

The Legend

Number 213



A special edition to celebrate NGOC's Robert Finch completing the Bob Graham Round, a 24-hour fell-running challenge in the Lake District

North Gloucestershire Orienteering Club
November 2024

www.ngoc.org.uk



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The above shows the committee structure following the 2023 AGM

Front cover: Robert at the summit of the 42nd and final peak

Foreword by NGOC Chairman

Welcome to a special edition of Legend. NGOC's own Robert Finch completed the Bob Graham Round in August, a truly Herculean effort and pinnacle of hill-running achievements, and he has been kind enough to share his story.

Rob's account brings it all to life, the challenge itself, the preparation and what it feels like to make the attempt. It is also an account of teamwork; for a theoretically solo effort, a whole community of old friends and new friends come together to support each other. Please enjoy reading it and I am sure Rob would be only too happy to share his experiences further if it sounds tempting...

Ian Jones

You may also like to read: [*A Guide to the Hill Running 'Rounds' of Great Britain: The Six Iconic Challenges! \(msn.com\)*](#)

Rob's Bob - The Report

The Bob Graham Round is a 24-hour fell running challenge in the Lake District. The route takes in 42 mountains starting and finishing at Keswick Moot Hall. The challenge started as a goal to do as many mountains as possible within a 24-hour period. Bob Graham, a local hotelier, set out in 1932 to run over 42 mountains for his 42nd birthday. This feat wasn't repeated for 30 years and since then the Bob Graham Round has become the accepted long distance challenge route for fell runners. There is a Bob Graham Club which you can join if you successfully run the Round. Currently there are just under 3,000 people who have successfully done it.

Preparation and build up

I had been aware of the Bob Graham Round for about 15 years after reading the book "Feet in the Clouds" as a teenager. The book introduced me more widely to fell running, orienteering and Mountain Marathons which have all played a significant part of my life since reading it and being inspired. The Bob Graham was something I wanted to do but I wasn't sure if I could do it or how seriously I wanted to do it. In January 2023, I decided that I would like to increase my long runs and try to run an ultra-distance in the hills. My goal for 2023 was to do a mountainous 50km with half a view of stepping up to the Bob Graham after.

I actually worked with an ultra-coach for a couple of months which I found an interesting but not necessarily fully enjoyable experience. I never found an ultra-challenge or race that stood out or that I was really keen to do. So I never did do a 50km in 2023! Instead I did some orienteering, good running training, a number of mountain trips and had some great results at Mountain Marathons with Nick at the Saunders (2nd on the Kirkfell course, building on 5th in 2022) and with Rupert at the OMM (2nd on the Medium Score).



Leg 3 looking towards Bowfell, Great End and Great Gable mid November 2023. Hard not to be inspired with conditions like this!

In November 2023, my girlfriend Nicole was working at the Kendal Mountain Festival and I tagged along for the long weekend. I did a long run starting from Dunmail out towards the Langdales. There was a cloud inversion in the first half and conditions were great. I had planned to do an out and back but continued onto Bowfell and round to Scafell Pike and dropped down to Seathwaite on the Corridor Route. I then successfully hitched all the way back in one lift (thanks to some friendly Fix the Fells volunteers). If you're familiar with it, you'll know that the route is the majority of leg 3 of the Bob Graham. It is the hardest and roughest leg. I felt good and loved it. I was inspired. The run, the festival and seeing some friends cemented in my mind that I should give the Bob a go. I was feeling fit and running well. I had people out there to support me. We lived below Leckhampton Hill which is great for training. I called my main mountain man, John Horton, and informed him of my intent. I wasn't sure at this point if it would be a 2024 or 2025 attempt but I had decided to try and do it.

Over the next few months, I focused on getting myself fit with a solid base of training. I enjoyed racing the Birmingham and Gloucestershire X-Country Leagues. In particular, I enjoyed racing clubmate and friendly rival Harrison on a regular basis. In early March, I headed to the Lakes with four of my closest running friends as company. The weekend started in the snow with Harrison, then John and Nick arrived before Rupert joined for the last couple of days. I had nine days in the mountains and did some really significant recces. It was a massive week and I really felt I had to keep doing more when Rupert arrived at the end. I was really pleased to still be moving at 23-hour pace on the final day after so many days in the hills with low visibility, snow underfoot and strong wind.

In the nine days during that March trip, I had done 180km walking and running and over 11,000m of ascent and descent. A few friends mentioned I was ready now! I didn't feel ready but did now feel like I could commit and build to an attempt in 2024. I discussed plans and at this point set my date of the 16th August. Most people attempt the Bob around the longest day in June but I wanted more time to get some longer runs in.



March 2024 - reccing the end of leg 4 with John and Nick. Stunning snow conditions

From March I tried to increase the specificity of my training and tried to regularly hit the long runs. I knew weekend trips to the mountains would be key to get on relevant terrain and would be my focus. I planned to combine mountain weekends with normal weeks in Cheltenham of huge local volume with less pressure. Mid-April, I organised with John our annual Ordnance Survey Runners Fell Running weekend. We had another great group of beginners and experienced runners. Coincidentally (not at all, I was the organiser!), we went to the Lake District and so I was able to choose the routes and recce some more sections. Day 1 we ran the Newlands Horseshoe and divided into two groups halfway. I led a faster group and made sure to include the hill section of leg 5.

On the final day, we all headed up Skiddaw together from Bassenthwaite. We dropped down Bakestall and the others headed back to the village hall accommodation and home. I had decided I would continue on the Bob Graham route and see how far I could go. Most people's legs were pretty tired by this point but mine seemed to keep going. I developed one of my most significant mental strategies during this run. **“It is easier to choose to continue now, than it is to get back to this point and make the decision to continue”**.

I really wanted to do a double leg in training and to get to 40km or 50km or more. Descending Blencathra at the end of leg 1, I had two over four hour runs in my legs and was over four hours into this run. To get back here, I would have to travel home, wait weeks, get back to the Lakes, run for days, go again and then make the decision to continue. It was “easier” to make the decision now to continue onto leg 2 and the Helvellyn range. I continued all the way to Seat Sandal and then descended into Grasmere (my debut marathon in 9hrs 15mins, 47km and 3,500m). I felt tired but not broken and another key weekend ticked off.



April 2024. OS Runners group photo below Skiddaw on the last day before I continued solo

I had another weekend in the Lakes for the late May Bank Holiday where I recced four of the legs over four days. I then had a number of weddings in early June in the flatlands! I was complaining as it was affecting my training and I am not the world's biggest fan of wedding fun. I shifted my training around and did some mid-week three-hour runs and also some step machine sessions when away. Being dedicated with the training and getting it done when it was tricky, all builds up with the sacrifices you make and how much you want it. I was building my team through contacts developed through the OS Runners, the weekends I had organised and through orienteering. My support team would be key before and during the attempt to make it a success. I regularly told myself when I was struggling to get out of the door: **“Will you be able to look your supporters in the eye and say you have done everything you can to prepare for this?”**



May 2024 post run refuelling after running leg 5 with Niel & Matt. It wasn't all hard work!

Most of my local training has been on Leckhampton Hill. I am very grateful for how close I live to some good trail running with 200m of ascent from the front door. I would regularly run up the hill and visit my friend the Trig Point multiple times per week or even per day. I increased the specificity over time from shorter/mid length hill reps to longer reps at a lower intensity. Nearing the end of training, I was doing sessions like 4-5x10 minutes uphill with hiking poles, jog down recovery. I was able to average 2,500-3,000m ascent per week in Cheltenham and I did this for months.

I have also combined gym work with the local trail running and the more glamorous weekends away. From August 2023, I attended instructor-led gym sessions before switching to solo sessions in April 2024. I had never incorporated lifting weights previously so it was good to learn the techniques and safe ways of lifting. I tried to focus on squats, deadlifts, single leg work and building some more core and arm strength for using poles. I tried to do two sessions a week, never super big or heavy but consistent sessions with my running volume increasing around them. I can't say I really ever enjoyed the gym sessions but tried to trust that they would help.

If you're interested in what training I did, see my Strava or my Attackpoint training log. All of my training for the last 10 years has been logged on Attackpoint. Attackpoint is publicly viewable online but I mainly log everything for my own benefit and self-reflection. You can see the build-up and even more thoughts on every run I do here: [RHF's training log - Attackpoint](#)



Attackpoint: training hours by activity per month in the build-up. Green orienteeering, red running, blue biking, cyan stretching and strength work, white walking.

One of the key parts of the philosophy of the Bob Graham Club is that you help others and that they help you. At one of the weddings, friends Liv and Matthew said they were going to stay at their cottage in Penrith mid-June. They offered that we could stay with them (thank you!). This worked perfectly as we had not been decisive in making plans for my birthday and it allowed me an opportunity to support an attempt. I offered my services in one of the Bob Graham Facebook groups and arranged to meet Colin at the side of the road at 4:30am. I led Colin through leg 3 and did my best to bring together everything I had learnt of the route and how to get round. Unfortunately, I couldn't regain the time lost on leg 2 and eventually poor conditions on leg 4 stopped Colin's attempt.

On the descent of Scafell, we met two guys from London who would be attempting the Bob Graham a month later. I tentatively offered to help George and ended up helping on legs 1 and 2. This was a great rehearsal of my start time and running through the night and how that would feel. I used it as a full practice of my kit, pre-run nerves and food, what do you eat at 2am etc. One of



On the summit of Scafell Pike supporting Colin on leg 3



At the Moot Hall about to support George through the night on legs 1 and 2 with Jamie

my support crew, Jamie, also offered to help. Jamie did a great job leading leg 1 in really low visibility, bringing his experience of a successful Bob Graham in July 2023. I did not feel great the whole time but managed to keep going. Both of us were struggling to keep up with George at times.

We delivered George to Dunmail Raise exactly on schedule and he successfully continued for a sub-23-hour completion. It was great to witness him run up the high street and to be part of the post-run curry and celebration. I had a longer stop at Dunmail before continuing on leg 3 to Harrison Stickle. This was about halfway round the Bob Graham route before shuffle jogging down to Grasmere (another longest run, 13 hours, 62km and 4,500m ascent). The Bob was now appearing doable as I felt like I could have continued, especially if I had tapered before and wasn't carrying kit and food for two legs!

Between the two supporting shifts, Nick and I competed at the Saunders Lakeland Mountain Marathon. This is my favourite race and it is always great to race with a best mate. The Saunders was in the Far Eastern fells so there was no overlap with the Bob. I was just looking forward to two days in the hills. We both worked hard, with Nick having to work particularly hard. It was a bit unfair on him that I was almost in Bob Graham shape and he lives in the New Forest.

Overnight, we camped with a group of friends which included colleagues Niel and Jon, Sheffield runners Matt Pickering and Nan and some other orienteers. A number of them would be going on to support me in six weeks' time. The race went as well as I could have hoped and we finished first on the second longest Kirkfell course. The day after I recced leg 1 again and ran my fastest descent of Hall's Fell. It was a great suggestion from Nick to stay up in the Lakes a bit longer.

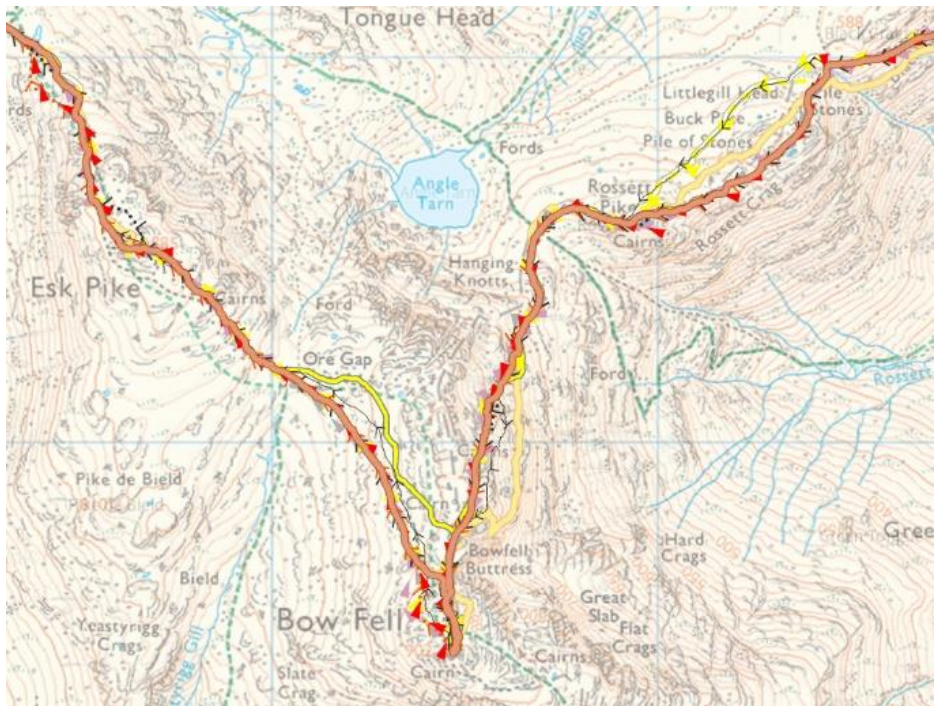


July 2024 after the start of the Saunders Lakeland Mountain Marathon with Nick

The organisation of the Bob and the logistics was starting to ramp up. As a Southerner, I do not live that near the mountains. I regularly enjoy long weekends in the hills but can't compete with locals for time in the mountains. **“I can't be the best fell runner, but I can be really good at the organisation”**. I have applied this to mountain marathons with a spreadsheet with all my kit weighed, analysed and planned my fuel (how many grams of carbs per item? How much per hour? etc) and I study maps and map geek before events.

I used some mapping software to bring in all my recce runs and the routes of a number of successful Bob Graham completions. I would study the lines that I took and compare them to the fastest lines. Could I have navigated better? What are the route choices? Which is the actual summit of this mountain? I learnt the route and also had a spreadsheet with a record of all of my splits between hills. It was useful to know that even though Yewbarrow is a horrendous climb, it will only take 50 minutes and

I had done it before. I spend a lot of time studying maps at work and for orienteering races. It was useful for me to visualise what the ground looks like, remember my recces but also think how it would feel.




The ascent of Bowfell - analysing routes and lines. The arrowed lines are other successful attempts and the solid lines are my recces.

To be a member of the Bob Graham Club you have to be witnessed at every mountain top. This means you need company for the entire round. I wanted to plan to have the capacity of a couple of people with me on every leg (in case of injury or last minute unavailability). I was incredibly grateful to receive so many offers of support. There was some consideration about who would fit best on which leg and what people's strengths and weaknesses were.

A number of my support runners were also making it a weekend with their partners so I had extra offers of help from them too.

I wanted more than that and thought it would be a great opportunity to raise some money for charity. I have a number of personal links to saving lives in the outdoors and mountain safety is something that I am very conscious of. I decided that raising money for the Keswick Mountain Rescue Team would be a logical fit. I wrote a bit more about my reasons why on my JustGiving page here: [JustGiving Page](#). I shared the JustGiving page and the donations and messages of support started coming in. That was a great boost as I easily beat my original target of £1,000.



Robert Finch

Robert's fundraiser for Keswick Mountain Rescue Team

JustGiving page for Keswick Mountain Rescue Team (screenshot taken after I finished, total still rising!)

Keswick Mountain Rescue Team

Verified by JustGiving

RCN 1165345

www.keswickmrt.org.uk

Everything was coming together as I had my final big training weeks and began a three-week taper down. The legs never felt great in the taper but I had done enough now to trust that they'd be okay. I was worried that I would be very stressed and anxious in the final week so made some plans on how I would cope with that. I had an appointment with a podiatrist to tidy up my feet and also had two sports massages to really loosen the legs up.

The final piece of the puzzle was the weather and it was the one thing we had no real control over. The forecasts in the final few days were luckily fine. We drove to the Lakes on the Thursday

and had a final day of sorting. We even took Mum out for a birthday Afternoon Tea which positively used up some time (I had a plain soup and bread). I was surprised how I wasn't actually that nervous. I guess I was just feeling ready to go and just wanted to begin. I was far more nervous supporting George a month earlier. Everyone arrived in the Lakes and it was time to head the 200m from our cottage to the Moot Hall steps.

Rob's Bob begins

Moot Hall steps 9pm 16th August.

*Roadside support by Nicole Frith, Matt Pillinger and Fran Pratt
Cheerleading by my parents Carolyn Finch and Peter Finch and
by Louise Avory*

Leg 1 - Keswick to Threlkeld

Supported by Matt Pickering and Nan Smart

My goal for leg 1 was "in control to the first control" which is an orienteering tactic. Basically don't mess up right at the beginning. Matt and Nan executed leg 1 perfectly. Matt is an orienteering friend and has helped on a number of successful Rounds (favouring the early dark legs). He was in the front leading the way and reassuring me that the pace was okay and to chill out. After the three-week taper, the legs felt fairly good up Skiddaw and I could've gone faster but Matt reigned us in. Nan was by my side the entire leg and was on hand with food and water and we just chatted the whole way. Nan is Matt's girlfriend whom I had only met once before at the Saunders MM this year. It was great to get to know her better and hear about the fun stuff they get up to based in Sheffield.



At the start and ready to head into the night with Matt and Nan

The summit of Skiddaw was very windy and we struggled to run in a straight line. As we dropped off towards Great Calva, the wind lessened as it became more sheltered. The leg passed by with the climb up Mungrisdale Common being its usual drag. The descent down Halls Fell was my fastest ever, grassy to the right to start with then accidentally onto the ridge before I found another grassy line to the right and then the usual cut through across to the left hand trod the rest of the way down. We sent Matt ahead with food and support point orders while we jogged in exactly on schedule. I had always planned to change my shoes and dry my feet after the river crossing. I enjoyed some homemade leek and potato soup and seeing my roadside support team of Nicole and Matt Pillinger (briefly) before heading up again.



Threlkeld car park with Matt and Nan handing over responsibilities to Ben and Matt

Leg 2 - Threlkeld to Dunmail Raise

Supported by Ben Grayson and Matt Lovesey

The change in support runners makes it easy to break the Bob down into its various legs and gives you new people to talk to. Both Ben and Matt live on the edge of the Lakes and know the Helvellyn range and leg 2 well. Matt is a climber and was based at OSHQ before moving to live in Kendal and has been on a number of our fell running weekends. Ben is a local fell runner whom I had met while up in April (a friend of friends) and he didn't hesitate to offer his support in my attempt. I really appreciated all of the offers of support but am particularly grateful for those who offered who didn't know me that well. Ben was one of the keenest people to be involved (for a 1am night shift) and he'd only met me once! This is part of what the Bob Graham and wider fell running community is all about.

The climb up Clough Head is a long steep drag. I tried to relax into it but as per usual did it faster than schedule (think the schedule calculator on the Bob Graham website is a bit off). After Great Dodd, the hills tick off quite quickly and it is more runnable. I gave my poles to my pacers and just focused on running. We had a few minor hesitations and off line moments in the dark with a "who is actually leading the navigation here?" kind of questioning. Nothing major but enough to refocus the mind.

A brief stop on Raise to sort shoes, food and wee then onto Helvellyn for the obligatory Trig photo. On Nethermost Pike we visited a few cairns and piles of rock as I always doubt which is the actual top. Down Dollywagon Pike is very steep so I did a bit of bum sliding to save the legs. A refill of water by Grizedale Tarn then up Fairfield.

Descending Fairfield I had a rare moment of being alone. Ben and Matt had stopped at the top to sort some stuff and I started down. I had a few moments like this on the round and it was strange to have no one around me. It took a while for Ben and

Matt to catch back up before the final ascent and descent into Dunmail Raise. Ben was sent ahead with four requests from the support point and entertained the team by only remembering three of them! I had requested a bacon sandwich for breakfast at the second road crossing. Unfortunately it didn't go down super well (like a lot of the more solid food this run) so I swallowed some more soup and continued onto leg 3.



Dawn breaking while ascending Seat Sandal at the end of leg 2

Leg 3 - Dunmail Raise to Wasdale

*Supported by Niel Strydom, Jamie Howe and Ben Grayson
(continuing)*

Mid leg support by Sara Tomassini

Leg 3 is the key leg of the Bob Graham. It's the longest leg which covers the highest ground, is the roughest and is at a key stage in the run. The first half is quite runnable with the second half around Scafell Pike quite rocky. The support team on leg 3 were

all current or former surveyors. Niel used to be in my team at the OS as a Field Surveyor but is now a Manager. Jamie used to be the Field Surveyor for the north Lakes before recently changing jobs. Ben is also a Surveyor but not for the OS! There was a bit of chat about surveying and our various jobs and I tended to just listen in. Jamie was leading at the front with Niel by my side looking after me.

At about 06:30, Ben started off on a monologue: *“Rise and shine. It's 6am and your hand can't make it to the alarm clock before the voices in your head start telling you that it's too early, too dark and too cold to get out of bed. Aching muscles lie still in rebellion, pretending not to hear your brain commanding them to move...”* There was more! It was so random but also so relevant to the training process we put ourselves through.



Start of leg 3 with the worst of the climb done with Ben and Jamie. The end of leg 2 in the background

Around the Langdale Pikes, I felt my lowest of the entire Round. This was the furthest I had been round the route after getting to Harrison Stickle mid-July. I had been going for 11 hours, I was feeling tired and I was struggling to take on food. I still had over 12 hours left and it felt an awful long way to go. I'm not sure fully what I did to get through it! The route to Rossett Pike has a good downhill to it and Niel offered me a story: "would you like to hear about the time I got shot?" What an offer to put all my self-inflicted suffering into perspective.

The climb up Bowfell is one of the steepest and least path-like and on the way up Niel told us all about the time he got shot. I was also remembering my mid-June support on this section when I almost lost my BG attempter and his other supporter in the clag. It was going far better today! I had lost a bit of time to a loo stop and a couple of minutes on the climbs but overall I was only 10-15 minutes down on schedule. I remember asking Jamie if this was something to worry about but he assured me that it was fine and we would gain it back later. Once up Bowfell, there's a lot of rocky ground but none of the climbs are horrendous. We overtook a lady attempting the Bob and I definitely felt like I was moving far better than she was (though she did go on to complete the Round).

We also had the bonus of seeing Sara (Niel's wife) at Esk Hause. Sara had walked in with water and some supplies and got a bit cold waiting for us. It was great to see another friendly face. Even if I was finding it hard, I couldn't even think of giving up as so many people were out supporting me. The others stopped to refill bottles and say hello but I just kept on moving forward up Great End.

Through the rocky lumps of Broad Crag and Ill Crag and up onto Scafell Pike - the highest point of the day. As per usual there were no views but loads of people! We'd barely passed a single walker until that point. We found our way down to Mickledore and the descents were starting to become a bit uncomfortable,

particularly in how I flexed my right knee. I love the section traversing under the cliffs into Lords Rake and then up the West Wall Traverse. I've never seen the view from there (probably for the best) but it really feels like you are in the mountains.



At the Wasdale support point being assisted by Nicole and Fran

Leg 4 - Wasdale to Honister

Supported by John Horton, Rupert Denny, Tim Morgan and Jamie and Niel (both continuing)

Mid leg support by Jane Morgan and Cat Reader

Reaching the Wasdale support point was one of the highlights of the whole day. There were so many great people there and a load of people I hadn't seen so far that weekend. It was such a boost seeing everyone and starting to feel like I might actually be able to do it. I knew people call this point the "Wasdale graveyard", that there is "no easy way out of Wasdale" and the next hill has affectionate names like "Yew-bastard".

Most unsuccessful rounds end here at Wasdale. I never considered stopping at Wasdale. My team for leg 4 was really strong and I knew that I was in safe hands to be looked after. I was really looking forward to running the next leg with John who has inspired me so much over the years, but in particular in doing the Bob Graham round. John ran the Bob Graham Round in 1996. The two of us have had multiple fell running and mountain weekends every year since 2017 and I consider John one of my best friends despite the 35-year age difference! I also had Rupert who is a really close friend from Cheltenham (and who I did the OMM with) and Tim who I know from Southampton Orienteering Club and who is a super experienced orienteer and hill runner now based in Scotland. I knew that if I was going to struggle on leg 4, then I trusted that John and the others would be able to get me through it.

The climb up Yewbarrow is long and steep but I just told myself it was ONLY 50 minutes of climbing. I could feel the boost of the Wasdale support point and I had more energy climbing Yewbarrow following the heels of Tim and Rupert. I gained time back straight away on the two long climbs at the start of the leg and didn't shed a tear on Red Pike. Out and back to Steeple while Jamie and Niel (continuing from leg 3) had a short rest and we continued round to Pillar, thankfully incident free.



Ascending Red Pike with Tim, John and Rupert on leg 4

The descent from Pillar seems to go on and on and I think I wasn't descending super smoothly. Jane had walked into Black Sail Pass with more water and food (though I think Tim and Rupert were carrying enough between them!) She spread a selection of food on the floor and I grabbed a KitKat Chunky for a treat. Jane then joined us round Kirkfell and Great Gable, bagging a couple of Wainwrights on her "since moving to the Lakes" Wainwright round.

It did feel ridiculous having six support runners with me but ultimately it was just such a positive experience. I enjoyed listening to everyone catch up and get to know each other. I chatted a bit but a lot of time was just listening to multiple conversations. The top of Great Gable was in the clag and the climb seemed to go on with a few false summits. Jane said goodbye on Great Gable and descended back to her car in Wasdale.

We took a better descent off Great Gable than I have previously and passed a couple of other Bob Graham runners. We met Cat on the summit of Green Gable and after that it is almost downhill all the way into Honister. Unfortunately, Cat took a tumble and banged her knee on a rock so didn't get to run much with us. This is the only injury that I am aware of. I couldn't really check she was okay and basically had to keep going!

Descending into Honister, I sent Tim ahead with the support point requests. I also said I wanted a faster changeover than the schedule. I knew that I was roughly back on schedule but was feeling good/okay enough so wanted to keep moving and see what time I could do. I had scheduled a 10-minute stop at Honister but we only took four minutes. I didn't sit down. I just leant against the car and ate some more soup. It was great to see my parents and Louise (John's wife) who had come out to support me.



A conga line of Bob Graham support runners ascending Kirkfell

Leg 5 - Honister to Keswick

Supported by Nicole Frith, Matt Pillinger, Fran Prat and Rupert and Tim (both continuing)

I hoped leg 5 would be the “party leg” and it was. Rupert and Tim continued from running leg 4 and I was also joined by my entire Road Support Crew. In all the planning, we weren’t sure exactly who would do leg 5 as it depended a bit on how I was going and the weather conditions. It turned out that I was feeling fairly good (all things considered) and the weather was fine. This meant Fran (who specialises in multi-day long distance running) and my road specialists could join in (notably Matt who loves tarmac as much as I love the trails).

I was also really grateful that Nicole could run the final leg with me. Nicole has been a massive support in my running throughout our relationship but in particular in the build up to this run. The amount of hours we have thought and talked about this one run is a lot. I really wanted Nicole to be there on the final hill Robinson. The first time I took Nicole to the Lake District in 2019 we walked the Newlands Horseshoe on the first day. The second half of the horseshoe is the same as leg 5 so Dale Head, Hindscarth and Robinson were our 4th, 5th and 6th Wainwrights together! Nicole has since done 130 of the 214 Wainwrights and now also loves the Lakes like I do.

The Dale Head climb is the last major climb of the Round. It is fairly gradual so not too bad. Once again, it was nice to catch up with the new support runners and hear how our respective previous 20 hours had gone! It was good to hear how smoothly the Road Support had gone and to hear stories from their perspective. I had to have another loo stop descending Hindscarth which I could’ve really done without. It’s not that fun stopping to crouch on the hill side after that much running.



Descending Hindscath (peak number 41) with Fran, Matt, Nicole and Rupert

Reaching the summit of Robinson felt pretty momentous. I thought we'd get a group photo but I celebrated by the cairn and then think I was so focused on getting to the end, I just kept running. We successfully negotiated the last rocky down scramble and the steep grass bank and then it was all runnable ground to go. I was quietly pleased that after 21 hours of running I was still faster than some of the group descending!

Niel and Jamie had driven my car round to Chapel Bridge and Fran stopped there skipping the boring road section. I changed into road shoes, ran 50m before starting walking uphill again. The road did drag a bit but I knew it was almost done. The support crew kept the motivation and energy high. I was now feeling confident that I would get under 23 hours but wasn't sure by how much. Matt kept us informed of how far was left, including stats like less than a parkrun to go! I probably would've preferred to be even closer at that point...



Celebrating on the 42nd and final peak – “Robinson”

I was channelling all the races I've ever done at this point and could feel myself building to the finish and speeding up. I walked the final tiny rises and then running through Portinscale and across the fields I was upping the pace. I think I surprised my supporters by how much energy I had left. I didn't drop them on the flat but they did seem at least to be working!



The final effort up the Keswick High Street to reach the Moot Hall steps.

We crossed the roundabout okay and up the lower section of the High Street was a bit chaotic with pedestrians blocking the pavement and cars coming. I didn't really want to slow down in any way. Then onto the High Street and there were loads of people. I couldn't decide which way to run through the crowds to reach the Moot Hall steps. Lots of cheering and clapping and someone was ringing a bell! I touched the lower door where I had started and stopped the clock. 22 hours 46 mins and 41 seconds.



By the Moot Hall steps at the end with my amazing Rob's Bob support team (missing Matt Lovesey)

I had done it. I then headed up to the top of the steps (which I had been saving for when I completed the Bob) and looked out over the crowd! The Round (the pub next door) brought out their celebratory pint. I drank more than I expected before sharing it with my team. I had visions of being collapsed at the bottom of the steps with my head in my hands but I was able to stand up

okay. I tried to take the time to thank everyone individually for their support.

I wanted to sit down so after a bit I slipped off and headed back to the cottage. We invited everyone back to ours for a big batch of veggie chilli and drinks for a celebration. It was really great to have the whole team together and share stories of the day. It was such a positive experience having everyone supporting you for your goal. I will always be so grateful to everyone who helped me complete the Bob Graham but also everyone who supported me in the build up. I had a team of 18 people help me over the weekend and everyone did exactly what was asked and needed of them.

We have also raised a considerable amount of money for Keswick Mountain Rescue Team. My original goal was £500-£1,000 and at the time of writing I am at a massive £2,750. I'll leave the page open a little bit longer if you haven't donated and now feel inspired to. My JustGiving link is: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/robs-bob-keswick-mrt> I hope Keswick Mountain Rescue Team can put money to good use. I also hope that I and my friends will never need them on our adventures! As I am sure there will be more adventures for us all.

Post Bob reflections

I had a clear vision of what I wanted my Bob Graham attempt to look like and I spent a lot of time planning it. There were a couple of unknowns: the weather, random bad luck and running far longer than I had ever run before. The one thing I couldn't plan for was the weather and we were lucky. Very lucky. The weather was perfect for a long run. Not too hot, not too cold, some wind, some low cloud and barely a drop of rain. I put on my rain coat a few times but within minutes the threat of rain had passed and I took it off again.

I had no random bad luck during the run (no twisted ankles, broken kit, last minute issues with supporters etc). I am pleased with how I had prepared myself for the challenge. My body coped better than I could have hoped. It was hard work and I had a few niggles but nothing major. I struggled a bit with fuelling on the day. In training I never had any issues taking on fuel when moving but my stomach was a bit unhappy for quite a lot of time on the day. Overall though I must have got enough food down and didn't get to a stage of really struggling.



Post Bob Graham refuelling and celebrating with everyone back at the cottage

I always planned to take a couple of weeks of rest and recovery with no pressure to do anything. I actually felt better than I expected in the days following the run. For example, I didn't need help getting dressed and I also didn't shit myself! So pretty positive overall. I walked to Derwent Water a couple of times before we left the Lakes and had a few moments to reflect. A few nice meals and treats to celebrate.

I've done a few short runs since, volunteered at parkrun and am looking forward to going orienteering again. With less running I've had a lot of time to think and already my mind is searching for what is next. This has been the first time I have trained really hard and specifically for a big goal and I have really enjoyed the process.

Part of me still cannot believe I have actually done it. My experiences in the mountains are so different from my day-to-day life. I often feel like they may not have even happened. Fortunately, there are so many great photos recording the day and I have enjoyed looking back at them and reading the messages of support. I have seen so many photos of other people undertaking Bob Graham Rounds and now I am the person that is in the photos. There is the start photo looking fresh with head torches ready, the weary photo sat down at the roadside, some sunrise and sweeping mountain views, the tired but happy runner at the end but best of all there is the group photo by the Moot Hall with the whole team. I will treasure that photo my entire life.

I spent a lot of time running up and down Leckhampton hill on my own in training. But when I think of my Bob Graham, I will always think of my team and the sheer gratitude I have for sharing it with all of them. It is sad to think that I may not have another day as good or like it ever again. However, I do know that if any of my Team want to run the Bob Graham, I will be one of the first to volunteer to help them.

Rob Finch