

## Mike Quinn - Frog Graham Round 8<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Three years ago I completed the Bob Graham Round (BGR) on my 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday. It was the hardest thing I have ever done by some way. I had to push myself well beyond anything I had previously done and it took a lot out of me. Consequently, it took me a long time to recover afterwards. Physically I was ruined. I could barely walk for a couple of days and didn't run again for a couple of weeks. Mentally was possibly even tougher. For ten years I had focused on this day and trained, gone through recces, memorised schedules and generally absorbed myself in being ready for the big day and completing the round. Now, suddenly, this was in the past and I felt a bit lost. When I was asked what was next I wasn't sure. For some fell runners the BGR is the first step on the way to bigger challenges. They go onto winter rounds, double rounds, Paddy Buckley, Charlie Ramsey etc. Not me. I knew I definitely did not want to do anything as hard as the BGR again!

I can't remember exactly when I first heard about the Frog Graham Round (FGR) but it was probably during the BGR preparation. The FRA Forum had a thread about it and I bought Peter Hayes' book "Swimhiking in the Lake District and North East England" after reading about it on there. Peter completed the inaugural round in 2005 creating the route in the process and offering certificates to anyone else who could complete it although he didn't think that it was likely that any certificates would be needed! The route covers about 40 miles with 15,000 feet of climbing including 18 summits and swimming across 4 lakes. It is a great route linking up some classic fell terrain with four lakes and shares the same start and finish as the BGR, the Moot Hall in Keswick. I felt I could complete it all in daylight which appealed massively.

During lockdown I had started to think about a new challenge and was considering the FGR for 2021. I thought by then I would have a chance to regain some fitness which was massively lower than 3 years ago after consistently over eating and under training. It was quite a surprise at our club training run on 23<sup>rd</sup> June when Paul Williams announced he was having a go at the FGR in August with Patrick Wallis and asked me if I wanted to do it too as he had noticed I had been open water swimming with my daughters during lockdown. My initial reaction was that I would love to but it would be too soon. I had done my first hilly run for a few months just 10 days before this and was ruined after "only" 10 miles and 3000 feet of climbing. Even at my peak fitness I would have been very wary of getting into a round with two runners who are much faster than myself and made sure they were aware of my limitations. They were both very supportive and said they just wanted a nice day out and would quite happily wait for me.

I didn't commit straight away as I wanted to be more aware of what I was getting myself into. On 12<sup>th</sup> July I took Sophie and Lucy on the Tadpole round, a smaller version of the FGR for children and beginners which we all loved. This included swimming across Crummock Water and Buttermere using the same entry and exit points as the FGR. With more confidence on the swimming part I was lucky enough to be able to recce the whole route by myself in two long days on 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July and could feel my fitness rapidly improving with each outing. From my recces and from reading previous reports I had managed to create a rough schedule which involved setting off at 4am and getting to Derwent Water at 7pm. This would leave us with 2 hours of daylight to swim across Derwent Water and a decent margin for going slower than this

scheduled pace. I didn't fancy swimming Derwent Water in the dark or even worse having to give up so close to the finish. I still decided to hedge my bets and, after checking with Paul and Patrick, asked around to see if anyone would like to join us. My reasoning was that if Paul and Patrick got fed up of waiting for me I would still have some company! Support duly came on all four legs although Richard Clark had to pull out of Leg 1 last minute after severing his finger on a lawn mower the day before. He was rushing to get his chores done so he got across to the Lake District and join us. Most of these friends were familiar with supporting on BGR rounds and were quite surprised that they didn't have to navigate for us or carry anything! The spirit of the FGR is that contenders should be as self-sufficient as possible. For us that meant carrying all our food and gear including wetsuits.

On Friday evening, the day before we started, we had dinner at Paul's Dad's house in Portinscale and tried to get a few hours sleep in a tent in the back garden. All too soon it was 3am and we were up and getting ready to walk the mile or so to Keswick. As we walked up the main street in the dark to the Moot Hall we could see there were already a couple of groups waiting there. At 4am in the morning it could only be one of two things. "Bob or Frog?" was the question we all asked each other. Four people were part of a "19.45 ish" BGR and another couple were there also attempting the FGR. We had cut it pretty fine so after a brief chat we all set off together. The BGR group went off quickest but rather amusingly missed the left turn up to the bridge into Fitz Park. They caught us up in the park and were soon out of sight. The FGR couple passed us too not long after Spooney Bridge using a bright head torch but we managed fine without one. We had decided against taking a head torch as we would only need it for about 30 minutes and would then have to carry it. We noticed that the couple didn't seem to be carrying as much kit as we were which helped me to justify our slower pace!

As we passed Latrigg car park there was a lovely cloud formation rising out of the valley between Latrigg and Lonscale Fell. It was already warm so we took our tops off to avoid over heating so early on. The climb up Jenkin Hill seemed easy enough and we could see the sun rise as we reached the plateau, feeling very lucky to be up here at such a time. As we neared the summit I put my top back on as my hands were getting cold. We met the couple again at the cairn which marks the descent to Carl Side so they weren't too far ahead.

We reached Skiddaw summit bang on schedule (96 minutes) which was a big relief for me. We looked at the views for a while and Paul eventually managed to take a photo after having a problem with his phone. It was nice to feel relaxed and not having to rush. On the long descent Paul took us down a trod which he had recced cutting the corner off to White Stones and we overtook the couple without actually passing them just before entering Dodd Wood. It's always gives you a boost when a short cut works! A couple of very easy downhill miles brought us to St Bega's church which we made a point of touching as per instructions from the club secretary, Martyn Price. Apparently a few contenders are not touching it but they must pass within a few metres of it to get to the lake. Paul took a photo to ensure we weren't denied membership on this technicality. We were about 10 minutes ahead of my schedule here so it was a fairly relaxed change into wetsuits with the usual errors from lack of practice like leaving goggles in dry bags etc. Errors that are amusing when it happens to some-one else but less so when you make them!



Paul and Patrick topless on top of Skiddaw at 5:30am.

On the swim across Bassenthwaite I was pleasantly surprised to find that I wasn't the slowest at everything! Paul and I were swimming at a similar speed with Patrick not too far behind. We started swimming at about 6:30am. The water felt warm, there was mist at the southern end of the lake and it felt just right being in the middle of a lake enjoying the views. We got out at a shingly beach where a couple of fishermen were setting up and changed out of our wetsuits.



Bassenthwaite Lake with early morning mist.

I started to eat my first lot of pizza while changing. I had brought much more food than Paul and Patrick (2 whole pizzas cut up into 3 lots for after each of the first 3 swims, 4 bananas which I ate before each swim to try to avoid cramp, 4 Bountys, 2 bags of wine gums, 18 salt tablets (1 every hour) and 1 bag of chocolate raisins for emergency use). I was expecting to see Nick Ray and Peter Kemp waiting for us at the shoreline but we were a bit ahead of schedule. They appeared by the wall before I'd finished getting changed and we set off up the track then the road towards Barf. It was nice to see friends that I hadn't seen for over a year now and the conversation flowed easily.

On the road Fiona Brannen and Max Wilkinson appeared so there was quite a big group of us heading up the steep track by Beckstones Gill to Barf. We stopped to wash out our wetsuits and other swimming gear in Beckstones Gill to avoid contaminating Crummock Water and Buttermere (two of the three "pristine" lakes still to be found in the Lake District (Wast Water is the third)) with New Zealand pygmy weed which can be found in Bassenthwaite. This is a key requirement for the FGR with two wetsuits recommended but we only had one each so had to rinse them out. I also had a good drink here but didn't fill my water bottle as we cross back over the same gill again further up.



Rinsing out our wetsuits in Beckstones Gill.

I noticed that I was falling behind a bit on the road and also the climb up to Barf but wasn't too concerned as we were ahead of my schedule and there was plenty of support so that we could split up if Paul and Patrick wanted to go ahead. Again we stopped at the summit to take in the view and it felt pretty relaxed which was just the way I was hoping it would be. I mentioned about splitting up to Paul and Patrick but they were adamant they were going to wait for me. This was the first of many times they had to field this question!

It was turning out to be a perfect day weather wise as the photos show. There was barely a cloud in the sky and the temperature was perfect. If anything it was too perfect which isn't a complaint you often hear in the Lake District! I was trying to make sure I drank plenty of water and that I remembered my salt tablets.



Barf summit.

For about the only time all day I led the way for a couple of minutes from Barf to Lord's Seat by leaving the summit first. Nick kept sprinting ahead and taking photos which I wasn't expecting. Other people also took photos throughout the day and they have helped to create a great memory. The photos show how perfect the weather was and capture the mood perfectly. It was a long day out on the fells with friends. We just happened to be completing the FGR along the way. There was certainly no pressure of having to keep to a certain speed other my own schedule which we were comfortably ahead of. From Barf the next two summits are passed quickly. Lord's Seat only takes about 15 minutes to get to and Ullister Hill is about another 10 minutes on.



On the way to Lord's Seat.

We didn't really stop at Lord's Seat summit carrying straight on down into Whinlatter Forest. Everyone was moving well and spirits were high.



Dropping off Lord's Seat.

We made sure we didn't miss out Ullister Hill, one of the lesser known summits on the round. The boggy trod across to its summit is getting wider and wider as people try to follow it without getting their feet wet. At the summit we took a different trod to the one I was expecting but Nick and Peter are very familiar with this area and I had no hesitation following them. Not surprisingly it was slightly quicker than the way I would have gone. For the descent through Whinlatter Forest we followed the main tracks most of the way and then a direct route known only to locals which brought us through an outdoor play area and the main car park. This was about the only section that we didn't follow the suggested route on the excellent Harvey's Frog Graham Round map.



Descending through Whinlatter Forest.

After crossing the road we followed the wide, gently graded forestry tracks to take us onto the Grisedale Grind. We had a drink and refilled our water bottles at Sanderson Gill just after the bridge over it. It was starting to feel very warm now even though it was before 9am and I wasn't looking forward to this climb after finding it long, tough and steep when I recced it. However, it was over soon enough with plenty of conversation to distract me from the exertion and my estimated split time of 75 minutes was way too long. This was one of the few sections I didn't have a precise time for from my recces due to backtracking and checking out different options in Whinlatter forest after not liking the path suggested on the FGR map.

Martin Perry caught us up on this climb and it was nice to see another person who I hadn't seen since lockdown and be able to catch up with them. I think it was Fiona that had mentioned that Martin was planning to meet up with us at some point on the round and it gave me another little boost to see him. There was now quite a few of my BGR supporters out which brought back great memories especially as I was in a much better way then when I saw them during the BGR! The summit seemed to come much sooner and more easily than I expected which was great news. It was now about 9am and the first 5 hours had gone very smoothly.



Grisedale Grind. Skiddaw in the background.

As a result of my over estimation we were about 30 minutes ahead of schedule at the summit of Grisedale Pike. A couple of mountain bikers had also had an early start and presumably had pushed their bikes up to the summit. It is way too steep to ride up. I'm not sure which way they were heading down but I wouldn't have fancied any of them!



Grisedale Pike summit.

It was a nice feeling to be ahead of my schedule to get to Derwent Water with plenty of daylight left and I was able to stay relaxed over Hobcarton Crag and onto Hopegill Head even though I was falling behind the others. Having friends with us definitely helped me here as Paul and Patrick could go ahead at their pace and yet none of us were left alone.



On the climb to Hopegill Head. Hobcarton Crag in the background.





Hopegill Head summit.

From Hopegill Head we had the easy job of getting to Sand Hill which is a comfortable three (yes 3!) minutes. I'm not sure why this top is included as a checkpoint on the round as the quickest way to Eel Crag, the next checkpoint, lies along the path goes over this anyway. Still, it's nice to tick off another check point so easily! From here we diverted slightly to Liza Beck at Coledale Hause to have another big drink and fill up our water bottles.



Approaching Liza Beck at Coledale Hause.

The climb up Eel Crag seemed to go quickly following the Coledale Horseshoe race route and I had a chat with Martin before he headed back to his car. The others were still moving quicker than I was but I wasn't too concerned as I was eating and drinking well and generally feeling fine. It didn't feel like we had been going for 6 hours.



Approaching Eel Crag summit. Hopegill Head and Grisedale Pike in the background.



And again nearer the summit.

At the summit we were still 30 minutes ahead of schedule and spirits were high. It was getting warm but not too warm as it was still only 10am.



Eel Crag summit.

The next top of Wandope requires hardly any climbing and there are good views eastwards from the path which runs along the edge of the plateau. This was a very enjoyable 8 minutes or so. From the airy summit the next part of the round is in view along with a lot of the fells on the BGR.



Wandope summit.

Paul and Patrick nearly made the mistake I did on my recce by heading off too far south and descending the flank to the east of Third Gill not Whiteless Edge and I was pleased to be able to keep them right. Peter said his goodbyes on the way over to Whiteless Pike to head back over to Beck Wythop where he had parked up.



Whiteless Pike summit

From Whiteless Pike summit Nick led us down the east flank away from the main path. This was steep but much nicer underfoot and we rejoined the main path where it flattened out. Another few good lines and Nick was saying goodbye as he headed down Rannerdale to his car while we continued over to the summit of Rannerdale Knotts. From here it is a steep descent down to Crummock Water and decision time over whether to wear a wetsuit or not. Paul was going skins and Patrick was wearing his wetsuit so I couldn't just copy as I was hoping to! At some point between Bassenthwaite and Crummock I had managed to snap one of my elastic laces and had to do a repair job which gave me a bit of time to make a decision.

It was quite busy at the Crummock Water entry point with people swimming, going out in a boat or just milling around. I found a spot to sit down and ate a banana while I tried to fix my shoe lace. This took a bit longer than expected and Paul was soon swimming across. Patrick set off after another few minutes and when I was finally ready to swim they both seemed a long way out so I decided to stuff my wetsuit in my dry-bag to save time. Luckily for me the water was quite warm as I didn't realise how much slower I would be without a wetsuit on. Patrick nearly caught Paul up on the swim which shows how much benefit a wetsuit can give to weaker swimmers like myself. I didn't feel like I was doing anything different but the swim seemed to take forever. Thankfully this gave me a good time to cool down as I had been pretty hot on the hills. I kept drifting over to the left and couldn't work out why this was. I kept remembering that Martyn Price had wrote about how he had got really cold doing the same thing on his round and was in a very bad way by the time he got out. I was relieved to find that while I was cooling down I wasn't getting cold or going numb.



Crummock Water entry near Hause Point.



Arriving at Low Ling Crag.

Eventually I arrived at Low Ling Crag to see Andy Hyde grinning down at me. Apparently I'd missed a couple of female swimmers completely strip off. I don't think Patrick was joking about this! After a quick transition we set off on my least favourite part of the round.



Paul and Patrick waiting for me (out of sight!) on Melbreak.

I think it might be because of the lack of a path but I really don't like the climb up the steep, southern face of Melbreak and I really struggled on this. It didn't help that Andy, Paul and Patrick all seemed to fly up here and made me feel even slower than I really was. It reminded me a bit of the Esk Valley Tuesday night training runs where the others wait for the slowest person then as soon as they arrive say "Tea break over" and shoot off again. Patrick very graciously told me to have a sit down on one occasion which I was very grateful for. I'm not sure if it was general tiredness or if the swim across Crummock without a wetsuit took more out of me but I had to stop more than a couple of times. I was very happy to reach the summit plateau and be able to walk on an easier gradient up to the summit.

Heading off Melbreak Paul tripped on a metal stake which was barely visible above the ground. Luckily it wasn't serious and it gave me another excuse to stop! We were soon on our way again heading down to the waterfall at Scale Force where Fiona and Max met up with us again. On the way up to Red Pike I stopped at Scale Beck to get some last water before Buttermere. When I looked up everyone else had pulled ahead and I was very grateful to Max who both noticed this and came back to walk with me. I was starting to tire more rapidly than the others and it was nice to have the company to distract me from this. In complete contrast to Melbreak I really enjoy the climb up to Red Pike as it is relatively easy walking and the path follows the edge of the escarpment for quite a long stretch of it (see photo below). I hadn't met Max before today but the conversation flowed easily which made the climb go by quickly. I recall spending a lot of it encouraging him to swim in Buttermere and do the FGR himself!



On the way to Red Pike.



The last part of the climb to Red Pike.

At the summit of Red Pike there was a paraglider who looked like he was getting his gear off so he could hike down. We couldn't believe he would do this and later saw him gliding round the lower crags of High Stile. Apparently there was a paragliding competition that day with checkpoints very similar to those on the FGR.



Red Pike summit.



I was in good spirits again at the summit of Red Pike. It is not far to High Stile, I enjoy the technical descent down to Buttermere and I was really hot and couldn't wait to get into the lake to cool down. The others pulled ahead again and we got the maps out to make sure we got the right summit. High Stile has two points marked on the map at 806m and 807m respectively. It is the slightly lower top that is the check[point on the FGR and is slightly off to the left of the main path. The 807m top is passed by on the way to the ridge and the descent. I've read about some faster routes than the main path off High Stile but we stuck to the path and made reasonable progress down here. We weren't going for any records, had plenty of daylight left and gaining a few minutes just wasn't needed.



Heading off High Stile. Note that a lot of leg 2 plus Skiddaw from leg 1 can be seen in the distance.

I started getting twinges of cramp on the descent down to Buttermere. Fiona encouraged me to stop and eat some food so I got some pizza down which seemed to help. I didn't like the thought of eating this before the swim as in my head my pizza was for after each swim but it made sense and did seem to help. At the lake I had a banana as planned too. Five of us ended up swimming across. I'd managed to convince Max it was a good idea. He and Andy stripped off their tops and dived straight in. They seemed to thoroughly enjoy it from the noise they were making! Paul wasn't too far behind them opting not to wear a wetsuit again. I also went skins while Patrick put on his wetsuit. Patrick and I swam across together stopping about half way to take in the view from the middle of the lake which has to be one of the best on the whole round. I was in no rush for this swim to end. The water temperature was perfect and it felt really nice to cool down. This was probably one of the highlights of the whole round.



Exiting Buttermere.

At Buttermere I was really happy as we were still ahead of schedule and well on track to get to Derwent Water with plenty of daylight left. It was at this point (similar to Honister on the BGR) that I started to think we had already done it and switched off a little. Big mistake (again).



Paul at Buttermere.

There was a bit of a party atmosphere at the shore and we were all in good spirits as Patrick demonstrates in this photo below. I had hoped to see Elaine, Sophie and Lucy here but their plans had changed so I would have to wait until Derwent Water to see them.



Patrick at Buttermere.

After taking photos, chatting, eating, getting changed and generally wasting at least 10 to 15 minutes at the shore of Buttermere we got going again. Max and Fiona said their goodbyes and Claire and Kevin joined up with us for the last leg. We filled our bottles from Hassnesshow Beck just before crossing the road and starting the long slog up Robinson.

It was really warm now and Robinson in the heat was steep and tough. Paul, Patrick and Claire easily pulled ahead leaving Kevin to the difficult task of keeping me going. Kevin did a great job of keeping an extremely one-sided conversation flowing. I was struggling and not saying much while he talked about all manner of different topics.



Having a breather on the way up Robinson.

As the slopes finally eased two young lads came speeding past us checking their watches and delightedly informed us they had done about 50km. They didn't ask us how far we had gone! I still congratulated them. It was a relief to climb the fence near the top and enjoy a relatively gentle walk to reach the summit of Robinson. The two young lads overtook us once again having made a navigation error by heading off to Dale Head which made me smile. They were still checking their watches to see how much their distance had increased.



Heading off Robinson.

Coming off Robinson I tried to jog and keep up with Paul and Patrick but it just wasn't happening. I started to feel twinges of cramp again. This always seems to be my problem on long runs. Walking is fine but as soon as I begin to run I overheat, start to sweat and cramp up. I was ready for the steep climb up Littledale Edge. On my recce I thought it was an easy level path over to Dale Head but the climb up here took me by surprise. Expecting the climb didn't make it any easier though and I was finding it hard to keep going. If it hadn't been the last leg I would have found it much harder to keep moving.



Dale Head summit.

A welcome breeze picked up as we neared Dale Head Summit and after a photo we set off down to Dale Head Tarn. I was struggling to eat now and had to force some chocolate raisins down with a drink of water. I knew this was a bad sign especially with the last swim to come. The stream out of Dale Head Tarn is the last water source before the finish so I made sure I had a good drink as well as filling my bottle up. High Spy came and went without too much difficulty but I was still struggling to run after the summit. This was really frustrating because it should be a really fast descent to Hause Gate along easy gradients. It was along here that Paul and Patrick finally cracked and said they would go ahead to Derwent Water and wait for me there to give extra support to Elaine and Derek who were looking after our children. Claire went with them while Kevin had the unenviable task of staying with me! We did manage to jog some downhill sections without any cramp twinges and I was pleased that as we started climbing Cat Bells we could see the other three near the summit. I was getting concerned, though, that I hadn't eaten or drunk enough and was trying to force more food and water down.

On the way up Catbells, the last summit, I remember commenting to Kevin that this only confirms why I would never do the Bob Graham again. It is just so hard and takes so much out of you. Whenever I do the Teenager With Altitude race I always think I should be able to run up to the summit of Catbells but it never happens and it was unsurprisingly no different today apart from that I didn't think I would be running.



Catbells summit.

Coming down off Catbells there was evidence of the “staycationers” who do not seem to know how to behave and are, in my opinion, completely unwelcome in the Lake District. A father with two children had pitched a tent precariously close to the edge of one of the steep slopes and looked like he was planning a wild camp. Far worse was the sight of a group of young lads hauling crates of beer up the hill. Kevin commented to them that you're supposed to travel light on the hills. One of them replied in a broad scouse accent that they “didn't get the memo obviously”! This kept me chuckling for a good few minutes. I was very conscious of how wide Derwent Water looked and reminded myself of the three islands which are the last three checkpoints before the finish.

It was a relief to arrive at Derwent Water at 7pm, bang on schedule, and see Elaine and Lucy. Sophie had hurt her knee so wasn't there but I was reassured it wasn't too serious. We still had well over two hours of daylight which was a good job as I seemed to take an age to get my wetsuit on, eat some more food and drink the remainder of my water. I was feeling tired now while Paul and Patrick were changed and ready.



Derwent Water entry at Otterfield Bay.

Patrick said he would give himself a head start and Paul said he would swim with me but this plan didn't last long! Patrick did set off by himself but started heading too far south from Otterfield Island while a few people tried to shout to get his attention. He was oblivious. We were all puzzled by how off course he had got so Paul went and swam after him. Paul caught him up and they got to Otterfield Island with Claire and Elsa providing canoe support.

Once I had got myself ready to swim Jenny was in her canoe waiting. Paul and Patrick were on their way to St Herbert's Island, the second island. As soon as I set off I understood why Patrick had struggled so much. That breeze that had been so welcome on Dale Head was now causing some unwelcome waves which were hitting us head on. Every time I tried to breathe or looked up to sight a wave smacked into my head making it hard enough to get some air in never mind looking where I was going. I was very relieved Jenny was close by in the canoe but it was hard to tell if she realised how much trouble I was having. She didn't seem concerned, though, which made me feel that I couldn't be doing that badly.



Derwent Water with Skiddaw in the background.



The last swim across Derwent Water is the longest but split into four sections by three islands. The rules of the round state that contenders have to fully emerge from the lake at each of the three islands which sounds easy enough in theory but is one of the most challenging parts of the round. The water is very shallow for quite a long way at the edge of the islands with lots of large rocks hidden just below the surface. It is incredibly difficult to stand up amongst the slippery rocks when exhausted, wearing a heavy wetsuit and carrying a dry bag. Once you have managed to stand up it is still surprisingly hard to walk over or between the rocks with the waves splashing all around you. It seems that the best way to get fully out of the water at each island is to snake your way in, avoiding the big rocks, to as shallow water as possible then try and stand up. On my recce across here I struggled to stand up even with neoprene boots on so had decided to keep my trainers on for the last swim. Paul and Patrick did the same and we all agreed that it worked well.

I felt that I reached Otterbield Island quite quickly and was thankful there weren't any seagulls there to swoop down on me as there often are earlier in the year when they are nesting. Emerging and getting back into the lake was easy enough and I could see Paul and Patrick still heading towards St Herbert's Island. I shouted to Jenny about my difficulty with the waves and was pleased when she agreed that they were challenging so I felt it wasn't just me being soft.

It was on the next section that the cramp started kicking in. First one and then both of my legs locked up across my thighs and it was a real battle to try and stay relaxed. I realised a few years ago in a masters session (I swam while my daughters were swimming with their club) that my legs are next to useless when swimming while my arms are quite good. I concentrated on my arms, breathing every three strokes and hoping the cramp would pass. It eased off occasionally but kept coming back and also spreading to my calves. It seemed to take a long time to reach St Herbert's Island with bigger waves Jenny described as "white horses". I hadn't heard that term before but it was quite clearly referring to the size of the waves creating foam as they crashed over me. Paul and Patrick were out of sight again by the time I reached the island and I really struggled trying to stand up with spasms of cramp, slippery rocks and general exhaustion. I fell a couple of times and luckily didn't hit any rocks. I had planned to walk across the islands as much as possible to minimise the swimming. My cramp eased off once I had stood up and it was easy enough to walk across the island. With hindsight I should have headed more north up the length of the island to make the next swim even shorter but it wasn't obvious from my vantage point.

The third section of swimming was really tough. I could see Paul and Patrick with their support canoe ahead which was very helpful for sighting. It is hard to see Rampsholme Island when swimming in this direction as it merges into the woods on Walla Crag. The cramp came back with a vengeance almost as soon as I had started swimming and was getting worse. Both of my legs were locked solid and at times the pain was excruciating. I was praying it wouldn't spread above my waist otherwise I doubt I would have been able to complete the swim. It wasn't too dangerous as I would just have had to turn onto my back and let my wetsuit keep me afloat but it was far from ideal! The waves appeared to get even bigger on this section but the two photos I've included don't seem to do them justice. They seemed a lot bigger trying to swim through them!



Derwent Water with Blencathra in the background.

If I hadn't been exhausted and in so much pain with my legs locked with cramp, and if finishing the swim wasn't the difference between completing the FGR and not, I probably would have enjoyed this swim. I was making reasonable progress through the waves and quite enjoyed the excitement of more extreme conditions. On reaching Rampsholme Island and eventually managing to stand up the cramp eased off again and I again enjoyed walking across the island knowing that the last swim to Calf Close was shorter than the previous two. As I re-entered Derwent Water for the final time Paul and Patrick suddenly appeared a lot closer and this gave me renewed energy for the final swim. I could still use them, and their support canoe, to sight and the last swim didn't seem to take very long despite the seizing pain from cramp in both legs starting up again.

As I reached Calf Close I was pleased to find that I had caught up Paul and Patrick, and that I wasn't the only one struggling to stand up in the shallow water on the slippery rocks. I was even more pleased to find that they had struggled on the swim too and it wasn't just me being weak. We had already decided to keep the bottom half of our wetsuits on for the final run back to Keswick so it was a quick transition as we all still had our trainers on from the swim. My cramp eased off when we started walking but came back again when we tried to jog and I started to heat up. I tried to keep up with the very slow jogging pace but it was still too much and I was forced to walk. Claire, Elsa and Kevin joined us on this last land section, which is about 2km, back to the moot Hall. Apparently Elsa had been concerned that she wouldn't be able to keep with us on this last short run but she must have realised very quickly that she had nothing to worry about with me in the group!

Kevin easily caught us up, after helping Jenny with their canoe, and it was a nice feeling heading into Keswick knowing that completion and membership of the club was in the bag. Paul seemed keen to get the round finished and set off jogging. I tried to keep up with the gentle pace but spasms of cramp meant I couldn't even manage this.

Keswick was pretty busy with long queues outside the Fish & Chip shops and also numerous people sat outside pubs and restaurants. It was still quite warm even though it was late evening now and would be dark in an hour or so. We got a few puzzled looks as we jogged through the street in our wetsuits. I made the effort to run a bit here with an adrenalin surge helping me pick up the pace. We reached the Moot Hall at 8.32pm, exactly the same time of day as when I finished the BGR. It was nice to be able to climb the steps this time as the building was under construction work three years ago and we had to be satisfied with touching the door below the steps. There's something a bit special about finishing in the same place as legends like Joss Naylor, Billy Bland and it was a very satisfying end to a long, hard day on the fells.

After getting a photo at the Moot Hall (see below) we hung around for a short while chatting. A puzzled looking man who was having a drink in The Round, the pub next to the Moot Hall presumably named after the BGR, came up to me asking what we had done. He hadn't heard of the Frog Graham Round or the Bob Graham Round so I tried to explain the route to him. He didn't seem to get it and asked me why I wasn't out of breath! I replied that I could barely stand up but didn't try to explain it anymore. It easy to forget how people who are not used to climbing hills can't get their head round big days out on the fells.

As always on big days like these there are numerous people who have helped the day go smoothly. We were lucky to have so many supporters to share the day with. I know for many people it is a good excuse to get over to the Lakes and up onto the fells but I am aware that there are many other places to go and really appreciate that, yet again, people have given up their time to help me. After asking for support I was delighted when Kevin Barron replied requesting leg 4 and wondering if I would like some canoe support from Jenny across Derwent Water. This was completely unexpected and massively eased my anxieties of being left behind by Paul and Patrick towards the end of the round when I suspected I would be struggling. I had swam across Derwent Water at the end of my second recce which was about 30 miles. I had followed the route from Keswick over Skiddaw, across Bassenthwaite and over the fells round to Whiteless Pike before cutting across to Robinson to pick up the rest of the route back to Keswick. The swim across Derwent Water is quite daunting when you are tired and you get a long time on the descent from High Spy to see how wide it is and to psyche yourself out of it. The islands provide a bit of a safety net when contemplating it but in practice are possibly more of a hindrance than a help. On my recce I suffered severe cramp and was really struggling by the time I got to Rampsholme Island. It was so bad that I actually stopped, sat down and opened up my dry bag to try and get some crisps (and salt) down. There were a couple with a canoe camping on the island and I was very close to asking them to row me across the final stretch of water but in the end decided to go for it. Thankfully I made it ok but it didn't fill me with confidence for the real thing! Behind the scenes is less obvious. We had Elaine, Claire and Derek looking after mine and Paul's daughters (five in total) for the day. Elaine, in particular, agreed to look after all five of the girls by herself while Derek drove Claire round to the start of leg 4 so she could join us on the last leg. This was a big sacrifice for Elaine as she had planned to take Sophie and Lucy to Buttermere and possibly Crummock Water so they could all see part of the round. Elaine had also helped us on the Tadpole Round and joined us for the second half of this.



Finish at the Moot Hall.

To conclude, would I do the Bob Graham again? After three years it is still a resounding no! Would I do the Frog Graham again? In complete contrast, most definitely yes. I'm already thinking of a solo, unsupported clockwise round as well as going round again with other friends who are interested. This, for me, is the difference between the two great rounds.

I have included a schedule I would use next time based on my recces and round. I have also recorded my kit list which may be of use to future contenders hoping to join the club.

### Schedule

	Time	Leg Time	Water Sources
Start	04:00		
Skiddaw	05:36	01:36	
St Bega's Church	06:16	00:40	Skill Beck in Dodd Wood
Beck Wythop (SWIM)	06:56	00:40	BASSENTWAITE LAKE
Barf	07:46	00:50	Beckstones Gill twice
Lord's Seat	08:01	00:15	
Ullister Hill	08:10	00:09	
Grisedale Pike	09:08	00:58	Sanderson Gill
Hopegill Head	09:28	00:20	
Sand Hill	09:31	00:03	
Eel Crag (Crag Hill)	09:56	00:35	Liza Beck (Coledale Hause)
Wandope	10:04	00:08	
Whiteless Pike	10:15	00:11	
Rannerdale Knotts	10:44	00:29	
Hause Point	10:55	00:11	
Low Ling Crag (SWIM)	11:35	00:40	CRUMMOCK WATER
Melbreak	12:35	01:00	Unnamed beck
Red Pike	13:55	01:20	Black Beck & Scale Beck
High Stile	14:15	00:20	
Horse Close	14:55	00:40	Combe Beck
Crag Wood (SWIM)	15:15	00:20	BUTTERMERE
Robinson	16:35	01:20	Hassnesshow Beck
Dale Head	17:15	00:40	
High Spy	17:35	00:40	Beck near Dale Head Tarn
Cat Bells	18:20	00:45	
Otterbield Bay	18:45	00:25	<b>Need to be here by 8pm at the latest</b>
Calf Close (SWIM)	20:00	01:15	DERWENT WATER
Finish	20:30	00:30	

### Kit List

Wear – Short sleeve thermal, shorts, socks, fell shoes, buff, watch, cap  
 Backpack & Dry Bag (inside back pack and with most other gear inside)  
 Wetsuit (on straps of backpack), Swim Hat & Goggles (top pocket of backpack)  
 Waterproof jacket and trousers, long sleeve thermal, mitts  
 Phone (in small dry bag), head torch  
 Map, compass & whistle  
 Water bottle (1 litre)  
 Food