

## ERIC WALMSLEY REMEMBERS BOB GRAHAM by Bill Smith

Roger Dewhurst of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, organiser of both the Pendleton and Bolton-by-Bowland races, lives in the latter village in the picturesque Ribbles Valley, north-east of Clitheroe, and contributes a monthly "Country Diary" to his local Parish News. Having nothing particular to write about for his April column, he decided to give an account of his 1974 circuit of the Bob Graham Round, a joint achievement with the late George Brass on which I had assisted as a pacer from Dunmail to Keswick, going anticlockwise.

When he'd completed the article, Roger took it around to the lady who types up his contributions, Mrs. Christine Walmsley of Holden, the nearby farming hamlet through which the Bolton-by-Bowland Country Run passes following the descent from Higher Heights Farm. On seeing the references to Bob Graham, Christine showed the article to her husband Eric as he had been a friend of Graham's and had done a lot of fellwalking with him. Knowing my interest in Graham and the Lakeland 24 Hour Fell Record, Roger passed this information on to me and I rang Eric and arranged to visit him one cold but sunny afternoon in February when Pendle and the Bowland fells were sharply outlined against a clear blue sky.

Erie Walmsley is a tall, lean man of 87, a retired Chartered Quantity Surveyor whose main leisure pursuits have been cricket and fellwalking. In his younger days, he captained Whitehaven CC's first eleven, for whom his brother Harold, now 89, had also played, as did their Father before them. All this exercise eventually resulted in Eric needing to have a hip replacement, which by no means curtailed his outdoor activities. After 23 years of hard use, however, the cup had to be replaced and nowadays his walks are mainly short ones of just a few miles, usually accompanied by his dog. Harold still lives in Whitehaven and has many slides of Lakeland scenery, which he often uses to illustrate talks he gives to various clubs.

"I first met Bob Graham," recalled Eric, "around 1937/38, about six years after he'd done his famous Round of the Fells. It was at a gathering of the Anglo-German Society, of which I was a co-opted member as a walker. Eight German visitors were staying at Bob's guesthouse in Lake Road, Keswick, next door to the Abraham Brothers' studio, along with eight Englishmen, myself included. It was Bob's habit to take his guests out fellwalking, if they were so inclined, and he took the Society members out several times. Also present on some of these walks was the noted Grasmere artist, W. Heaton Cooper, who was a close friend of Bob's. He would sometimes assist Bill (Heaton-Cooper) in choosing scenes for his paintings, as he also did for the Abrahams' photography."

"On a visit to Great Gable, one of the Germans started a landslide coming down a scree slope and Bob was fortunate to have been able to arrest the fall of a large stone with his hand. It could have killed one of the Germans had it hit him. It was a near miss! On this same walk, the Germans were greatly impressed by the sight of Napes Needle and wanted to climb it. I loaned each of them in turn my boots and they all made it to the top, assisted by a climbing guide belonging to a friend of Heaton Cooper's who was with the party."

"The Germans had a leader who kept a strict eye on them and Bob cunningly took him to a meeting on his own, allowing the Englishmen to each take a German to their respective homes and brainwash them! I still have a letter from one of my German friends, Rudolf Koslin of Danzig/Stettin."

"Bob later ran the Barrow House guesthouse beside Derwentwater with his sister and her husband. All the meals were served from a hatch and he made many friends by chatting away to guests while passing the plates out. The guests also became friendly with each other once the ice was broken and details of climbs were swapped. Bob was an excellent cook and a great lover of people. You couldn't help liking him. He was also a great lover of nature and could identify all the wild flowers. On one walk, he stopped by a wall and upturned a stone to reveal a lovely wild flower. 'If I hadn't covered it up,' he said, 'some silly beggar would have picked it.'"

"Bob worked very hard after he'd moved to Barrow House and he didn't have time to do much walking there. Water was fetched from a dam in the stream that flowed down from the waterfall behind the house and this had to be constantly checked to ensure it was clean and not blocked. He afterwards moved to another guesthouse at Lyzzick Hall near Bassenthwaite."

"Following my first meeting with Bob with the Anglo-German Society, I would visit him on summer Sundays with a couple of friends and we'd go for a walk, especially after the cricket season had ended. When the War came, it put an end to our walks and I served with the Royal Engineers. Bob had been turned down for service in the First World War because he had flat feet! After the War, I'd spend at least one week's holiday with him every year. In 1951, I emigrated from Cumberland to Yorkshire, then escaped into Lancashire in 1962. (Eric had moved from Whitehaven to Halifax and then to Holden.)"

"When you went for a walk with Bob, it was an all-day tramp, not a short stroll, and he took a lot of keeping up with as he always moved at a trot or jog. He never ate much while out on the fells and never carried any protective clothing, just a jacket which he'd tie around his waist if the weather was warm. On his feet, he wore plimsolls or sandals, much to the disapproval of one friend who suggested he should wear boots. Bob took his advice for one walk only with the result that he slipped and fell down a gully. That was the last time he wore boots. Had he worn his usual footwear, he probably wouldn't have slipped."

"Bob knew his way around the fells allright and never got lost. One of his favourite routes was a circuit of the lonely fells back o' Skidda' from Keswick to Mungrisdale and back. He never did any rock-climbing but was quite comfortable on scrambles like Broad Stand, and I can't recall him ever competing in guides races."

"My brother Harold and his wife Nell, a Preston girl, also went on walks with Bob and were fond of doing the Ennerdale Round. While still working, they did all the 'Wainwrights' together and repeated this achievement after they'd both retired. Their son became an Alpine climber."

Eric, Harold and Nell must be among the few remaining links with Bob Graham, whose Round of the Fells in 1932 has inspired so many modern fell runners and walkers to emulate his great feat. I am grateful to Eric for sparing me the time to relate his memories of the man.