

65 @ 65 +

On 17/18th May 2008 Paul Murray (Rucksack Club and Horwich RMI Harriers) traversed the 65 highest summits in the Lake District on a continuous end-to-end route. He started at Walna Scar Road end (Duddon) and finished at Hartsop (Patterdale) 46hrs. 17mins. later.

Paul planned to do his traverse last year in celebration of his 65th birthday but, due to poor weather, deferred his attempt until this year by which time he was 66.

The total distance which he travelled was approximately 150 kilometres (93 miles) involving total ascent in the region of 11,000 metres (36,000 feet). His total rest / sleep time (4 hrs. 26 mins) is included within the overall total of 46hrs. 17mins. The summits which he climbed are all over 2500 feet (762 m.) high and are the 65 highest Lakeland hills as listed by John and Anne Nuttall in their book 'The Mountains of England and Wales'. Sail was the lowest at 773 m. (2536 ft.).

After careful consideration of which mountain summits should be included within their list, the Nuttalls adopted "any summit of 2000 ft. or more which rises above its surroundings on all sides by at least 50 ft." and, like Sir Hugh Munro's tables of the 3000 ft. mountains of Scotland, one summit requiring climbing skills is included – Pillar Rock (780 m. / 2560 ft.).

Paul was supported on the fell by members of the Rucksack Club (RC) and of Horwich RMI Harriers (HRMI) and by his wife, Margaret, at road crossings. Here are his recollections :

"I started from the foot of Walna Scar road on the Duddon side at 2.00 a.m. on Saturday with Rae Pritchard (RC) and it remained dark but clear as we traversed Dow Crag, Coniston Old Man, Brim Fell, Swirl How and Great Carrs, dawn breaking as we descended to Wrynose Pass which we crossed without stopping. It was misty on Crinkle Crag but by Bowfell it was clear though cool. These were ideal conditions and we were going well. Edwin Coope (RC / HRMI) met us at Esk Hause shelter with food and drink. The next hills, Allen Crag, Glaramara and Looking Steads involved a long out and back route which can be tricky in mist, but they remained clear and we made good progress. Peter Walkington (HRMI) had set-up a rope on Broad Stand and he and Rae made sure I made a safe ascent and descent of Scafell. Neil Shuttleworth (Glossopdale) was also there with a welcome cup of tea. There were a few specks of rain as we went round to Lingmell and onto the Corridor Route but fortunately the rocks remained dry and we reached Sty Head well ahead of schedule. Edwin provided more food and drink and we were joined by Ian Charters (HRMI) and Kath Brierly (RC / Todmorden Harriers) for the next stage."

Paul's split times were Wrynose 2hrs. 35mins. (10.5km / 900m ascent), Esk Hause 2hrs. 33mins. (8.5km / 860m ascent) and Sty Head 4hrs. 38mins. (16.25km / 960m ascent) plus 7mins. rest at Esk Hause and 18mins. at Sty Head.

"It was misty again as we went over Great Gable, Green Gable and Kirkfell but we had no navigational problems. The hardest summit of the round is Pillar Rock which we approached via Robinson's Cairn and the High Level Route. Rob Wilkinson (RC) was waiting with a rope and he and Rae expertly guided me up and down the Slab and Notch route. Then it was on to Pillar, Black Crag, Red Pike, Scoat Fell, Steeple and Haycock, all familiar peaks. We descended into Ennerdale, where Kath left us, and Ian stayed with me up the long climb to High Stile and down the worst descent of the weekend to Buttermere where my wife, Margaret, and my daughter, Ros, were waiting with welcome refreshments. I planned my schedule so as to arrive at Buttermere before nightfall, bearing in mind the rough descent from High Stile, and was pleased to arrive at 8.28 in the evening."

Sty Head to Buttermere 8hrs. 17mins. (24.5km / 2200m ascent) plus 22mins. rest at Buttermere.

"Ros (RC / HRMI) took over from Ian and her job was not only to give me food and drink, but also help me to navigate in the dark over the North West Fells of Sail, Crag Hill, Grasmoor and Grisedale Pike. It turned out to be the most difficult route-finding of the weekend as we encountered both darkness and mist but Ros had no problem using the compass to pick the correct lines. After a slow descent off Grisedale Pike we arrived at Braithwaite feeling tired almost 24 hrs after I had left the Duddon valley and so I had a sleep in Margaret's car for about two and a half hours."

Buttermere to Braithwaite 4hrs. 50mins. (16km / 1200m ascent) plus 3hrs. 13mins. rest (including about 2hrs. 30mins. sleep) at Braithwaite.

"It was a fine clear morning with a cool breeze and good views from the tops and it was to stay that way until dusk. Ros remained with me up Skiddaw, the longest climb of the round, and over Blencathra to Threlkeld. Geoff Bell (RC) accompanied me from there over the Dodds and Helvellyn range to Grisedale Tarn. Our route was similar to the Bob Graham except that we also went out first to Greenside and then later to Catstyecam and Striding Edge. At Grisedale Tarn, once again, Edwin provided support and Mary White (RC / HRMI) and her husband, Andy (RC), joined me and continued with me to the finish. They both chatted away and we seemed to easily ascend St. Sunday Crag and Fairfield and then over to Kirkstone by way of Hart Crag, Dove Crag and Red Screes. Margaret was there again at the road crossing, so after a change of shoes and more food and drink, I felt fine for the last stage – just six tops of the High Street range. We travelled well and I was pleased to cross Nan Bield Pass to Harter Fell and return back to High Street before it went dark. I was now in my third period of darkness but Mary and Andy's route finding was superb. As we descended off my 65th hill, Rampsgill Head, we could see the moon's reflection in Hayeswater and we soon reached the dam and stony track to Hartsop. We were all pleased to be finishing and were able to jog the last two hundred metres to reach the car park at 17 minutes past midnight."

Paul's final split times were : Braithwaite to Threlkeld 5hrs. 17mins. (20.5km / 1500m ascent), Threlkeld to Grisedale Tarn 5hrs. 23mins. (21.5km / 1490m), Grisedale Tarn to Kirkstone 3hrs. 10mins. (10.35km / 825m) and Kirkstone to Hartsop 5hrs. 8mins. (21.75km / 1010m) plus 10mins. rest at Threlkeld and 16 mins. at Kirkstone.

His schedule of summits in order of ascent were :

Dow Crag, Coniston Old Man, Brim Fell, Swirl How, Great Carrs, Crinkle Crag South Top, Crinkle Crag (Long Top), Shelter Crag, Shelter Crag North Top, Bowfell, Bowfell North Top, Esk Pike, Allen Crag, Glaramara, Looking Steads (Glaramara), Great End, Ill Crag, Broad Crag, Scafell Pike, Symonds Knott, Scafell, Lingmell, Great Gable, Green Gable, Kirkfell East Top, Kirkfell, Pillar Rock, Pillar, Black Crag, Red Pike (Wasdale), Scoat Fell, Steeple, Haycock, High Stile (Buttermere), Sail, Crag Hill, Grasmoor, Grisedale Pike, Skiddaw (via Millgill and Carlside), Skiddaw Little Man, Gategill Fell Top (Blencathra), Blencathra (Halls Fell Top), Atkinson Pike (Blencathra), Great Dodd, Stybarrow Dodd, Greenside, Raise, Whiteside, Helvellyn Lower Man, Helvellyn, Catstyecam, High Spying How (Striding Edge), Nethermost Pike, Dolywaggon Pike, St. Sunday Crag, Fairfield, Hart Crag, Dove Crag, Red Screes, Thornthwaite Crag (via Stony Cove Pike), Harter Fell (Kentmere), High Street, Kidsty Pike, High Raise (High Street) and Rampsgill Head.

Edwin Coope