Introduction

In many ways this is a dull tale. There are no stories of sickness, blisters, chaffing, getting lost or delirious wanderings. Instead it's a tale of a beautiful long day in the fells with a group of mates – a grand day out where the weather gods were kind, where the strength of squad was key and where the months of training paid off: in a very lucky way it all just came together.

This is a tale of 10 Minutes – 10 Minutes of the 1, 165 minutes it took me to complete the Bob Graham Challenge on Saturday 30th May 2015.

10 Minutes

1. **03.20 – The Start of a New Day**

I am descending Hall's Fell. I glance to my left and the thin, faint glow of a new day is beginning to peep through the darkened skies that had accompanied us on Leg 1. I give a little inward nod to myself and think, 'this is going be a good day.' I had had a nice Leg 1 with Graham Ansell solidly providing supplies and Rob Stein competently navigating his way through the mist of Calva and Mungrisedale Common. The pace had been comfortable with nice chit-chat throughout. We arrived at Threlkeld having taken 3hrs 38minutes. I was feeling in control and clear headed.

2. **06.14 – Where it all began**

I'm standing on the summit of Helvellyn. I ask Neil Sidaway and Ryan Parker to pause and take a photo. It's a non-descript photo of me next to the cairn in grey dawn gloom. But in my head I was my 15 year old self wearing a green army style bandana with a ridiculously over-sized cheap orange cagoule – one hand held high clenched in a fist and my Dad's firm handshake in the other. We had conquered Striding Edge and were now standing on the mighty summit of Helvellyn – a **real** 3000ft mountain! I was a mountaineer, I was strong and invincible in the mountains. I glanced back at the camera and nodded to Neil Sidaway and Ryan Parker – 'let's push on lads', I said. Yes, this was where it all began!

In the capable and confident hands of Neil and Ryan, Leg 2 passed smoothly arriving at Dunmail having taken 4hrs 02minutes on the Leg.

3. **09.35 – The Power of a Team**

I'm somewhere between Thunacar Knott and Harrison Stickle. I'm starting to feel slight fatigue. Not a worrying level of fatigue but just those first twinges of 'ok, I need to concentrate and stay focused here'. But I am not concerned. I am enclosed in a warm cocoon of expertise and strength. There is nothing to worry about. In front of me is the steady meandering footprints of Mike Harrison, to my right is Phil Archer – quietly carrying gear, offering drinks, providing a mental crutch of support and behind is Howard Seal chipping away providing invaluable nutritional advice. So, despite the first minor worries of fatigue I know everything is ok – I am cocooned and cared for. The Power of The Team is with me.

4. **12.15 – Steeped in History**

It's just past midday and I am aware of a nice buzz of people on Scafell Pike. I've been on my feet for over 12 hours but this is of no concern or consequence. As we dip over the summit I glance up at my surroundings; this is probably the first time I have absorbed the scenery since starting out. I notice the awesome place I am in. Mickledore below, Scafell crags ahead, the East Buttress of Scafell to the left and Great Moss way down below. Of course, I've seen this view many times but on this occasion I am in awe (possibly because I've been staring at the same 2 metre patch of ground for the last 12 hours!). Images of Coleridge, of the Abraham Brothers, of Slingsby, of Joss Naylor and many, many more flood into my mind. I am reminded of why I love the Lakes: certainly it is the landscape but it is also the people who have left their spirits. The history, the adventures, the comradeship, my own shadows as a walker and bit-part climber and times spent struggling over the boulders on the Wasdale fell race. 'This is good', I think to myself. 'I am making my own little bit of history'. With Broad Stand safely out of the way we 'skip' down to Wasdale arriving there 5hrs 20 minutes after leaving Dunmail. It's a quarter past one in the afternoon and we are an hour and twenty up on a twenty three hour schedule.

5. **14.05 – Game on!**

Okay – enough of this romantic chatter and thought. I'm on Yewbarrow, it's taken us 37 minutes. Bill Williamson glances across, 'you up for this', he says. I must have given the affirmative because he's off. All I can do is stagger after him.

6. **15.25 – I blimin' love this sport**

We're crashing over rocks descending Pillar weaving our way between trods and carefully tip-toeing over boulders. Bill is skipping ahead, John Fletcher is striding out behind me reliably recording times (aren't you, John?) and Colin Rhodes is wittering on about something or other (whatever did happen to that Beef Jerky?). Howard Seal is still with us offering words of encouragement and nutritional advice. It's a strong team which inspires trust and confidence. I'm in a slight daze but the feeling of being alive is all consuming. We are greeted by Jennie Chatterley and Sandra Mason at the top of Black Sail, Jennie and Phil Jennings make an appearance from Gable and Jim Francis meets us on Great Gable. This is my favourite terrain, the weather has stayed kind and I'm in good company. I'm tired but in control.

7. **16.54 – ok, ok we could be onto something here**

We're leaving the summit of Grey Knotts. I begin to work out the timings and calculations. Figuring I could be at Honister by 5pm and allowing for between two and half hours to three hours for Leg 5, I could finish sub-20 hours. Blimey! Never did I plan for or anticipate this. We reach Honister having done Leg 4 in 3hrs 34 minutes – my surroundings are a little blurry, my legs a little wobbly, my emotions non-existent but my mind focused

8. **18.07 – Focused on… where am I? Robinson?**

We're on summit 42. Les Barker, Nick Moore and Bill W. are with me. It's a good crew – Nick is by my side and Les and Bill are pacing. They tell me to absorb and appreciate, to look around at the distance I have just covered. I couldn't give a monkeys, I think. The last thing I am able to do is think. I have become a body capable of, and only just, putting one foot in front of the other. I know only one thing – that I need to keep moving, that my legs need to keep going forward in the way they have done for the previous 18 hours. We reach the road where Mario Yeomans and Catherine Keevil are waiting. They join us for the last section. It is the section where I begin to fade, my concentration, my legs, my energy, everything I seem to have is gone. All I can do is move my legs which are just about, to my surprise, somehow still moving. I don't know if my legs are in front of me or behind me but they are still moving; this can only be a good thing.

9. **19.24 – Family Love**

I pick up a stride on the main street and glimpse Kate's face in the distance – 'they're here', I thought, 'how stunning to see them, how absolutely beautiful to see them.' It is a heart churning moment of warmth and love. A time to regain some sort of emotion and become human once more. I touch the green door 19hr 25 minutes later.

10. **19.35 – Club Love**

I'm sat huddled in a doorway on Keswick street. The small glass of Prosecco hasn't gone down too well. I am surrounded by wonderful, wonderful people who have made such sacrifices for a selfish desire. I feel immensely grateful and lucky. Les comes and sits next to me and cuddles me up. We share a bag of chips and mushy peas. Club Love!

Post BG Thoughts

Two months on, I'm still unsure why I did it. I never quite figured out why I chose to do it in the first place. I certainly wouldn't consider myself a BG obsessive and certainly don't feel like I've had some sort of spiritual experience. I don't have any particular philosophical thought or feeling on why I did it. The only thing I can put my finger on is that the round gave me an opportunity to be off the leash for 24 hours and so it can only be my inner Stupid Dog which drove me forward – an ultimately pointless thing to do but it felt damn good doing it!

Advice

For any future aspirants, I took three pieces of advice into the round with me:

1. Do not rush Legs 1 & 2. Stick to the schedule.
2. Do not do Leg 2 in the dark. It's easy ground and the room for error is great.
3. Your body cannot consume more than 50-60grams of carbohydrate an hour. Eat and drink regularly and don't rely on big food stops.

Acknowledgments

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And finally, a huge thanks to Kate, Isobel and James for putting up with my erratic behaviour, my inability to focus on a conversation other than running and, most importantly, for trying hard to understand.

Paul Johnson

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