

Dave Berry Bob Graham round 28th and 29th of May 2022

Written 25th June 2022: After just enough time had passed.

I've split the report into a few sections as it made sense to me, as the lead up to the day was as much a part of it for me as the doing. I've tried to keep the report interesting and if you would like any help with a Bob please get in touch.

Training

After completing the Frog Graham round in a marathon 20 hours in May 2021 I decided, along with Andy Mochrie, to have a go at a Bob. It had always vaguely been on my radar and the major hurdle for me was that I couldn't understand moving for 24 hours, so having done a good chunk of it, the Bob suddenly seemed feasible.

My training started pretty soon after the Frog. It needed to as I haven't been properly fit in years, after having kids I've skirted around the edges of being fit, but not got back to feeling strong and flowing. So I spend a year running regularly, focusing on getting out most days and trying to go up as many hills as possible. I also focussed on trying to run flat and fast some days, but more on that later.

I must admit that I didn't follow any of the schedules I found on the internet and chatting to other folk from the club who'd completed the Bob only confirmed that they were to be taken with a pinch of salt. i.e. I found they all seemed quite 'so you live somewhere flat' focussed.

I did slightly less miles and slightly less height than was prescribed (peaking at about 40 mile weeks with about 5000-8000 ft of climbing), but focussing on hard terrain and being on the Bob route.

It was all going really well until I broke my big toe 6 weeks before my attempt coming down the inaccessible pinnacle on Skye, I was quite annoyed with myself. Thankfully I swam and rode my last few weeks of training and then did some long slow plods in the hills and all was well.

I should end this section saying that the training over Autumn and Winter on the route was hard, but really satisfying and enjoyable. Although the day itself was amazing, the adventures I had getting ready, and getting to know the lakes, were as good and will stay with me just as long.

Thank you Esk Valley team for joining me on a lot of it. The two most memorable were the winter conditions leg 4 recce in January (ice axes and all) and the overnight 3,4,5 that I did with Andy. Where we were frozen into a 3ish, 4ish and 5 as the overnight temperature dropped (in March) to -15°C.

Planning

I hadn't appreciated how much planning was needed for a Bob, first you need to get supporters.

Again- thank you Esk Valley as I was really lucky to have a fantastic bunch of friends who wanted to run with me. It turns out I was quite light on support in general terms as I only had one supporter on each leg. This worked really well for me, but I hadn't really considered what would happen if it went wrong for one of us. That said the people I was with (Paul, Richard, Neil, Dave and Mark) were all very experienced and knew the terrain really well and I had run with them all (a lot), so chances of wheels coming off in a major way were low.

Food:

Once the support was sorted it was all about kit and food. I was going late May so although it was warm the weather report did project for -5°C wind chill so I packed a lot of feathers as well as my usual kit. In terms of food I focussed on eating actual food, I'm not a big fan of gels and the like. I did the London marathon back in 2005 and felt awful after having one every hour (i.e. 3) so the idea of putting 24 in me wasn't going to fly. So I went with pie, pizza and flapjack. I modified a honey flapjack recipe from BBC good food (adding more calories in additional honey and nuts and an egg and some flour to stick it together better)- I can give the recipe gladly if it's useful.

I also bought some salt capsules from Decathlon, I dehydrate easily (as I've discovered over the years) so these are always an essential if I'm not regularly eating actual food. As the course ran on I ended up giving up on solid food, jelly babies were the future, so a combination of salt and sugar with a lot of water was really good.

Poles:

I had never used poles and I'm ashamed to say I judged people who ran with them. In January I realised that I needed something with me for a fall arrest. So I bought a cheap pair. If like me you've never tried poles I would recommend getting hold of a cheap pair (I now own a more expensive pair). I am heavily built, so I'm always carrying a lot of shoulder so being able to use this bulk massively sped up my day and I really haven't looked back. I wouldn't use poles on a short run, but they were great on the Bob, especially to give stability when things got rocky.

Shoes:

One other thing I realised was that I could do it all, as long as I had something on my feet. During training I had two pairs of mudclaws come apart. So I stashed a spare pair of shoes for every handover point, I didn't expect to need them, but it made me feel better- more on this later too.

Setting off time:

In an unusual twist (although people set off at all sorts of times) Andy and I had decided to set off at midday from the Moot Hall. This meant a leg 3 in the dark. I am a climber and I reasoned that over the rocks would be slow anyway, so the dark wouldn't have too much of an impact. I think I was probably wrong on reflection, but it was an interesting experiment. There are major family support benefits of setting off at this time though and I had decided to raise some money for Young Lives Vs. Cancer as my son Tom had leukaemia a few years ago and I had wanted to do something to pay back for the brilliant support they'd given us.

The major benefit was that the only non-family friendly handover was at Wasdale. To sort this, I dropped my van off for Dave (on leg 4) to stay in overnight-ish and Neil (my leg 3 support) to drive home. It panned out well as we were only 1 person in a vehicle and were respectful of the space (and I'm a National Trust Member). i.e. I paid to park, I didn't set up a camp and we were quiet and generally non-disruptive. I wouldn't have done this if we had a squad. I had expected it to be quiet overnight, but to be honest I had forgotten the 3 peaks attempts, who were up and down Scafell Pike in fairly large numbers.

The rest of the road handovers were very easy to plan then, and it was great having my wife and boys there, as well as friendly faces who were supporting me and Andy- who started at the same time but wasn't aiming to finish in 24 hours.

Leg 1- 12.00 Moot Hall- Support Paul Williams and Keira (Labrador)



Pre-match family photo (left) and the Esk Valley Team (right): *Rosie the wonderdog is just out of shot (being insane). The team on the steps before setting off on leg 1 Clockwise (top left) Paul, (top right) me, (peeking out) Martin, (bottom right) Andy, (bottom left) Rich, (Middle left) Tim.*

We set off from a busy marketplace at 12.00. It was a glorious day with not too much wind (but mercifully some) and very little in the way of cloud cover. I can't remember feeling as nervous about anything in recent years. I think the fact that I'd been training for a year, that I'd added some additional pressure with sponsorship and that I wasn't sure how my toe would hold up all made me feel pretty worried. So I had a latte (an odd choice in some respects, but a calorific one) and tried not to think about it too much.

When 12.00 came around (which took forever) I set off feeling very jangly, like a jar of bolts. It's meant to be hard though, so some suffering is mandatory. Five of us were setting off together which was great, Andy- supported by Tim and Martin and Paul and I.

We didn't fall into the 'We've missed the road- oh no we've stuffed the nav' early faux pas to pick up the bridge and park, so all was well. The initial run up through the park was good and all was uneventful. We amiably chatted up past Latrigg and into the early part of Scafell and just after the monument's gate I made my first nav decision and used the route 1 logic I applied the rest of the day i.e. always go direct. I went up the grass on the left-hand side of the path, Andy's team went up the path. Andy and I had trained for a year (largely together) for the Bob and although I knew I was planning to go quicker I hadn't anticipated leaving them here. So it was a funny moment for me as I had expected to consciously leave Andy and wish him well and it was a wave at the gate that ended up sending us on our separate (same) ways.

A piece of flapjack later and Paul and I were at the top (1hr 15 mins) and heading out to the most inconsequential peak (in my opinion) Great Calva (45 mins). It was really boggy underfoot as the rain had been heavy and constant for the week before, but going was good and visibility was great.



Heading up Skiddaw: *I couldn't get my head around the concept of not having a bag, so kept some food and water with me most of the way.*

It was similarly uneventful for the rest of the leg, which is massive testament to Paul's support (thank you), the only real thing of note was my continual amazement of the height of fences Keira could clear without aid.

I was feeling good and just went with it. I was ahead of schedule as the got to the top of Blencathra (14.50- 50 mins) but enjoying myself and feeling comfortable- I'd lost the jangle at the top of Scafell. We did have a bit of excitement coming down Halls Fell as we discovered a Lady totally crag-fast, facing outwards and crying. We had a quick stop 3-5 mins to help her and get her moving and then headed on.



Paul and I coming off Hall's Fell: On the road down into Thelkeld. Feeling good and enjoying ourselves.

Total time for the leg: 3.15

Leg 2- Thelkeld to Dunmail- Support Richard Veitch

We got to Thelkeld in really good time, and I was feeling good. I had some (pre-flattened) coke, some water and a pie.



Pie in the cricket club carpark: Setting off with Rich for leg 2.

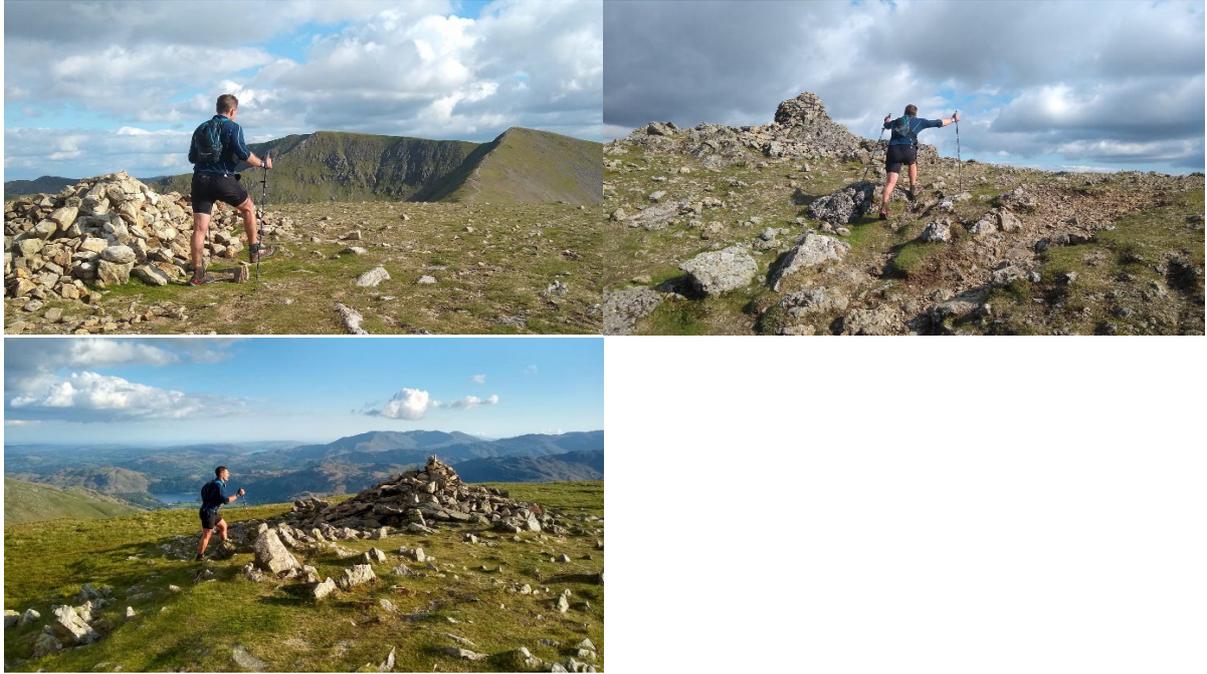
I had done a second recce of leg 2 with Rich about a month before, so we knew the right way and were feeling good. I absolutely hate the drag up Clough head, but actually on the round it wasn't as bad as I had expected. I'd been worrying about it a bit, as although I'd done a number of legs into other legs I hadn't done legs 1 and 2 combined in training. I needn't have been worried though as it was fine.

We picked off the peaks with the only incident I can remember, this being me squashing a boiled egg under my knee as I tried to eat, run and change a top simultaneously. I should know by now I am not that good.

Rich was a fantastic supporter throughout and kept me eating, took a picture at every peak (which I've shared some of) and generally kept the good vibes rolling. All was very well, and we made good time.

The only major decision and thing of note was the slog up Fairfield. As mentioned earlier, I had decided to head route-one on all peaks. So I just went straight up the side of Cofa pike. It was horrible, hot, the steepest thing (at least it felt it) that I went up on the round and I have vowed never to go that way again. The major win was that I couldn't envisage a hill being harder over the course of the next 24 hours and I was right. The absolute worst the round had to throw at me was behind me after that point, the rest I did to myself.

We continued down past Seat Sandle, hit all of the trods, I had time in the bank and life was good and happy.



Leg 2 Peaks: *On a very photogenic evening.*

Total time for the leg: 4.25

Leg 3 Dunmail to Wasdale: Support Neil Colquhoun- the wheels get a bit wobbly.

When I arrived at Dunmail all of my family and a number of my friends were there, so it was hard to keep my sense of urgency. I really should have taken that as a sign, but onwards ever onwards. We ate drank and I said goodbye to Rich- who was the one who realised I'd been stood too long and told me to get moving (thanks again Rich).

So off we set. Neil and I had been out running 2 weeks before to do the Snowdon Skyline race (which is amazing) and have regularly run together before, but we're both climbers. So were both happy with going over the rocks in the dark. Neither of us had actually managed to get up Broad Stand in daylight, so we were doing an onsite in the dark, which I think would have phased others who were less happy on rock, but we were both OK with it. We had to get there first though.



Neil and I at Dunmail: *A little too comfortable and chilled out.*

The leg started really well, if a little chilled out, and we went up Steel fell and on to Sergeant Man without incident. Neil picked a great line to Calf crag and all was good. We chatted, we sang (the classic 'hit' I've got knobby shoes) all was good. We then headed on to High Raise and it started to get dark. We suited up (legs and tops) and got ready for the night. I was starting to feel the dehydration from leg 2 setting in, so was drinking a lot but all was well.

Around about Rosset pike and Bowfell I realised the time and that we were about an hour behind schedule. I did however find time to complete a promise to my children to play Bastille Quarter Past Midnight, at quarter past minute, one of the last 'silly' things I found time and energy for. The lyrics talk of running and midnight so it's not completely ridiculous (and it cheered me up). At that point we picked up the pace, but we'd blown the benefit of light by that point and were operating in the dark. We slowed up further navigating as (due to weather on recces) I'd only been on the leg once before and Neil was nav'ing on sight. We were safe and going the right way though, just too slowly.

This really affected me and I got really anxious and started getting caught in my head. There was little we could do about it though as we were on the Bob's worst terrain in the dark. My original

opinion was that this wouldn't slow us down, but I think I'd underestimated how knackered I'd be and how much pressure I'd put on Neil.

'Just on-sight a leg in the dark for me will you mate, oh and it's the most technically complex one', 'yeah, no bother' and it wasn't a bother (thank you Neil), it just took us longer than expected. i.e. the wheels didn't come off, we were moving, always in the right direction, but I'd underestimated the scale of the task.

Andy and I had both talked about going up Broad Stand (to go from Scafell Pike to Scafell) and I'm really glad he didn't, I was OK and never felt anything but safe, but as I was going up it, it played with my head. I'm quite an experienced and capable climber, having climbed in the low E's in the past, (and Neil is better) and I found it really hard in the dark as my hip mobility was shot and try as I might, I couldn't get my feet to stick; so I ended up on my arms a lot. Broad Stand is not a hard climb, but 40 odd miles in it became a lot harder (especially to do it on-sight in the dark). Once it was behind us, we became a bit disorientated on top, partly because of how imposing it all was, partly by the hour. We were very late at this point (about 2 hours over) and at the top of Scafell. This was the last time I saw Andy on the round, as we saw his (and Paul and Mike's) torches on Bowfell, we gave a few flashes and moved on. I spoke to Andy later and they had realised it was us (despite the crowds on Scafell Pike doing the three peaks).

At this point, behind, tired and dejected with the screees to go before we hit Wasdale, the sole fell off my right trainer. It was safe to say it could definitely now be classed as a low point.

I cannot tell you how glad I was that I had a spare pair waiting for me. Innovate received a sternly worded letter about their quality control. Apparently 1 in 100 failure rate is expected in mudclaws! I shouldn't call them out though (sorry Innovate stay on your toes, but please keep making my shoes), it was just bad luck at the wrong time.

All I could think about was that I had buggered it up. I had it all in hand running to a 22 hour schedule and I'd thrown it away.

Thankfully with the benefit of hindsight I think leg three was the making of my round, with no incidents and all slow but plain sailing; at the time I was wholly crestfallen though. I can't thank Neil enough for getting me through the night and making the leg enjoyable.



You can see I've stopped (yes stopped) at High Raise for a photo: Now where did the time go? Hmm. Cracking photo though.

Total time for the leg: 8.00 hrs from in front to behind in a stroke.

Leg 4 Wasdale to Honister: Support Dave (the saviour) Gibson

When we got to the van at Wasdale, I woke up Dave (2 hours behind when he was expecting to be needed and at 4.30 in the morning who wouldn't have fallen back to sleep) and swapped my trainers and socks (which were cut and full of scree) and tried to get some food down.

I had a brief handover conversation with both Dave and Neil and then crashed on with food in hand. I was fairly certain at this point that I wouldn't be able to pull it back as I had to run sub-23 hour schedule to do it. I was certain I was still going to complete the round (as I'd been sponsored to complete the round), but didn't think 24 hours was feasible.

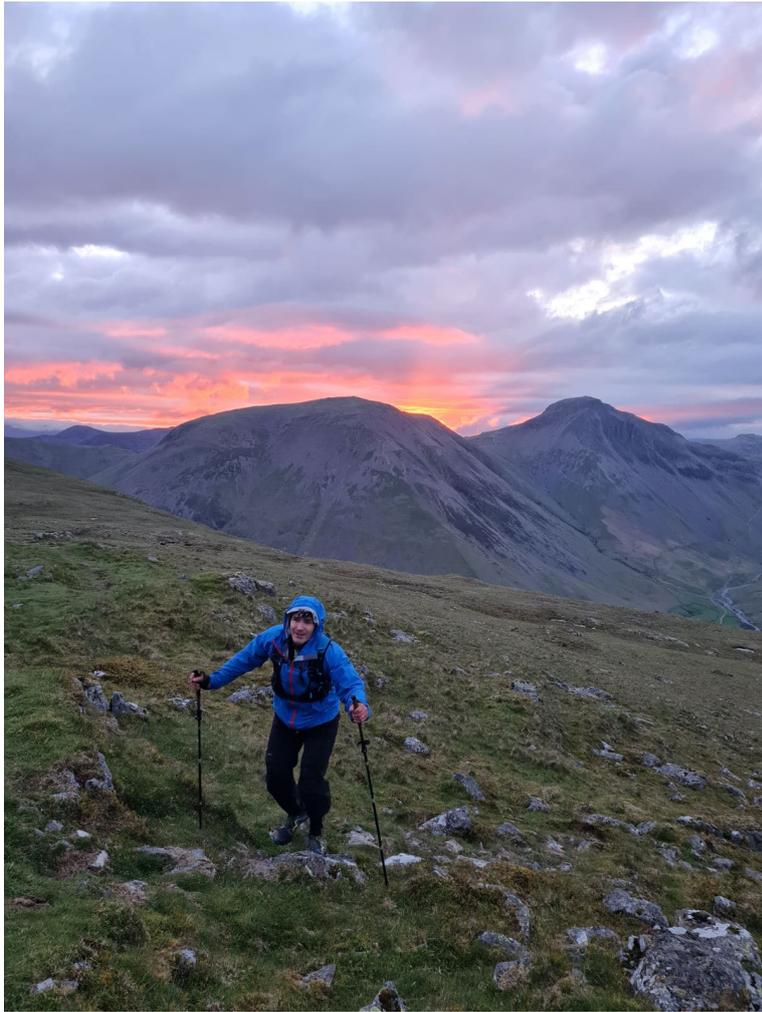
At the bottom of Yewbarrow I got as far as saying 'Dave can you hand me some.....' and had he managed to guess I meant water I might not have been sick. The pizza I'd been trying to eat had turned to hideous mush in my throat and I stood still and puked all over. Spewbarrow had claimed another victim (but I think most are probably at the top). This was a great turning point. That was the last 'proper' food I ate, so salt tablets became useful whenever I started to cramp, which happened pretty regularly after this point. I also had pretty torn up feet from the screes, so was finding moving a bit painful. I tried to ignore it and focus on keeping moving though.

Late, dehydrated and with the sun rising Dave and I had a quick, no fat ladies have sung conversation. If we could get leg 4 boxed off in under 5 hours I was still in with a shout. So Dave led the charge and off we set.

At this point I kept coming back to two conversations I'd had running into the Bob, one with my brother and one with Andy. With my brother I'd been pointing out that I'd maybe not get around in the 24 hours and he'd come out with the one line of 'You haven't got fail in you'. I wholly disagree with him, but it was a mantra I started circling around in my head to keep me moving. The other was a conversation with Andy about what I'd do if I got behind. I'd just matter-of-factly said 'go quicker', as if that would be an easy thing to achieve. He's pointed out it might be harder than that, so to prove an incredibly supportive friend wrong (what sort of monster am I?) I set off quicker. Had it even occurred to me how long I would have to 'move quicker' for, I might have thought differently, but the concept of time had become very fluid.

We were up Yew barrow in 50 mins, Red pike in 45 and the hills kept falling. The sun had come up and suddenly this seemed achievable again. We reached Great Gable just after 8.00 (every time I slowed Dave handed me a jelly baby) and if I could get to Honister for 9.00 I was in with a shout. We did.

There is no way I could have done that without Dave though. Thank you so much mate. I've walked ran and climbed up a lot of hills with you and these will now probably be the most memorable.



At the top of 'spewbarrow': *Starting to feel positive again as the sun rose.*



Up by Pillar: Moving with intent again.

Total time for the leg: 4.55 hrs

Leg 5 Honister to Keswick: Support Mark (the 'I'm going to be a little bit of a bastard now') Bown and Rosie the wonder dog

We reached Honister at five past 9, just in time to keep a sub-24 completion a reality. I swapped into my road shoes (early I know, but we were short on time and it was dry) dropped my bag (a big deal for me), picked up Rosie 'the wonder dog' and set off. Rosie has been my training partner for a year and is a springer spaniel. She has a natural inclination to pull on a lead and I unashamedly used her to help me up Dale head and along the road. She had had an awful week the week before as she'd not had her daily 5k, so this was a great opportunity to get some miles in.



Approaching the summit of Robinson: 10.30. Rosie on a lead as slightly too interested in the sheep. Whoops.

Mark was fantastic. The three remaining hills went without incident and Mark found a fantastic line down off Robinson that cut the inconvenient crag in half, meaning that we avoided coming straight down the crag completely.

I am ashamed to admit I lost my rag with Rosie coming down off Robinson as she nearly pulled me over, but moments before I'd wanted her to pull, so she couldn't know. Thanks again to Mark for holding her for a minute so I could get down. I just didn't have the strength to stay on my feet with her pulling at that point.

Soon we were then on the road. My memorable quote from Mark was- I'm going to have to be a bit of a bastard now, you need to run at least 6 minute kilometres. Thankfully I still could, and it turned out repeatedly faster. I had lost the ability to properly converse however so thank you again Mark for keeping talking to me.

I am really proud that I managed to run a 50 minute road 10k, I don't think I would be proud of that in any other circumstances, but I was proud of it in this context.

At Portinscale we picked up Paul, who'd just finished his breakfast. I'd not seen him for about 18 hours and he'd been on an adventure with Andy on leg 3 in between, but we kept running. Mark had pointed out I could slow down now, but I wasn't honestly sure I could slow down and keep going. I'd hit a rhythm and I wanted to stick to it.

As we came around the corner to the high street I wondered how pencils are made. No I didn't, for once I couldn't have cared less about the worlds first tableting procedure, I was nearly home. Sorry pencil museum, not today.

My son's had been waiting for me on a bench and my wife had not been sure if I'd make it when I'd left Honister, but chugging on the road had bought me time back. So I rounded the high street, picked up my boys and kept on going. The pictures say the rest better than I could.

What an adventure.



Approaching the finish: *I am not proud of this photo, but I was very proud of me here. I am about to cry, laugh and try to not be sick all at once and finish the Bob in under 24 hours. I had thought that would not be possible 8 hours before, so it was a big deal.*



Finished back at the Moot Hall: The video of this will always be a massive win when I feel like I can't do something. I collapsed about a quarter of a second later.

Total time for the leg: 2.24 hrs

Total time for the Bob: 23.39

Thank you' s and revelations

Revelations:

When the going is good, go with it.

You've only failed when you think you have- and you won't think that with the right support.

I did not sit down for over 24 hours. I didn't realise I'd not sat down anywhere on route until a conversation later (even when swapping my trainers). I didn't do it on purpose, I didn't notice. I have no idea if it's relevant, but I was surprised when I realised it.

The sting of the Bob is all about the clock. I now know I could go further on the same ground. I was really surprised by this, but when I got to the end I knew if the end was further, I could have still been going. The killer was the 24 hour time limit. Again I have no idea of the relevance of this, but it was interesting to realise and it made me think of the Nims Purja quote of 'sometimes you feel like you are knackered, but when you say you are actually knackered, you are only like about 45% knackered'.

It would have been impossible without the amazing support I had.

Thank you' s:

First I must say a massive thank you to Andy Mochrie. 'Would sir care to join me' stamped across a picture of the Bob book was a message I received 3 days after the Frog Graham and I would not be writing about one of the best adventures of my life had he not. Also a massive thank you for keeping me moving. Laughing about FKT's, the-log™ training programme and generally lampooning the twittery of a lot of what's written about what fundamentally is a really big day out in the hills which should be enjoyed.

All of my support: Paul, Rich, Neil, Dave and Mark. I absolutely could not have done it without you. You were amazing and as I said I hadn't realised how light an expedition we were until later. I also want to thank all of the road support- my Dad, Julie, Hanne, and loads of others I didn't see e.g. Eileen. Again without you giving up your time it wouldn't have been possible. All of the online support, my brother, sister, mum and many, many more. All of it counted.

My wife and Children: I was a tired grumpy man for about a year. I was a very stressed tired grumpy man for the month before (partly due to the broken toe). You were amazing and your understanding and support made it possible at all. I love you and could not have done this without you. I hope me doing this has taught one of us something. A common conversation in 2022 was 'I'm just off for a weekend to run up some hills'- 'ok, don't die, I love you'. You made it possible and picked up all of the slack so I could go on this crazy adventure.

Unusually I want to thank the government and land owners: We are amazingly privileged to have the right to roam on our British hills and often we take that for granted. No one could do the Bob if this wasn't the case, we are a lucky bunch.

Lastly I want to thank you. I can't believe you've read to the end.