made hard work of the steep climbs, but time was being caught up.

Richard, Mark and Sarah, caught us up somewhere near Helvellyn. Richard had had to do some compass work and was then helped by Mark and Sarah. There were a few corners they could have missed out now, but they all kept with me.

Down Dollywagon, followed by the horrible steep climb up Fairfield. How I hate Fairfield, and I thought I would share this with Richard. He replied. "It's there to be done, so shut up and get on with it". I got on with it.

The heavy legs slowed down going up Seat Sandal, but a fast descent meant that we were down at Dunmail ahead of schedule.

There were loads of people at Dunmail, including Ted and Enid Hawkins, Chis Hawkins' Mum and Dad. The mood here was good, I think because the time was OK.

The change of clothes were ready, I was spoon fed porridge by Saria, a bacon butty from Pam, whilst Andy changed my socks and shoes.

Leg 3

We set off ahead of schedule and climbed Steel Fell. I hate Steel Fell. I lost a little time on the climb. Never mind it didn't matter so much now.

The companions on Leg 3 were Chris Reade, Graham Lund and Andrew Knowles. Graham Tagg (still fresh after his leg 1) was keeping a note of the time and kept on ahead with Chris. Graham L and Andrew did a wonderful job making light interesting conversation, feeding me and making me drink.

Chris kept pointing and saying, run here and here. Follow me. People had told me Chris was the man for leg 3 and they were right. I didn't have to care about the schedule, the miles and time just passed wonderfully.

So on we moved. Soon we were up the High Raise slog and were met up here by someone called Dave doing a BG recce with a massive pack. He was quicker than me.

The weather was good and we got Bowfell out of the way. Andrew said his goodbyes and disappeared toward the Langdales. Shortly afterwards we were briefly met by Paul Jennings from work, and his wife Christine. I then realised that there were then 4 of us from the same place of work. Graham, Graham, Paul and me.

The main tourist route to Scafell Pike was reached and we came across many walkers. Plenty of them shouting a friendly good luck. There was also a 10 peak challenge going on.

Scafell Pike to Scafell was via Lords Rake, West Wall traverse. The snow that had been there a few weeks previously had all gone, leaving the stones on the route a bit loose. The Grahams stuck close by me, talking to me. I was carefully trying not to dislodge any of the loose stones, so took time.

Chris took us a great route down from Scafell, and we arrived at Wasdale feeling good and up on time.

Leg 4

In Wasdale the weather was good, and the mood was happy and relaxed. Another good pit stop, with plenty of good and friendly banter. Then off again. Support on this leg was Duncan, Ian Cookson, Will Houghton, Mike Gibbison (again after doing leg 2), Richard Gray and Graham Lund who carried on from leg 3. Chris Reade appeared out of nowhere on a hill top later on. The pressure was off, plenty of time on this leg, no need to rush anymore.

Up the dreaded Yewbarrow. Duncan was in fine form and I learnt a rhyme that described the cuckoo's time in the UK "In May I sing all day, In June I change my tune, In July away I fly". It all helped to get up, spirits were good. I had sore feet, but for the first time all day I felt good and confident. We moved on past some of my favourite peaks on the whole route.

Red Pike, Steeple, Pillar, Kirk Fell all great Lake District classics. What a fantastic day, what a great experience this BG was. I was enjoying myself.

Then the weather changed for the worst. Thick cloud and drizzle arrived making the rocks slippery and us cold and wet. Navigation became difficult, but the whole team was doing a great job in bad conditions, feeding me and making me drink.

I slipped descending from Great Gable in the greasy condition. Chris Reade seemed to be there in seconds, getting me to slowly move my toes and fingers. I sat up and was OK, able to carry on. I had been lucky.

We moved on in the mist to Green Gable, down to Brandreth, Grey Knotts and Honister.

Leg 5

The mood at Honister was different. There was a lot of concerned looking people there, but plenty of cheers and shouts of "Well done Ian".

I was OK to go on, so was fed and changed as fast as possible and then was off. The companions this time was Steve Cliff, Andrew Farmer, Ian Roberts, Ian Egglestone, Saira, and Martin Walsh. Saira had been worried about being able to keep up. To me, she seemed to be moving like Paula Radcliffe. Will Houghton and Graham Lund also carried on, so Graham did 3 legs.

The walk up Dale Head was tough, I remember Dale Head being so easy in training. People were saying things like "You are OK, but you need to push it a bit". Nobody would tell me the time, nor how far to go. How had it come to this? I was so confident at Wasdale.

The run off Dale Head seemed to lift team spirits as a bit of time was made up. Then came Hindscarth. Steve shouted "Come on Ian"

A tired pull up Robinson, the 42 peaks done, but no one seemed sure if I would make it in time.

Ian Egglestone gave me his head torch, so it must be late. I remembered there were a few miles to go so kept on eating and drinking. Down to Gels and Water, nothing else was appetising.

"Come on Ian", "Come ON Ian", "COME ON IAN"

I've been told that the descent from Robinson was good as was the run to Newland Church. I was met here by Wynn, and Ian Roberts. They put nice comfortable road trainers on and soon had me going again. There was plenty of encouragement here, including Andy Crook and Ian Cookson.

Richard, Ian and Martin kept with me all the way back. Gently saying encouraging words. Come on Ian, have a drink and food. By now, running on the flat felt like running uphill. Did I care about a BG? I wasn't so sure at this stage.

Slowly, the distance was covered, Portinscale appeared. Not far to go, but do I have the time?

Next, we crossed the bouncy bridge and were on the short rough track from Portinscale to Keswick. Richard said, "Run a minute then see how you feel". I did, then, I walked a long minute, followed by running a short minute.

We all ran together along the main road to the door of Moot Hall. 23:49 - I thought the time would be close, but this was close.

I was numb, but remember there was a lot of hugs, and hand shaking. There seemed to be a lot of people there, including wife and daughter Karen and Vicki. What wonderful fantastic support I had had.

Together WE had done it. A massive thank you to everyone.

Small collection of pictures from Richard here :

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/70374777@N02/sets/72157634408843745/>