

My Bob Graham Round – Saturday 24th June
Luke Adams



**“2023 - This is it!
This is the year I am going to complete the Bob Graham Round.”**

66 miles
26,000 feet of elevation
42 peaks
All within 24 hours.

1. *Skiddaw 930m*
2. *Great Calva 690m*
3. *Blencathra 868m*
4. *Clough Head 726m*
5. *Great Dodd 857m*
6. *Watson's Dodd 789m*
7. *Stybarrow Dodd 844m*
8. *Raise 883m*
9. *White Side 863m*
10. *Helvellyn Lower Man 925m*
11. *Helvellyn 950m*
12. *Nethermost Pike 891m*
13. *Dollywaggon Pike 859m*
14. *Fairfield 873m*
15. *Seat Sandal 737m*
16. *Steel Fell 553m*
17. *Calf Crag 537m*
18. *Sergeant Man 736m*
19. *High Raise 762m*
20. *Thunacar Knott 723m*
21. *Harrison Stickle 736m*
22. *Pike of Stickle 708m*
23. *Rossett Pike 651m*
24. *Bowfell 903m*
25. *Esk Pike 885m*
26. *Great End 910m*
27. *Ill Crag 931m*
28. *Broad Crag 935m*
29. *Scafell Pike 978m*
30. *Scafell 964m*
31. *Yewbarrow 627m*
32. *Red Pike 826m*
33. *Steeple 819m*
34. *Pillar 892m*
35. *Kirk Fell 802m*
36. *Great Gable 899m*
37. *Green Gable 801m*
38. *Brandreth 715m*
39. *Grey Knotts 697m*
40. *Dale Head 753m*
41. *Hindscarth 727m*
42. *Robinson 737m*

“First done way back in 1932 by Bob Graham, hotelier of Keswick, Cumberland, at the age of 42, the 42 Peak Round has become a testing ground for the supremely fit. Each summer around 100 of the most highly tuned ultra-distance fell runners will attempt the 27,000 feet of ascent within the allotted 24 hours. Only one in three will return to the Keswick Moot Hall before the clock runs down.” – BobGrahamClub.org.uk

The Bob Graham Round is a unique challenge as there is no entry fee, you can choose when to do it, what time to set off and you can organise your own support team. This might sound ideal, but the logistics involved are huge and you really have to be on top of everything. E.g. navigating an unmarked route, having the correct food & drinks, as well as getting the support runners to the right place at the right time. All of this based on a time schedule that you decide on. The preparation is so important and you really feel the pressure of not wanting to let yourself or your team down – the logistics can be more stressful than the training itself!

After a few years of losing interest & love for road racing, I was getting out on the trails and fells a lot more and enjoying my running again. I've always loved the Lake District and fell running was really giving me a real buzz and drive. I had run different sections of the route over the years, supporting others, and I had been picking up hints and tips ready for eventually attempting it myself. I had supported my friend Peter Rooney on his attempt in 2022 and felt very inspired by his dedication to the training, whilst balancing family & work life. Peter was also a great help in the months leading to my round - I asked for his advice almost every week!

It was at the end of 2022 that I met David Shields at Penshaw Monument doing hill reps with his son. I'd seen him walking his dog regularly next to my home and it turned out he lived just round the corner from me. I asked him about his running and told him I was looking to do the Bob Graham Round. He said he'd be keen to help out and join in the training. From there we started doing a few training runs together around South Shields, then in the Cheviot Hills over the winter, before heading over for some big training days in the Lake District. We've become really good friends since then and he's been a fantastic training partner. We agreed to go for a joint attempt on a 22 hour schedule.

At the beginning of the 2023 I put together a training plan together using the knowledge I'd learned, tips I'd taken from others and I shared my plan with a few experienced runners to get their thoughts.

My plan was to...

- 1. Commit to the training for at least 6 months.* I knew it would take around 6 months to train my mind and body to achieve this and knew there'd be setbacks along the way fitting around family life and managing injuries/illness. I set my date for the weekend of the Summer Solstice which would give me the most daylight hours.
- 2. Get the right support team together.* I felt it was important to have at least one person who had completed the round on each leg so they knew the course and knew what to say & do when things got tough. I also asked my friend Michael Bunn to help with road support as I knew he'd be a great asset with his organisation, leadership and passion for running.
- 3. Practice all sections of the route at least twice, and aim to run consecutive legs in a day.* I tried to get over to do these recce runs at least twice per month. I did some solo runs on my own and quite a few with David and some of the support runners. We had some fantastic weather during these runs and I found them really helpful for being able to picture the route in my mind. I absolutely loved these days and made some fantastic memories!
- 4. Gradually build up to running/walking 10,000 feet of elevation per week by the end of May.* To get the elevation in, the hill sessions were usually up to a few hours long with between 20-60 repetitions on a particular hill. It was tough, but I learned to love it and I always felt it was good character building for when it got tough on the day. The hills were in South Shields & surrounding areas (North Marine Park grass bank, Marsden Old Quarry, Penshaw Monument, Hylton Dene). The majority of my runs and mileage were all on grass or trails & I rarely did any road running.
- 5. Regularly practise running/walking on boulders for stage 3 practice.* I used the sea defence boulders at Trow Quarry in South Shields when the tide was out. I'm not sure I'd encourage others to do this as it can be quite dangerous, but it was definitely helpful to me and my training. The aim was to build my confidence & efficiency across the boulders and condition my legs to deal with the varied movements.

The Week of the Run

I was lucky enough to stay at an apartment in the centre of Keswick which was owned by a friend's relative. Thanks Judith! I travelled over with my wife Emma and my 1 year old son, Finn. The plan was to arrive on the Wednesday, relax in the sun and go for some nice days out before setting off at midnight on Friday night. This did not go to plan at all! Finn was very unsettled all week and had a viral infection. All 3 of us barely got any sleep for 3 nights, which was very tough and meant I was already on the back foot going into a 24 hour challenge.

I tried my best to resist looking, but the weather forecast for the fells looked awful. Very poor visibility, strong 40mph winds & rain (The only thing that softened the blow was the warm humid air which made it a little more manageable, particularly on the night leg). I prepared my mind for a poor weather day in the fells with next to no visibility, but I knew I had a good experienced team around me to get me through it.

On the day of the round, I received a phone call from Keith Mackey, who has coached and advised me with my running since I was at school. His message was "Put it to bed, bonny lad. You might never get this opportunity again - being in the shape you're in, the team you've got around you, the age you're at & having a young family. Don't miss this opportunity and just get round the thing!" He has a real skill of knowing what to say at the right time to keep you motivated to push on and his message went through my head throughout the day.

The Support Team

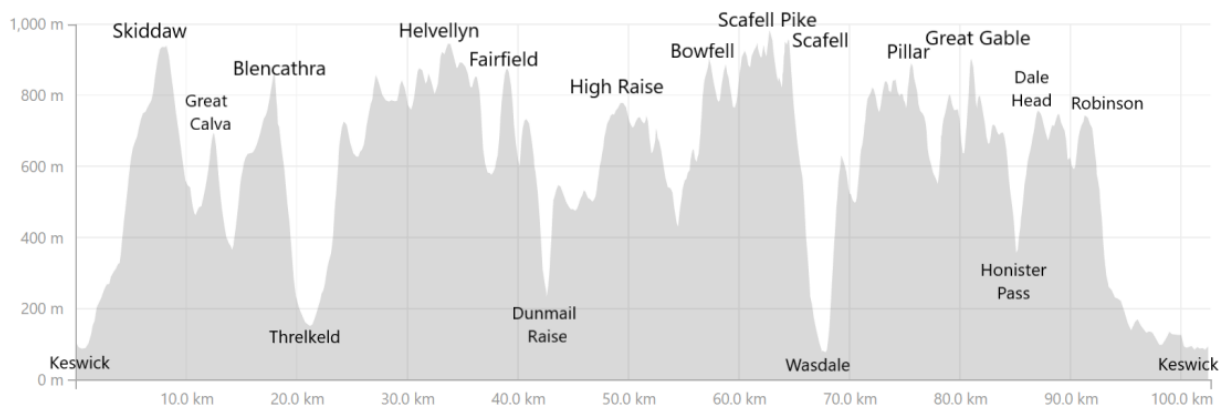
Leg 1 - John Butters & Jonny Malley

Leg 2 - Sarah Perry, Luke Kennedy & Dan Josephs

Leg 3 & 4 - Danny Grieves, Lawrence McCourt & Chris Barnard

Leg 5 - Lawrence McCourt, Mark Rutter & Karl Maguire

Road Support – Michael Bunn



Leg 1 – Midnight



David, John, Jonny, Me

1. Skiddaw 930m
2. Great Calva 690m
3. Blencathra 868m

We set off from Keswick Moot Hall on Leg 1 and the first 3 and a half hours seemed to go quite quickly without any hiccups, thanks to some solid navigation skills and good company from Jonny Malley & John Butters. I met Jonny at The Monthly Mile race that I organise and it was nice to finally meet John after reading his account & watching his video of his Bob Graham Round in 2019. Jonny & John regularly encouraged us to eat proper food on the early legs, whilst we still had an appetite. We had opted for sandwiches, pizza, bananas & flapjacks which seemed to go down well on our big training runs.

We descended down Doddick Fell after Blencathra, which was a good call given the wet conditions and darkness. I was very cautious on the descent and tried

not to take any risks. Sometimes during training runs or races you are tempted to take more risks and lose a little bit of control when running downhill, but I was keen to just play it safe on the day. It was a really nice feeling to get through the night leg and into 'some' daylight for leg 2.

Leg 2 – 3.44am

4. Clough Head 726m
5. Great Dodd 857m
6. Watson's Dodd 789m
7. Stybarrow Dodd 844m
8. Raise 883m
9. White Side 863m
10. Helvellyn Lower Man 925m
11. Helvellyn 950m
12. Nethermost Pike 891m
13. Dollywaggon Pike 859m
14. Fairfield 873m
15. Seat Sandal 737m

Leg 2 started off nicely chatting with Sarah, Luke & Dan who were also regularly checking if we'd ate and drank plenty. After the first climb on leg 2 it was obvious we were going to be in the cloud and that the forecast was looking correct. I remember climbing up Clough Head and mentally preparing myself for the start of a long day in the fells with poor weather and little visibility. I'd had some stunning days out on my training runs on the course and I tried to keep thinking of those.

“Stay positive. You can cope with this.”

It was during the second half of this stage when David started to drift back & look a little uncomfortable, and I was getting concerned for him. He'd mentioned in the weeks leading into it about having problems with his heels and I could see he wasn't moving well. I started to feel a little cold during this leg, and was keen to push on the pace to keep warm. We agreed that Luke would support me and Sarah & Dan would stick with David.

As I was coming off Dollywaggon Pike, I started to feel pain in my left knee which seemed to get worse on the descents. I was starting to panic that it might be over for me too! I felt great climbing, but any slight descent was

agony. Coming down from Fairfield was excruciatingly painful and I yelled in pain a number of times before stopping. I tried to massage around my knee and stretch out as well as attempting to use a buff to strap my knee up. Nothing was really working. I was really concerned at this point, but knew that I was nearly at the end of the leg and I just had to get down and get some treatment. From there, I knew I'd be climbing for a while on leg 3 and it's a lot of marshy, grassy ground. Hopefully the pain would go away.

"Just keep going" I said to myself.

Once I got down to Dunmail Raise, Michael taped my knee up, gave me a massage and I got some more food down me.

Unfortunately David had to retire on leg 2 due to the injury. I was really heartbroken for him as I know how much he'd trained for this and how much it meant, but I was glad to see him back down and safe.

Leg 3 – 8.06am

- 16. Steel Fell 553m*
- 17. Calf Crag 537m*
- 18. Sergeant Man 736m*
- 19. High Raise 762m*
- 20. Thunacar Knott 723m*
- 21. Harrison Stickle 736m*
- 22. Pike of Stickle 708m*
- 23. Rossett Pike 651m*
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The start of leg 3 was great with some good visibility for a few hours which really lifted my mood. My knee was feeling 'okay' and I felt like I was going well. I was joined by Danny, Lawrence & Chris and we ticked off Steel Fell, Calf Crag, Sergeant Man & High Raise before heading over to the Langdales. After this the cloud/clag started to become really bad and visibility was very limited

for the remainder of the leg all the way to Wasdale. The clag made this leg feel really strange as I had no concept of the time of day. I never looked at my watch at any point and just focused on following my pacers and trying to manoeuvre the boulders the best I could. The boulders were very wet and slippery from the rain and I felt like I had no grip. This really slowed me down during this section and I took a number of falls from Esk Pike through to Scafell. I was really low and frustrated during this period and just wanted to get off the leg as soon as possible. Miserable!

Leg 4 – 3.45pm



Lawrence, Me, Danny

- 31. Yewbarrow 627 m*
- 32. Red Pike 826 m*
- 33. Steeple 819 m*
- 34. Pillar 892 m)*
- 35. Kirk Fell 802 m*
- 36. Great Gable 899 m*
- 37. Green Gable 801 m*
- 38. Brandreth 715 m*
- 39. Grey Knotts 697m*

The descent at the end of Leg 3 down into Wasdale from Scafell was actually quite enjoyable, as we dropped below the cloud with views over Wastwater. However, once I reached the checkpoint I realised I was in a bad way. I felt like I had a temperature/headache coming on, I felt a little dazed and I was starting to feel sick. My appetite had gone too. I had nothing left! This section is commonly known as the “Graveyard of the Bob Graham Round”, as it's where most people quit. You descend all the way down into the Wasdale Valley from

the highest mountains in England & have another sharp, steep climb waiting for you up to Yewbarrow.

Danny and Lawrence were great and kept pushing on up the Yewbarrow climb. I had purposely chosen to have them with me on this section as I knew they would give me some tough love, tell me to get on with it and basically bully me round - which is exactly what they (gleefully) did. I took up to 20 steps at a time and then felt like I was going to be sick and had to stop. I repeated this cycle about 10 times before eventually sitting down and looking out over the lake for a moment. My energy levels were low and I was very fatigued.

"How the f*ck am I going to get out of here?" I thought.

Danny told me to get a can of coke & a gel down me and said something along the lines of "You're just bonking. It's totally normal to feel like this." It felt anything but normal but I was strangely reassured.

"Don't let this opportunity slip."

"You haven't spent all f*cking night & day in the clag to go home disappointed"

"It's just a bad spell. It'll pass"

"If you're going to quit, get to the top of Yewbarrow first."

"Buck up"

All of these thoughts went through my head at this stage and I just had to keep moving upwards and forwards, for as long as it took. As I got closer and closer to the top of Yewbarrow, I was surprised at how I started to feel strong and get my rhythm back again. I could see the top of Yewbarrow getting closer all of the time and pretty soon I had reached the top! GET IN!

I felt like I had beaten my bad spell and had survived it. From here on, leg 4 was easily my favourite leg and I felt like I was moving well and enjoying it. It was also nice to bump into Peter Rooney at the foot of Kirkfell with some water and he joined me back along to Honister. He was a calm and reassuring voice by my side with lots of positive feedback. I was feeling good!

Leg 5 – 7.32pm



40. Dale Head 753 m

41. Hindscarth 727 m

42. Robinson 737 m

I reached Honister Pass feeling in good spirits and knew I had this thing in the bag with plenty of time to go. It was nice to see David and his family at Honister supporting and cheering me on too. The weather had cleared up, there was some stunning views and all I needed to do was 3 more summits, descend Robinson safely and complete the final 6 mile road section into Keswick. The climbs on this leg were ok and I felt good, but by this point I was really struggling with descending and my knee pain started to creep on coming off Robinson.

I continued on to Little Town and decided to change into my (or rather, Danny's) road shoes. I asked Michael to tape up my knee again as it was causing me a lot of pain.

During this short stop, David tried to change my trainers over and I started to feel faint as I stood still. I told the support team I'm going to have to walk on NOW as my blood pressure is dropping. One road shoe on & one fell shoe on, I carried on down the road with a can of Redbull to try and pull myself round. Eventually I got the shoes changed and carried on walking down the road until I felt better. I took on some more gels/drinks & started to feel good again and began running, with the support team leading the way. It was great to have some local South Shields lads with me on the final leg to share the final run in with - Chris Muir, Mark Rutter & Karl Maguire.

I finally made it back to Keswick Moot Hall at 10.22pm with lots of cheering & it was so nice with to see my family, friends and training partners that had come out to see me finish. I had an overwhelming feeling of gratitude towards the amazing support team that had come over to help, some of whom I'd never even met before!

It's difficult to put into words, but I feel so thankful to have experienced the culture of the Bob Graham Round and I was delighted to finally become a member of the Sub 24 Hour Club with a successful round of 22 hours & 22 minutes.



A few of the support team at the finish. Chris, Mark, Me, Michael, David, Lawrence, Karl and Peter



With Emma & Finn



Robinson - the final summit



Climbing out of Wasdale up to Yewbarrow on a training run



Finishing in Keswick



Training run on Leg 3



Heading towards Great Gable on a training run (David in picture)



Luke Adams

June 23, 2023 at 11:44 PM · Allerdale, England

Bob Graham Round

22 hours.

Incredible! Thank you so much to my amazing support team ❤️

Read more...

Distance

67.14 mi

Elev Gain

26,089 ft

Achievements

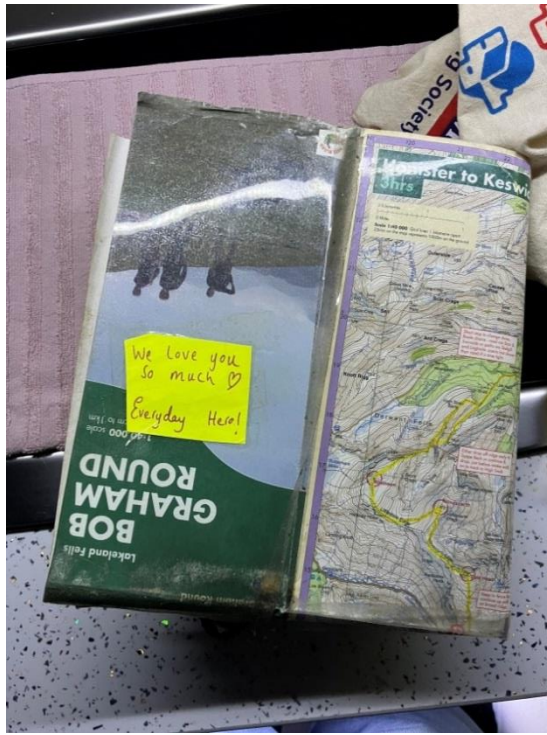
🏆🏆🏆 96



Congratulations, this activity is your longest run on Strava!



Strava Map



**Motivational message from Emma & Finn.
Thank you for everything!**