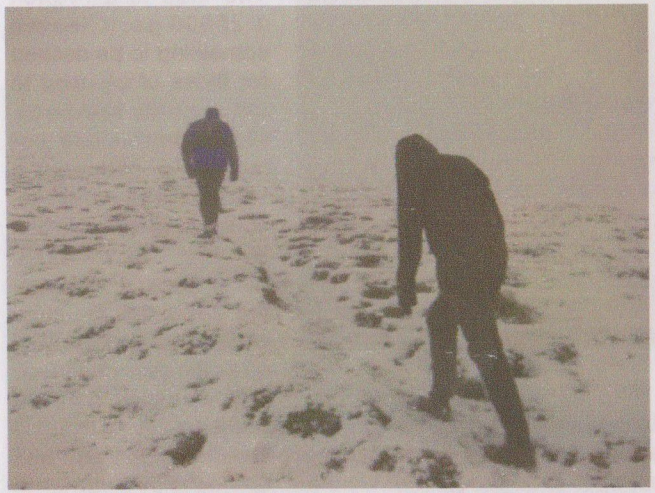
The Bob Graham Round - Never Again

The following drama contains the characters Nick Moore and his wife Glenda, a few well known WCOC members and the author.



NIck, on the Helvellyn ridge in June, shortly before the phone box incident

It's a Saturday morning in June. It is half past six in the morning and I'm the only one up in the house and I am ironing. I have just had a phone call from Glenda to say that Nick's Bob Graham attempt is off. She can't talk for long as it transpires that there is a phone box in St Johns in the Vale with three lycra clad runners tightly packed into it, and they want her to collect them before the police arrive and ask awkward questions. A real disappointment for Nick who has spent months preparing for this day. A real bonus for the author's wife who finds all the ironing done.

Nick was given plenty of encouragement and planned another attempt in July. This time at half past six I am amongst a small crowd of people on the top of Dunmail Raise waiting for runners, straining eyes up towards the horizon. A pair of elbows are spotted on the horizon. Clearly this is Margaret, and so this must be our runner. He is ahead of all other runners trying the round that day. Things are looking up. This was Glenda's first taste of support crew, and despite having to pick up her daughter at two in the morning (From a school trip, I hasten to add) was quite excited and clearly very proud of Nick.

Nick arrived looking pretty good and slightly ahead of schedule. He has after all been going for 7 hours through the night. There are great tales of a spectacular dawn and Margaret gives the encouraging statement to our team of pacers "he's going well downhill". At the time this did not seem to convey the depths of trouble that we were about to suffer over the next 17 hours. Half way up Steel Fell, it became apparent that we were going to lose a couple of minutes on the schedule. Going up High raise it became apparent that Margaret had really meant to say "whilst the downhill is going quite well - the uphill is going pear-shaped and there will be trouble ahead". John Slater was the other pacer on this section and was disappearing off into the distance with some ladies out for a days walk, learning the route for next year. Not that they were going particularly fast. This group had set off way behind us, passed us, and nearly disappeared in half an hour. Nick was going nowhere and his conversation was drying up. And the ironing hadn't been done.

We kept the food and drink going in, basic pacing responsibilities. Nick was good with this, realising the importance of fuel. When one does the Bob Graham, one has low points, one has points at which you experience great self doubt. Nick was clearly in the depths of

one.

A minor error of route choice to Harrison Stickle lost two minutes. This was dwarfed by the minutes lost on each of the peaks we climbed. John and I had quiet whispered conversations together. On the wonderful traverse below Rossett Pike I did some calculations. Rossett Pike is the 22nd peak and so is over half way in peaks. Good to tell Nick this. However following the 23 hour schedule you should be there after 11 hours. We were no where near this. It was very close to 12 hours. He had used up his spare hour in the first half. He now had to return to schedule pace for the next 12 hours and not lose a minute. It is a terrible thing to admit, but I was now planning the escape route to Wasdale. I reckoned by Esk Hause all would be lost and a long sombre plod to the cars would end the day.

However the discussions that John had had with Nick must have had an effect. He is famed for this and a good chap around when things aren't going well. We climbed Bowfell on schedule. And Esk Pike. And indeed Scafell Pike. We scaled Broad Stand (and there's another article in just what is a sensible harness). There was a huge clap and the sound of crashing rock filled the air, with voices just heard in the thick of it. The noise was every where. We could not pin down the location. It stopped. It wasn't us. We carried on. Hoping no one had come to serious grief.



All smiles at the Wasdale foot spa and rice pudding festival

The descent to Wasdale is in my mind a highlight of the Bob Graham. If you are going clockwise and you get down to Wasdale on time and feeling okish, you can convince yourself that once up Yewbarrow you have broken the back of the round.

Clearly having seen the way Nick was climbing there were still great doubts. At the change over the new pacers and Glenda had been waiting for an hour longer than they had wanted. Looking up at the horizon and not seeing the silhouettes, the tension had clearly been building. Chris Emmerson took over. A very experienced, calm pacer. All eyes watched as they climbed Yewbarrow, knowing that this was a make or break climb. And we watched them moving very, very slowly. This was terrible to watch. Glenda was clearly reading our expressions and whilst trying to be positive the message was clear. With fifteen hours done and another nine still to go, Nick was in big trouble. Glenda drove us back to Cockermouth. The air in the car was not celebratory.

We dispersed, showered, assembled the next round of pacers and regrouped at Honister at around half seven. Consultations with schedules and calculations abounded. But everyone knew that you needed 3 hours for the last section. It was already getting gloomy. The weather forecast was for rain. Last leg pacers Mel Bradley and Kate Charles were joined by Barbara Heywood and sat in the car, trying to keep warm for a long time.

All good pacers get to the handover with plenty of time to spare. You certainly don't want to be late. This means we were all there for around 7:30 pm to start the strained gazing

of the horizon. Sheep become runners, boulders become sheep. Eventually a group is seen descending. It is immediately obvious that they are not running, they are descending very slowly - a car moves off up the quarry road to pick a runner up. He has just been walked backwards down the fell. The end of his round. The supporters move off and we are the only group left at Honister.

He has to appear over the horizon before 8:45. It is 8:40. No one has spoken for ages. No one dare go near Glenda. And then we see them. Silhouettes, but it can only be them. And they are moving, clearly still going. Massive lift of emotions. No one wants to be involved in a non completion. Nick still has a chance. No one likes being involved in a last minute rush either, and this one is destined to got to the wire. The pacers appear to be ready, what a responsibility. Torches ready, waterproofs ready.

Nick arrives, in good spirits, Chris has done a sterling job. It transpires that Yewbarrow and Red Pike did not go well, then Nick found something. He picked the pace up and was managing to hold to the schedule.

There is always time for Fish and Chips in Keswick before driving to Little Town.

Parked in the dark by the church, it is now raining and getting heavier. Glenda is now really enjoying the tension. (It sounds better than being worried sick and approaching a challenging nervous disposition). John and I are still there, gazing upwards again. We see the lights on the top of Robinson. It was the sort of rain that comes from high clouds, it gathers more speed that way but it also means that the tops were clear. During the descent the pacers have a bad time on the crags, losing height a bit too rapidly at one stage. They go out of sight. Calculations again. It is looking good, this is the most confident I have felt since half six this morning. And all of a sudden they are with us. Nothing can go wrong now. Nick manages to change shoes very quickly, as do Kate and Barbara. Mel has a knot problem and sets off two minutes after them. Cars are packed and off we go. Two hundred yards later we find Mel, on the wrong road, running back having taken the wrong turn out of the church. John was really calm here (this avoids any possible litigation from defamation of character, actually it doesn't as it is not true). I am however very calm, pick Mel up and get shouted at for it being my fault. The tension is clearly starting to get to people. I drive the long way round so as to meet them. Reunite Mel with the group. Barbara has had enough, climbs into the back of my car, slides the full length of the back seat, opens the other door and is sick out of it. Never mind the rain will wash it away in about 2 minutes.

We drive on to the next junction. It is now my turn to lose the plot. I am convinced that they need to turn right and that the road sign is the wrong way round. John isn't convinced and explains very clearly to me (euphemism). The tension is unbearable. This is going to be so close. They pass us, going well.

We decamp to Keswick and are treated to the usual entertainment of drunks versus bouncers and police competition. It is now approaching midnight, he has only fifteen minutes to get here. Conversation has stopped. It is clear anyone prattling on in a nervous way is very likely to get rounded on by everyone else. There is now quite a crowd of Nick's friends, family and pacers from the whole day.

Unknown to us, Nick and his pacers are lying on the ground playing find the spectacles. He ran into a tree branch and lost his glasses. What a way to miss your 24 hours by.

But then a cry goes up, runners, torches and cheering. A quick check of the time, he is going to scrape in. The relief goes through the crowd, the police stop arresting the drunk to applaud (bit of an exaggeration actually, but his effort deserved it). He was there on the Moot Hall steps, surrounded by everyone, photographs. Glenda mightily relieved has already extracted a promise that he won't be putting her through anything like this again. And there is the proud man, in his own quiet unassuming manner.

I am still left with answering the question " How can anyone that slow going uphill complete the Bob Graham Round".

The answer of course falls into two parts. Nick was well prepared, he worked hard for this for months. And then there is the other reason.



All smiles at the end

The Bob Graham round asks questions of yourself. Some people dig deep and find that magic something. Having seen Nick complete the Ennerdale and Wasdale races in previous years I knew he had that ability to find that something. He may not be the quickest but he has plenty of that spirit that is required for the Bob Graham. I take my hat off to his fantastic achievement. I hope he enjoyed the dinner and the presentation.

And "Never again, Mr Bond?"". If you are going to ask for pacers - get a bit of speed going uphill first. Roll on next season.

Nick's Version

It was a roller coaster of emotions during the day. Leg 1 went well with a lovely stroll for Steve, Chris and myself. We had perfect condions and hit the route spot on. On Leg 2 John Day's navigation was excellent with new variations on Clough Head and Fairfield. The route up Fairfield led Margaret to comment that it would save her time (is she planning another BG to improve her time?) It was great to have Alan along, I hope he is as lucky with the weather for his BG. The sunrise was amazing as shown by the photos John Day has put on Flickr (torpenhow3) ending at Dumail ahead of schedule, with Dot and Mike to welcome me with food, a chair, fresh clothes and trainers.

The hard early climbs on leg 3 were a low point when I started to lose time, but after a few words of 'advice' from John Slater we were able to stem the loss. Andy's rucksack was like a travelling advert for Cadburys, which was spotted by a walker. The fruit and nut kept me going. The climb up Broad Stand went without a hitch, with Julie and Paul calmly getting us up.

Coming into Wasdale the decision to reduce the rest time from 15 to 7 minuted proved crucial. Yewbarrow is always reckoned to be a big test, I now realise that this is quickly

followed by Red Pike which just adds to the pain. This was the lowest point where I started to doubt whether I would be able to finish. Chris's words of encouragement were turning into orders! The leg on to Steeple was a turning point where we gained 4 minutes. We could now get round in time as long as we kept to schedule. John Boyle was picking all the short cuts, nicely left from the Wasdale race. Further encouragement was more time gained on Great Gable.

As we got into Honister we had 8 minutes in hand, but the rain had started. Kate was on a mission to get me up the last big climb, but we lost time, however after some fast running we gained time back on the last two tops. Barbara was endeavouring to keep me going with pieces of flapjack. The weather had now turned worse with heavy rain and wind. The rock steps off Robinson were very slippy and involved a lot of sliding on bottoms! Eventually we got down on to the track where we stopped to change shoes. 4 miles to go, 1 hour left. Glenda's nerves were getting tested. A steady jog along the road got us to Portinscale with 20 minutes left, success in sight! This was interuppted when I ran into an overhanging tree, resulting in lost glasses. I ran vaguely towards the lights of Keswick, leaving Melanie to search in the hedge (successfully found). We ran on to Keswick to Moot hall to reach it at 23.52. Relief for all! Unbelievable for me. What a team, they even laid on an Ambulance which came in to the square with blue lights flashing (later realised this was for an injured drunk!) Thanks to all who came to Keswick, Sue and Ben, Jane and Emma

I hope I am an inspiration to all over 50 year plodders. With good weather and an excellent team a Bob Graham dream is realised!