**The Bob Graham 24 Hour Club – A note on spirit, traditions and ethics**

The seeds that germinated and grew into the Bob Graham 24 Hour Club were sown between 1959 and 1970. During that time the efforts to repeat and perhaps improve on Bob Graham’s 1932 round of 42 Lake District peaks within 24 hours gathered pace. The athletes who took up the challenge, and those who supported their efforts both in the mountains and in the valleys, were a small group but they thrived on mutual support and help, which enhanced and made the best of their individual skill sets and talents. In a real sense, this group were the founders of the Club, even if they didn’t know it at the time.

When in 1971 the Club was formed with 8 members (largely through the efforts of Fred Rogerson, a man who never completed the Round but whose place as the father and nurturer-in-chief of the Club is secure), in addition to the practical matters of advice, record-keeping and the like, the constitution provided, and still provides, that one of the objects of the Club was:

*“To preserve the spirit, tradition and ethics of the Bob Graham Round and to encourage all aspiring and existing members to do the same.”*

Spirit, tradition and ethics

The spirit, tradition and ethics exemplified in the behaviour of our founders largely remains intact today. A community has been built up over the years around the Round and especially the Club, one that many of us have enjoyed being a part of, and one that many people have used as the springboard to achieve other, often greater, challenges.

There is no such thing as a typical member of the Club. We come in all shapes and sizes and come to learn about the Round in different ways. The vast majority of us come from a fell/mountain running or a mountaineering background; perhaps more of the former than the latter. But as a result of that there are some traditions and ethics that a very large number of us accept, understand and apply, and encourage others to do the same.

Self reliance

Running in the mountains is a pretty simple sport with a limited number of “rules”. The most fundamental of these is that we take full responsibility for ourselves and our actions whilst in the mountains. We might briefly summarise those:

* Know what you are in for and prepare as well as you can;
* Carry the correct equipment;
* Know how to use it;
* Be ready to cope with just about anything on the day.

The same fundamentals of complete self-reliance apply to the Round. And form the basis for many hundreds of emails of advice I have had to send out in my 11 years as Secretary of the Club.

Witnessing – safety

Sitting alongside those principles is the tradition, based partly on history but mostly on safety, to have a witness see you arrive at each of the 42 summits. Bob Graham himself used his friends to pace him during his Round. And the founders of our Club adopted this same approach in their efforts to repeat and surpass his feat. That same approach continues to this day. Should anything go wrong the advantages of having extra pairs of hands and feet are clear.

“You help people, people help you”

Many people come to the Round with skills already developed. Others develop and hone their skills as part of preparing for the Round. Helping others reinforces the “giving back” ethic that has been there right from the start. We are all clear that part of the spirit and tradition of the Club is that members of the Club provide help and support to other aspiring members, a tradition noted by Selwyn on the “Introduction” page of the Club website.

This provision of help and support has also taken shape in another tradition. That of learning more about the Round (with all its challenges of route-finding, navigation, weather, conditions underfoot and so on) in advance of an attempt by helping others on their attempts. What better way to learn what might be in store for you when you finally feel ready to commit to an attempt?

Both these traditions bring people into the community and then retain them within it after they achieve membership of the Club.

And all this time and assistance is freely given with no motive other than to help others achieve what for many is a long-held dream.

A navigational challenge

The challenge involves finding your way around the mountains in all weathers. Navigation is a key skill for contenders and supporters on the fell. These skills need to be acquired and practised. Marking the route is something we don’t accept. No tape, flags, chalk, lights or other man-made markers should be inflicted onto the natural environment. Cairn building is not encouraged; there are enough on the fells already.

No commercialisation

Other traditions remain with us today. There is no fee or cost to making an attempt save for those of your self-organised arrangements. There is no membership fee to join or maintain membership of the Club. Any “profit” the Club makes from the publication of “42 Peaks” and from the Biennial Dinner is given away to charities, as provided for in the constitution. Those of us who run the Club do it without any financial reward. Despite regular approaches to do so, we have no commercial relationships and have never endorsed any products or services. The Club is as far away from a commercial operation as it is possible to be; and plans to remain so.

The challenges of the modern world

The fundamental challenges of the Round remain largely intact. Trods are more distinct, GPS may (arguably) make for better navigation, poles may aid the physical demands and the community of experienced people to help contenders is wider and deeper, there are many more ultra-length mountain events in the calendar both at home and abroad to aid preparation. But despite these, the mountains and the weather can still deliver the stiffest of challenges. of the traditions of the Club that existing members will assist their aspiring col

Finding help

In the modern world, the advent of email, mobile phones and the internet has made attracting help from others easier than the old days of using the landline. This method of attracting support isn’t for everyone, but those who use these routes do attract suitably experienced help and support.

Whilst the route to finding help may be different, the help sourced through these channels remains as always; that of like-minded individuals, wanting to help others with their time and efforts, all freely given.

Recent completions by individuals from the USA, Poland and Spain and attempts from people from Belgium and France confirm that those who spend time interacting with the BG community are rewarded with offers of help and support and can achieve a successful Round and membership of the Club if that is what they want.

Poor behaviour

Time delivers change of course. Our simple Guidance Notes have had to be enlarged to cope with a sequence of problems: night time noise in built-up areas; failure to pay parking charges in Wasdale; poor behaviour towards National Trust staff at Wasdale and market traders in Keswick. None of these changes were brought about by the nature of the Round, the mountains or the challenges posed. They were needed to deal with human issues.

We try to mitigate these problems and encourage good behaviour via the Guidance Notes because their existence and recurrence does not sit well with the spirit, traditions and ethics of the Round and the Club. And because the first port of call for anyone wanting to “complain” about the behaviour of people undertaking the Round, whether or not those people are members or trying to achieve membership, is the Club.

The media and publicity

The publication of Richard Askwith’s Feet in the Clouds generated interest in the Round, beyond anything in the Club’s history. The spike in the number of attempts (and successes) that followed publication seems to have peaked now. But the experience of that period has caused the Club to adopt as low as possible a profile to all forms of media wanting to draw attention to the Round for their own purposes (in a fashion not dissimilar to the position adopted by the Fell Runners Association.) The view we take is that people find their way to the Round quite well enough without any form of “advertising”.

The landscape and the environment

The post-FITC spike has made us more aware of the effects of the ever-increasing footfall of humans on the delicate Lake District landscape. We know that certain parts of the Round are under review by the National Park Authority for wear and tear. These include the descent from the fence line on Skiddaw across and over Hare Crag, the trods into and out of Dunmail, the traverse around Black Crags (Pillar) and the descent into Honister from Grey Knotts. When providing advice, we stress the need to limit footfall in terms of pacer numbers (why do you need more than 2 per leg?) and to avoid over-reccieing legs.

How we maintain the challenge of the Round, with its traditions, spirit and ethics intact for future generations, is an increasingly pertinent question for us and the wider community.

Guided rounds

A recent development has been causing debate and concern both in the Club and the Bob Graham community at large; the advent of a commercial operator offering a guided sub-24 Hour Round service. Guides in the mountains are nothing new, and commercial mountaineering remains a popular choice for people especially in the Alps and the Greater Ranges.

The traditions of the Club, our emphasis on preparation and learning the skills to make you ready for the challenge, the freely-given time and expertise of Club members and aspiring Club members, and the necessary assumption of personal responsibility that we believe sits at the heart of this challenge (and every other challenge in the mountains) is some distance away from a guided service.

The experiences of more than 2,000 members of the Club (and others who have completed the Round under their own self-imposed criteria or who have no wish for Club membership) strongly suggests that such a “service” is hardly necessary; but markets will have their way. In keeping with our position of “no commercialisation”, the Club will not endorse either the approach to use such a service to complete the Round, or any person, firm or company that might offer such a service now or in the future.

Closing thoughts

The late Chris Brasher, who made multiple attempts to become a member of the Club but who never quite made it, said that the Bob Graham Club was the most exclusive Club in the world because you couldn’t buy membership.

Technological progress, the adoption of new equipment, increasing footfall on the ground, the internet, accepted behavioural norms; the modern world brings forward all sorts of challenges for the Club. We would encourage all contenders seeking membership and members who continue to be involved in the wider Bob Graham community to do everything they can to maintain the spirit and ethics of the Round and the Club outlined in this note and to help preserve this unique organisation and its traditions.

**Morgan Williams**

**On behalf of the committee of The Bob Graham 24 Hour Club**

**21 April 2017**