

The Lakes in a day - an attempt on the Bob Graham by Alan Stone

The omens were not good. Four weeks before the scheduled date for our attempt at this classic route, Mick hurled himself to the floor and broke his arm. He had obviously decided that this would be far less painful than running the full round. For those who choose to remain ignorant of such matters (and most sane people would choose this option) the Bob Graham Round is a 72 mile gentle stroll around the scenic Lake District calling in at almost every tea shop for scones and Earl Grey. For 'gentle stroll' read sweaty slog, for 'tea shop' read summit and for 'scones and Earl Grey' read billions of calories and litres of one's chosen fluid. Just to add interest there is approx. 28,000 feet of ascent and it's to be completed in less than 24 hours.

However, Mick was later to learn that he had only earned himself a temporary stay of execution and sentence was duly carried on Saturday 7th August 2004. Fellow condemned man, Alan (Falling) Stone was to be his companion into the 5th dimension. 1.00am at the Moot Hall in Keswick we looked slightly incongruous in running kit and head torches next to the late night townies throwing up their sixteen pints and a kebab into the gutter.

The first lesson to be learned that night was that you should always check your head torch has fresh batteries and not assume that the children haven't been playing with it. On top of Skiddaw the bulb was fading to a pale glow when Alan was forced to his knees. Not by a 'Road to Damascus' conversion and a desire to find God, but by a large rock embedding itself in his shin. The blood flowed. Despite being a man rather partial to Quiche, he carried on.

We were lucky with the weather. A clear night and a half moon were a beautiful backdrop. We discovered why most runners choose earlier in the season when we encountered the waist high bracken and heather coming off Gt. Calva. This slowed us down and we descended into Threlkeld from Blencathra behind schedule. The views were awesome. A multi-coloured sky and mist settling in the valleys, greeted the rising sun. Hard drugs couldn't have beaten that for a visual spectacle.

We made up a little time getting up Clough Head. The summits then flowed thick and fast to Helvellyn. We really hacked off a walker who wanted to be the first to the summit that day. But hey, that's what makes it all worth while, hacking off the walkers. We could see the entire range of mountains and our putative route laid out in front of us. If we hadn't had an inkling of the size of the undertaking beforehand, we certainly did now. The sad reality for anyone attempting this is that you see almost the entire route to be run from this point. Respect to Bob Graham who was the first to complete this route in 1932, including a summit for each of his 42 years (why couldn't he have done it age 28 ?!*!?).

We arrived at the second road meet to find our armchairs and army of servants awaiting our arrival. We were over an hour off the required pace. Slapping on the sunscreen was to be the closest thing to sunbathing we were going to get that day. Roy Ruddle was to be our guide, porter, Sherpa and priest in the confessional on this leg. A big thanks to Roy who put himself out in such a generous and warm spirited manner on the day. A big raspberry to the members of the MDC (*Mynyddwyr de Cymru*) who were last seen mumbling into their beards that they were too busy bathing the budgerigar.

Despite Roy's encouragement and the high 'acid' content of the Jelly Babies we were being fed (I did say this was a story about really tough men) we continued to drop off the pace. We lost more time at Broad Stand, a rock climbing cliff separating Scafell Pike from Scafell. Mick's half-healed arm objected to being

asked to take his weight, Alan's Yellow Streak objected even more. We took the longer route around Lord's Rake. We breathed very gently when by-passing the precariously balanced rock at the top.

We came down into Wasdale having had a right cracking day out on the mountains. We were so off the pace it was a mutual decision to call it a day. An 'old school' Consultant Obstetrician once taught me, "Never let the sun set twice on a labouring woman". This should be amended to read, "Never let the sun rise twice on a labouring fell runner". If we had carried on to completion we would have ceased to enjoy ourselves and a second sunrise could not have out done the first. As dusk came, Alan raced down the last hill, knowing that at the bottom would be his dearly beloved wife waiting with hot drinks, soft chairs and massage and beauty treatments. He was somewhat disappointed to discover an empty car park. His wife was later found in a local pub, a mile down the road, chatting up the locals and making defensive comments about how all car parks look the same to her.

We'd completed over 50 miles and close to 20,000 ft of ascent and were surprisingly fresh. The bug has bitten deep (and I'm not talking midges), we'll be back next year, after my winter sojourn in Whitchurch Psychiatric Hospital. If you ever find yourself in the lakes and have only got a day to see it all.....