

A high-angle photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, three runners are seen from behind, moving up a snow-covered slope. The runner on the left is wearing a red jacket and a grey backpack. The runner in the middle is wearing a red jacket and a red hat. The runner on the right is wearing a black jacket and black pants. A small black dog is running alongside them. The background shows a vast, snow-covered mountain range under a clear sky.

Black Combe Runners
Newsie

Christmas 2010: the Let it Snow issue

Keswick to Barrow

When I entered Keswick to Barrow in 2004 it was something of a journey into the unknown. I had never run that distance before, and I was not well prepared for it, so it was a bit of a surprise when I finished in under 6 hours.

It made me wonder how I would get on if I did it again, with the benefit of experience and better preparation. Would I be even faster, or would it prove that my first attempt had just been a freak performance, never to be repeated?

It was 6 years before the opportunity came round again. Several things would be different this time: more time to prepare, a proper training programme designed by a qualified coach (Valdaree), Val's Thursday night training sessions, a Garmin Forerunner to help monitor the training, no injuries shortly before the event, and 6 years older.

Val did a marvellous job devising a training programme that fitted round all the other things I was doing, and I stuck to it fairly well. The final preparation was a visit to Gill Cycles to buy some powdered energy drink that claimed to knock 5 minutes 45 second off your time. The very small print said that the time improvement applied to a 50 Km cycle ride, not that different from a 40 mile run.

The day of the event started with porridge for breakfast. Just after 4 o'clock the transport arrived. Unfortunately Karl directed them to the wrong house and our driver almost wakened my next-door neighbours. On the way to the start I sipped away at some slow release energy drink. The registration area was more chaotic than I expected, so I only just got to the runners start on time.

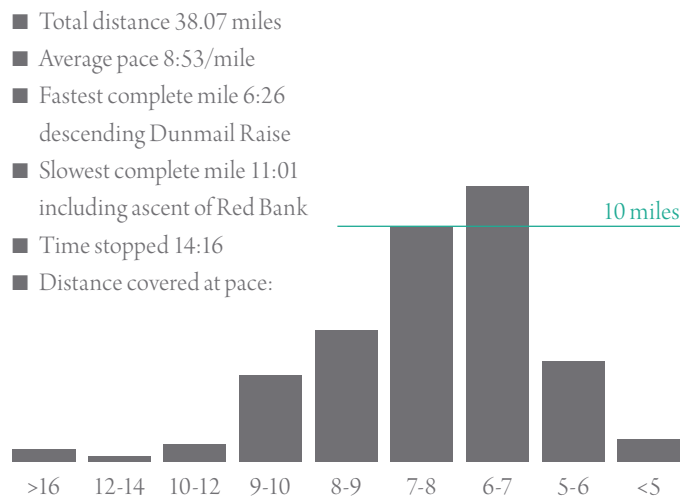
At 6 o'clock we were off. All I carried were 2 Mars bars, 2 small containers of the energy drink with a bit of Himalayan salt mixed in, a plastic

teaspoon and a few spare crystals of Himalayan salt, plus the Forerunner on my wrist.

The run itself went much as it had in 2004, the first few miles weaving my way through the early starters, thereafter just plodding along at a sustainable pace. I didn't spend much time at the checkpoints, just long enough to dissolve a bit of energy drink and pick up something to eat (mostly biscuits and bananas). As in 2004 my energy reserves held out and tiredness was never too much to prevent running up the hills. As a result I spent the second half passing other runners.

So, I finished in 5 hours 38 minutes 48 seconds, about 6 minutes faster than 2004. Was it the training, the coaching, the energy drink or the ideal weather? Probably a combination of them all. Having the Forerunner means I can analyse the performance. Here are some observations, for what they are worth:

Peter Grayson, July 2010





I think this is the Coniston 17, but Karl also wore the penguin suit in the Keswick to Barrow and all the way round the London Marathon.

Isle of Jura Fell Race

Beinn a Chaolais is the first and smallest of the three Paps of Jura. It's twice as high and twice as steep as Little Stand, or roughly the same as going straight up the front of Sca Fell Pike from the mosses, and as you approach it looks like a vertical grey wall. Fortunately for us the weather was dreadful and we could hardly see it at all.

It was supposed to be a nice sunny weekend, and for much of the time it was. Perfect conditions in which to be trapped on a Scottish island with only a distillery and 300 fell runners for company, but somehow during the five or six hours of the race it was winter again: low cloud, freezing wind and heavy, sodden rain. The rocks were greasy and sharp, the hills invisible and only the bagpiper looked happy.

The Jura fell race starts fast and easy with about 7 miles of heather and rock as you cross into the middle of the island then turn north towards the paps. Pete had studied this route with great care and he navigated skilfully through its bumps and twists. I had no idea what was going on so I followed the race organiser.

As we set off on the long, snaky crawl up Pap 1 this put me maybe four minutes ahead, and for a long time there was no overtaking. There is one, barely useable line through the scree that links up patches of vegetation and odd bits of solid rock, and everything else is loose, jagged boulders. This is not friendly rounded stuff like Lake District scree, but jagged, slippery quartzite, shifty and sharp-edged and mean.

I thought I was quite good on a rough downhill, but the people I was following didn't agree. When we finally got to the top of Beinn a Chaolais they ran straight down the other side as though the greasy boulders were grass. I ran straight down after them and fell over hard. I tried again and fell over several more times. I became quite upset.

The second climb was much worse. My guides had long since run off and I was taking bad lines through all sorts of loose and scrabbly rubbish. The weather was deteriorating and the field spreading out, and soon I was alone in thick cloud, feeling cold and a long way from home. In the Lakes you're never really that far from a pub or a phone box, but on Jura the funny story about going the wrong way would not end with a phone call and a pint on credit. I wasn't really wearing enough for the weather and even a twisted ankle began to seem like a good way to die of exposure.

I was very glad to find a hardy stalker's lad calling out "76, Dad. 53, Dad" at the top of Beinn an Oir, and I pretended to read my map for a moment while waiting for someone to catch up. Happily this turned out to be Pete and a few others including Helene Whitaker, who would shortly afterwards stop us all running off the hill in the wrong direction.

Beinn Shantaidh is the last and most severe of the Paps, a dome of pure scree with a single slash of green through it. The climb is a blur now, apart from a delicious spoonful of salt, but I remember the descent very well indeed. There wasn't really any running: we crabbed down anxiously until the boulders started moving with us and then tried to keep our balance while the whole hillside slid down to happy cries of 'below' and



Picture by Konrad Borkowski

'watch out watch out' and others much less printable. By the time we dropped onto the contour trod that would take us round to the last hill the heathery soil felt like pillows to our battered feet.

Corra Bheinn is last. It just means 'steep hill', and it was: short and sharp and in my case rather slow, but soon done. Pete put in maybe 50 yards on the climb and then rather rudely ran off when he got to the top. I used the opportunity to take what you might call a rather wide line and never saw him again. Just as well, really: what follows is a couple of miles of rough grassy descent and then three very uncomfortable miles on the flat road back to the distillery. I'd rather have gone back up Beinn Shantaidh than race Pete properly on that road.

It's probably one of the nicest roads in the country, but it goes on forever past deer and seals and little islands and beautiful beaches and the whole population turns out to say 'well done' to me and then 'och, he looks rough' to one another until I eventually turn the last bend to see the distillery again and its great chattering throng of people who're all surprised still to be alive and who would quite like a pint and a venison burger and some cake please.

Pete beat got there seven minutes before me despite cramping severely on the road, and we were both comfortably under 5 hours. Sue followed about 45 minutes later having nursed a sprained ankle all the way round and then fallen in a waterfall.

It's a very tough race. Worse than anything I've done here. It takes almost as long as Ennerdale but it's seven miles shorter. Apart from the middle four miles there isn't even much climb, but those four miles can take three hours, and the change of pace when you get onto the road is very testing. There was one man sat in the middle of the road so full of cramp that cars had to drive into the ditch to go round him.

And yet it has the shortest time-to-forget of any race I've ever done. It took 20 minutes and a cup of tea to get from 'thank god that's over I nearly died' to 'next year I'm coming on my bike'.

William Ross, July 2010

Jura: second opinion

My preparation for Jura consisted of a 38 mile run the week before and a sprained ankle, but I wasn't too concerned as I knew that the terrain was going to be very bad for me and so I would be crawling round anyway.

From the campsite we had a good view of Pap 3, but by the morning all the hills had disappeared into thick clag, and so our 'on-sight' attempt at Jura was turning into an on-sight-no-sight race. The only thing which could have made the conditions more difficult would have been rain and high winds, and so as we set off the drizzle started and on the tops the freezing wind made everything just that little bit more serious.

As I approached the bottom of Pap1, the cloud momentarily cleared revealing all but the top, and my genuine reaction was one of awe. It was like looking at a brick wall. As I focused, I could just make out a very tiny snake of runners winding up into the top of the cloud. It really was something else, and all that whinging about Little Stand, well, I take that back.

It was the descent though which was special. The whole mountain was made up of loose rock, big and small, and it was steep and the whole lot was moving. People were shooting past me left and right and the stuff they were bringing down with them was hitting my hands (which were obviously on the ground) and the backs of my legs. I couldn't even stop to gather myself, as I was still moving when I tried to stop.

The only way was down and I was going whether I wanted to or not. I had thought that the paps might be like Great Gable, but this was nothing like Gable. It was super dangerous and I was not having fun. I decided to bail out, but at the bottom I found myself alone, cold and in thick clag, and the prospect of navigating out of the wilderness which I did not know seemed bleak, so in desperation I carried on.

The ascent of Pap2 was all loose too, and once again I was having rocks kicked down on me, but this time on the ascent. Coming off Pap2 was no better, and everything was merging into a freezing hell of slimy rock. This time I definitely was not going on, and I asked the man in front to tell the next marshall that 112 had retired. He was very very sweet, and told me that I couldn't give up now as we were nearly done, and that I must have been going well as I was with him. It cheered me up, and I set off with him to go and overtake some people. We did overtake some people on the ascent, but him more than me, and by the time I was at the top he was gone and I had no idea where to go. I did have a map and I can navigate, but really when you look at the map of the paps it's just a scribble of rock and crags. I attempted to do a follow, and ended up in the biggest boulder field I've ever seen. Big, sharp, greasy and steep. I was trying to descend on my bum, but it was ever such a long way, and the people I had followed had long gone and no-one else was coming. It was a very lonely and scary place, and I concluded here that I was never ever doing this again.

[Sue Hodkinson, July 2010](#)

Facts about Jura

- Chance of having a very serious accident: 20%
- Chance of having a serious accident: 50%
- Chance of having some kind of accident: 95%
- People who said well done on my run down the road: 20 at least
- Number of times cried: 0
- Number of times nearly cried: 3
- Number of times swore: 1000 plus
- Number of units of alcohol after the race: 12-15 ish, can't remember
- Number of hot showers achieved in a three day stay: 1



Beinn a Chaolais (Pap 1), seen from Beinn an Oir (Pap 2)

Things that seemed like a good idea at the time, part 34: fell running

So, Will asks me to write something for the newsletter. 'Just do something about running,' he instructs. 'You're a writer, you'll be able to do it with your eyes closed. But remember, this is not the kind of club to make do with second best. We demand excellence every time. Have it on my desk first thing Monday.'

I struggle sleeplessly for nights with this commission. In the end I decide that the best way to distil the essence of the sport, and thus convey its true majesty to the world, is to report dispassionately on the experience of taking part. In short, I must file a report on my most recent race.

Wasdale Screes, October 2010

- 12pm Enormous lunch. Four sausages, beans, toast, eggs, tea. This will meet my energy and carb needs for the race, resulting in peak performance.
- 1:00 Picked up by Will and driven at high speed over mountain passes for an hour.
- 1:50 Feel very ill. Note to self: revise menu for next race. Or drive self.
- 2:00 Arrive Nether Wasdale. Road full of pale, thin people jogging about intensely. Obviously the right place.
- 2:15 Changed, paid, number pinned on wonkily. Warming up. Waves of sickness receding. Legs feeling nicely stretchy. New bum bag looking flash. Feeling good.
- 2:30 We're off! 70% of the pack ahead of me within nine seconds. This is fine. Starting slow is part of my race plan. Start slow, build up.
- 2:33 Running around roads and farms. Flat. Feeling good. 80% of the pack now ahead of me. It's fine.
- 2:35 Mountain sighted. Looks quite big.
- 2:40 Start climbing mountain. Start steady, save your energy.
- 2:45 This is actually quite painful.
- 2:48 Bit more painful than anticipated, in fact.
- 2:50 Not going as well as planned. Mountain steeper than I was promised. People overtaking me.
- 2:55 People still overtaking me.
- 2:58 Legs hurt. Lungs hurt. Important to keep pushing through pain barrier.
- 2:59 Why? Why not leave pain barrier alone? It's obviously there for a reason.
- 3:00 Really not enjoying this now. Going far too slowly.
- 3:02 Path levelling out slightly up ahead. Small glimmer of hope.
- 3:03 Pass man with dog coming down. 'The ones at the front look more tired than you' he says, pointlessly. Too tired to formulate witty riposte.
- 3:04 Race plan not really working out, if I'm honest.
- 3:05 Definitely levelling out now. 90% of pack now ahead of me. Should have done some training. Why didn't I do some training?
- 3:06 Can now see race leaders going past me on ridge in other direction. Bastards.
- 3:07 Can see first checkpoint at summit! Hear man coming up behind me.
- 3:08 Reach first checkpoint! 'Touch the rucksack' insists checkpoint man, pedantically. Fend off man behind me. All downhill from here.
- 3:09 Start running downhill. Feeling much better. This is where plan kicks in: pound downhill fast, take back places lost on climb.
- 3:10 Still running downhill. Gathering speed. Can't see anyone ahead at all.
- 3:11 Quite fast now. Still can't see anyone ahead.
- 3:13 Plan really not bearing much relation to reality at this point.
- 3:14 Track gets very muddy and rocky. Sink up to knees in bog.
- 3:16 Mud and boulders threaten to cripple me. Almost twist ankle. Not overtaken anyone since checkpoint.
- 3:17 Stumble through more bog and rock.
- 3:18 Plan officially abandoned.
- 3:19 Hate fell running.
- 3:20 Second checkpoint! Can see three other runners below me. Plunge down, newly enthused at sight.
- 3:22 More mud and boulders. Can now see man behind me again. He's bloody well catching up.
- 3:24 Despondency descends. Hate mountains, hate running. Especially hate running over mountains. Pointless, stupid way to spend an afternoon. Everyone else probably in pub already.
- 3:25 Slow down to walking pace. Can't be bothered to compete anymore. Hate everything. Never doing this again.
- 3:26 Can now hear man behind me. Damned if I'm going to let him catch me. Start running again.
- 3:28 Path improves slightly. Some trees arrive, cheering me up.

- 3:29 Woman ahead of me suddenly looks catchable.
- 3:31 Catch woman ahead of me! Yes! Two miles too late, but better than nothing.
- 3:32 Catch someone else. Land flattening out. Home strait.
- 3:33 Man in front hoves into view. Getting closer. Finish line approaching.
- 3:34 Must catch man in front. Must salvage small shred of dignity.
- 3:35 See that man in front is in fact boy from Sedbergh school, probably half my age. Redouble determination to catch him.
- 3:37 I can see the finish!
- 3:38 I'm not going to catch him.
- 3:39 Finish! Collapse over pub bench. Drink jug of squash. Sweat profusely. Definitely my last fell race. Never again. I hate it.
- 3:41 Drink more squash. Hose feet and legs down. Feel slightly better.
- 3:45 Will offers me a pint and charitably pretends I did well.
- 3:55 In pub with beer. Warming up. Memory of pain and humiliation already rapidly receding.
- 4:10 Decide it was fine really. Quite fun. I just need to be fitter.
- 4:20 Second pint. Start wondering how I should train for Dunnerdale.

Paul Kingsnorth, October 2010

(Editor's note: Paul is the only person ever to file a story for the newsletter on time and exactly to the specified word count)



Paul fails to learn from experience at the 2010 Black Combe race



Paul, Jamie and Chris after running through the night on leg 2 of Will's Bob Graham round. Photo by Hannah.

Summer Challenge 2010

Thanks to Dave Watson for looking after all the photos.









The Good Race Guide

First in a continuing series of informal and highly opinionated race reviews.



Ennerdale 23m



It doesn't get any better than Ennerdale. I had to knock a star off for the lack of party, but the race is enough on its own and you can always sit in the lake with your sandwiches afterwards. [SH](#)



Grasmere 1m



Shut your eyes and you'd miss it. Short, sharp and very painful, but the only race where you get to run into a brass band. Finds parts of your lungs you didn't know you had, and makes them hurt. [SH](#)



Great Lakes 14m



Unremittingly brutal but eventually rewarding. Steeper, rockier and tougher than any comparable race in the Lakes. Good Jura training. Good atmosphere, some camping but pub too far away. [WR](#)



Jura 17m



It's a race in 3 halves. Seven miles of bog and heather, 6 miles of nightmarish fell horror then 3 on the road. The whole field rehydrates on single malt then goes down to the beach to set things on fire. [SH](#)



Old Counties 37m



Epic. Amazing, but with a slightly unreal and delirious quality about it. Goes on for days. Lovely atmosphere but everyone is too spaced out (physically and mentally) for the after-party really to work. [SH](#)



Skiddaw 9m



I might be being a bit generous here. I can't think of anything good to say about running up a motorway and then down it with some strange folk wearing ipods. The highlight was the bridge over the A6. [SH](#)



Three Peaks 23m



A long road race with three short fell races in it. Bizarre route, huge field, brilliant support, cavernous beer tent, busy BBQ, bands later, cheering crowds everywhere and a real sense of occasion. [SH](#)



Three Shires 13m



Brilliant: a good distance over a great route to a nice pub, expertly organised by Selwyn with a light touch and a dry, rambling commentary. Starts with one of the great climbs. Unmissable. [WR](#)

Please send in your reviews. For each race we need 40 words and two ratings:

Race quality

- ★★★★★ A classic natural route on the high tops with varied and interesting terrain. Challenging and aesthetic.
- ★★★★★ Up and down route, or involving strange linking sections, or too many roads. Not pleasing to foot or eye.

Event enjoyment

- ★★★★★ A right good day out. Good crowd, good atmosphere, good beer, no hurry.
- ★★★★★ A quiet or an odd crowd, no atmosphere, no beer, no reason to stay.

Running in the Ariège Pyrenees

The Newsie isn't usually the place for a holiday report, but this is one place to stay that gives great running opportunities. We've just discovered a part of the Pyrenees, the Ariège, that we never knew existed.

We knew we'd like the running but there's so much to do – walking, road or mountain biking, skiing or lounging in hot springs in the nearby Ax les Thermes so we know we'll have to go back.

We spent a week staying at the Pyrenees Haven Guest House in a small village called Perles et Castelet part way up the Ariège valley. It only opened in early 2010 having been renovated very nicely by Gary and Debbie Devine (ex-Pudsey & Bramley fell runners), have a look at the pictures on their website at www.pyrenees-haven.com.

The first thing they do is tell you about the set run round the block, of about 3½ miles up to the two villages above Perles and back, they offered to run with us as well. They keep a book where you record your time, anyone who can beat John Heneghan's 24 minutes is doing well, I couldn't break 30. They were both great at recommending places to go, either at a walk or a run.

The mountains are quiet and very accessible with high passes through a lot of them, no glaciers to hinder progress and with well marked routes. We were lucky enough to have the first winter snow followed by sunshine all week and trees that turned hillsides gold. As most of us had colds at the start of the week we started gently, but views were equally good whether on a 2 hour or a 5 hour trip out.



On the rainy day we went to the Niaux caves to look at 15,000 year old cave paintings, it was an amazing experience and a privilege to see them. We had an idea we wanted to spend time in the medieval city of Carcassonne and seeing some Cathar castles, but the weather was too good. Next time maybe, other options would be skiing (downhill and cross country at a number of different areas locally) or running one of the many mountain races they have there during the summer.

More information can be found at www.pyrenees-haven.com and there's an article about it in this summer's Fellrunner.

Pete Tayler, October 2010



Things I learned from Bob Graham

In place of the usual editor's rambling apology – sorry the newsletter is a year late, by the way – here's a collection of what I hope are the less obvious things I learned from Bob.

It's more important to move easily than to move quickly, and it's more important to be calm than to be punctual. Your best hope is to keep spending as little energy and causing as little injury as possible.

The 23 hour timetable is about an hour slow at the end, presumably in the expectation that your wheels will fall off. If you still have wheels, you have a spare hour.

Leg 1 is fun but very dark. It needs sturdy, cheerful company.

Leg 2 is quite demoralising and it's easy to lose focus. Don't imagine that the gloom will last. The sun comes up and then about when your alarm clock would normally go off you start to feel better.

Leg 3 is the work. Try and have Pete with you.

Leg 4 is the work too, but it does feel like you've turned for home.

Leg 5 is much easier but the road is endless and the suburbs of Keswick extend for many miles.



Sometimes you can make fatigue go away by running faster. Go slowly and you seize up more and more. Force yourself to run and it all flushes out. If you get a massive stitch, it's working. Now keep going.

Bowfell is the turning point, or it was for me. If you can survive that climb and then not mind that you're only half way, you'll be ok.

Mostly it's better not to think about it.

Every time someone suggests that you eat, they're right.

By the time I got to Broad Stand I could only lift my feet about eight inches, but the arms still worked. I found it easier to flop over the layback than to climb the excellent ladder that Hannah had made for me.

Descending into Wasdale hurts more than any other part.

If ever Mike Berry offers you some lemonade, accept at once.

Red Pike is harder than Yewbarrow.

After the first twelve hours your body will burn anything. Try eating coal.

Pat told me to break it down into jobs I could do, and he was right. Get to breakfast, get to Sue, get home. The last one was the easiest.



Vary the menu. I really looked forward to each sit-down meal.

Get some decent wine. I was cheap and bought a half bottle of rubbish and it was very hard to drink.

Good ground crew. Hazel was completely indispensable and on the day everything was just where it needed to be with no effort from me.

In retrospect, there should have been more custard.

If you require something of your body with sufficient insistence, it will do it. I think maybe some people are like that all the time.

I enjoyed every bit of the training, thanks to the people who kept coming out with me (and the snow). It was a great winter.

It takes three months to recover. I could run adequately after a few days but I didn't run well until October.

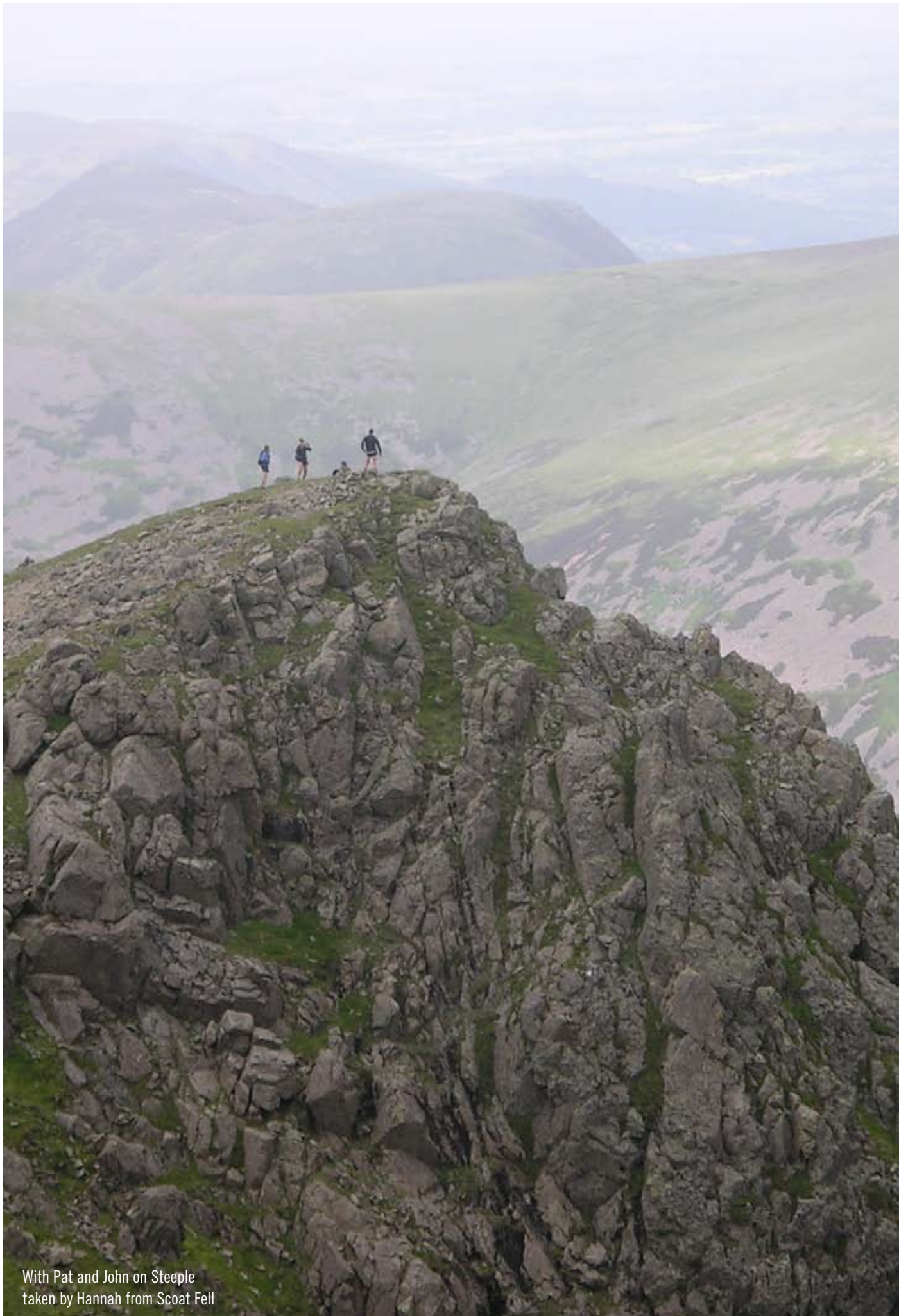
It's worth going out on a limb, risking injury and ridiculousness and placing unreasonable demands on your family, friends and self because afterwards you will smile about it for months. Possibly forever.

You will never be able to pay your friends back. Instead you will become a Bob zealot, encouraging other people to do Bob so that you can help them in turn and not feel so massively indebted.

If you're lucky, like me, then you won't have to do that because all the people looking on will go 'blimey. If he can do it, I'm doing it.' and your next year will be very busy.

[William Ross, November 2010](#)





With Pat and John on Steeple
taken by Hannah from Scoat Fell

2011 Black Combe Book

Bets, real or imaginary, may be laid at the Christmas dinner. L&H reserves the right to change its mind, odds or story if reality is inconvenient. All profits* will go to the orphans and baby animals.

In 2011:

- Pete T runs the marathon in less than 3:00: 9/2
- Peter K runs the marathon in less than 3.15: 7/4
- Mike McIver breaks the club record for the Bob Graham: 5/2
- Dave W does the Old County Tops in under 10 hours: 6/1
- A Vet 40 from BCR beats Pete in a fell race: 6/1
- Pete has to give back the Froty: 30/1
- Will beats his Jura time: 10/1
- Parmy completes a champs series and wins the handicap prize: 4/1
- Mike Berry wins the summer Black Combe race: 3/1
- Black Combe in the top 40 at the Ian Hodgson Mountain Relay: 10/1

Winner of the mens' winter league:

- Jamie Baron: 4/1
- Peter Kay: 3/1
- Dave Watson: 3/1
- Pete Tayler: 10/1
- Ken Lindley: 10/1
- Paul Kingsnorth: 8/1

Winner of the women's winter league:

- Helen Gee: 3/1
- Claire Watson: 4/1
- Hazel Tayler: 6/1
- Sue Hodgkinson: 4/1
- Gill O'Connell: 4/1

Number of BCR Bob Graham finishers in 2011

- One: 1/2 on
- Two: Evens
- Three: 6/1
- Four or more: 10/1

A Black Combe runner wins a top 3 prize in any (non-show) fell race. By category:

- Open: 200/1
- Women's open: 10/1
- Vet 40: 50/1
- Vet 50: 20/1
- Women's Vet 50: 2/1
- Vet 60: 8/1
- Vet 70: Evens

Televised outings of the penguin suit:

- One: 2/1
- Two: 4/1
- Three or more: 10/1
- Karl gets interviewed live on TV: 20/1

*after deduction of salaries, expenses and airport taxes.

