

Mark Hartell's 77 Peaks

The Lake District 24 Hour Record Is Broken

The breaking of the Lake District 24 Hour Record will always be a defining point in the history of mountain endurance running. It is without doubt the toughest challenge of its type in the UK and probably the world. Bold words, but can you think of any other non-stop mountain challenge which involves 92 miles + 40,000ft of ascent. The existing fine record of 76 peaks was set by Mark McDermott in 1988 and was the equivalent of almost exactly 1½ Bob Graham rounds. To even match the record, a contender needs to keep going for 24 hours at a pace fast enough to speed round the Bob Graham in 15 hours, a time which to the best of my knowledge has so far only been achieved by Billy and Stuart Bland. This puts the challenge into perspective.

Mark Hartell's build up for the 1997 attempt, his third, was better than ever. He had recced all the sections a number of times, sometimes linking two or three sections together carrying a sack and he had run the night sections at night. He had designed a schedule based on Mark McDermott's times in 1988 and matched these times in training. During the months leading up to the attempt he was in the winning High Peak Marathon team and he won the 59 mile Fellsman Hike in early May. Disappointed with the way he felt on the Fellsman, doubts crept in and Mark considered forgetting the whole thing as he had no wish to 'let down his pacers again'. However, with Jim Davies he won the overall running on the Scottish Island Peaks Race in mid-May and with Mark Seddon he won the Elite Class on the Lowe Alpine MM on the Isle of Jura at the beginning of June. To some, this all seemed a 'bit' excessive but for Mark this was the way it had to be and a deadly serious, 'do or die' third and final attempt to break the record was on - **Martin Stone**

To Mark's article, contributions have been added at suitable points by his pacers.

Mark Hartell writes:

This would have been a dream for Anneka Rice. I had no fewer than 23 people who had pledged to give up their time to look after me and support me day and night. No doubt, she would have used this as an opportunity to build a house or re-roof a church. Me ?..... I just went for a run.

Having said that, you have to realise that this was no ordinary carefree trot with some of my mates. No, this was the culmination of years of training, planning and dreaming. This was going to be the "big one". To understand why I came to be standing in a thin drizzle on a campsite in the Lake District at 04.55 on a Saturday morning it is necessary to wind the clock back seven years to where I realised that my successful completion of the Bob Graham round of 42 peaks in the English



14 hours to go as Mark leaves Great Langdale
Photo: Rex Stickland

Lake District was going to be the beginning of a journey rather than the end. Up to that point I hadn't realised that each time I made one of these dreams come true, I would simply find new, harder ones to fill the gap.

A few months later, I was at the presentation ceremony to receive my certificate of achievement from the club president, Mark McDermott. It is a founding tradition that the current president of the club is the holder of the 24 hour record so here I was meeting the man who had beaten Joss Naylor's record set back in 1976....and he looked normal. Small thoughts start to form.

Summer 1992 and, having given up smoking, I manage to get round the Paddy Buckley Round (a Welsh equivalent of the Bob Graham) in just over 18 hours; well ahead of my expectation. Small thoughts get bigger and I pluck up the courage to get hold of the list of peaks traversed by Mark for his record. Immediate despondency, once I realised that the 76 peaks based around the Bob Graham involved complete new sections was replaced by a gradual determination as I used nearly every weekend over the coming year to reccy sections of the route.

July 1993 and like a lamb to the slaughter, a young and nervous fell-runner with more aspirations than common sense is standing at the start on a weekend where a forecast of "heavy, frequent and squally showers with hail on higher ground" would have most sensible people doing a spot of canoeing. That fell-runner was me and eight hours later my dreams were shattered as I came into Dunmail twenty minutes down on schedule and called it a day feeling acutely embarrassed at having wasted the time of those dedicated friends

who were stood there in the rain happy to run with me and support me if I was going on.

June 1994 sees a repeat run. The same burning enthusiasm has delivered me tense and nervous to the start line on a day of dubious weather and the inevitable follows... only this time it is in front of the cameras as a crew from Border TV are making a documentary about the Bob Graham. Bitter disappointment then, and the same feeling that I have let my mates down and failed very publicly. Time to re-think.

1995 sees me with a different goal, the Ramsay round of 24 Munros in Lochaber. By now, however, I am becoming known as "Rain Boy" and, sure enough, I pick a weekend when snow is forecast above 3000 feet for the attempt. With gritted teeth I steel myself for 24 hours of running in the wet and the clag, desperately needing a success to boost my confidence but everything ends very suddenly as I step of a patch of old snow descending Sgurr Eilde Mor. Seconds later I am out of control, sliding down the slope headfirst and on my back!!! Amazingly I got away with only a bashed knee to show for my 300 foot slide but once more I have to hobble down to the waiting support and mumble my excuses.

After all this, I knew I needed to prove something to myself. Everybody else seemed to think I was the hard luck guy but I wasn't sure any more. So, June 1996 saw me back in Scotland but this time on my own and under a cloudless sky I managed to complete those 24 Munros with a few minutes in hand. In the following weeks I exceeded my expectations, coming second on The Hard Rock, my first 100 mile run in the USA and had

a long but enjoyable day (and night) cycling across Ireland and running up the 3000 foot mountains on the way with Adrian Belton.

Unfinished business then...and by November, three people had even suggested that I should have another go. So it was that on June 13th (a Friday, no less !!) I came to be in Keswick, trying to get some sleep before my early start. This time felt different; despite tension in the weeks leading up to this day, I now felt calm. I knew that I was better organised and by now, I had experience of being on my feet for a full 24 hours and more. One problem remained, however, the "Rain Boy" tag was proving difficult to shift and the optimism of the forecasters was rudely dispelled by the reality of the drizzly clag outside the window.

And that's how I came to be trotting down the road from Braithwaite to the foot of Skiddaw with a feeling of resignation as I looked up to where the hills should have been basking in the early morning light. Once again, a small army of pacers were lined up and were being cheerful in the face of adversity. Once again my wife, Debbie, had put up with months of my repeated absence at weekends and once again, Fred Rogerson, the club chairman had got up at some unearthly hour to drive from Windermere to wish me well and see me off. How could I let these people down again? Two hours later, on the climb up to Little Calva and the pacers inform me I am five minutes downdeja vu. This time though, something is different and once we safely reach Coombe, the scene of my navigational blunder back in 1994 I snap into a different mood. I am frustrated and angry that all this preparation and commitment can be dashed by the fickle vagaries of the weather and so decide to throw caution to the wind. Rather than running at the pace which I know I am capable of sustaining I will run to the schedule 'till I can run no more. These are desperate measures indeed....all my experience to date has taught me the necessity of running "within" oneself but that approach won't work here. Some determined running UP Lonscale fell means that I am back on schedule but have to postpone the planned rice pudding feed as the pacers cannot be expected to carry the sac, run to keep up with me and sort out some food. The "second breakfast" - tinned peaches and rice is quickly dispatched on the way up Blencathra and then we negotiate the horribly greasy top of Halls fell ridge before blasting down to Threlkeld one minute down after four hours running.

Mark Seddon - Leg 1 -> Threlkeld

Out of my tent at 4:30 am in time for Mark's 5-am start. My body was still feeling asleep but I was determined to give Mark all the help I could. The first 2 miles was straight down the A66 to Keswick it felt very fast to me up to



*Support in the dark at Honister
Photo: Rex Stickland*

Latrigg car park where Hugh Symonds joined us. I quickly changed from trainers to Walshes and lost 100m. The pace was so fast that I took half the climb of Lonscale Fell to catch up. We climbed into the cloud and a strong northerly wind was blowing. By Skiddaw Mark was a few minutes down on schedule and I was still struggling to keep up every rummage in the rucksack for food or drink meant 50m or so to catch up. By Great Scafell we had lost around 6 minutes on schedule but mainly because of the wind. From here the wind was behind or to the side. Coombe being such a small hill, had caused navigational problems on previous attempts but now Mark and Hugh's extra familiarity with this area and a careful bearing meant no problems this time despite the 50m visibility. Mark flew down the next descent and managed to jog some of the long marshy drag up to Bowscale Fell, pulling back around 4 minutes in the process. By Blencathra, I was very tired and not being very good on steep, wet, rocky descents I gave the support rucksack to Hugh and watched them disappear down Hall's Fell. They arrived at Threlkeld on schedule which was a magnificent start in difficult conditions.

M. H.

There seems to be some surprise and a buzz of excitement as I go through the support point but I have no time to stop or look around and am off up Clough Head and back into the mist and drizzle. This section is where I have planned an extra peak. Catsycam is scheduled for 15 minutes out and 13 back but with the wet rock I expect it might take a little longer. When I check my watch and realised that I have done out and back in 26 minutes, I realise that I must be running fairly quickly. Coming down from Dollywaggon Pike we emerge from the mist and suddenly I can see that the cloud base is rising and it is drying-up. This fuels my determination and I find myself arriving at Dunmail Raise 10 minutes ahead of schedule. Well, this is it....GAME ON !!!

Andrew Davies Leg 2 -> Dunmail Raise

The shout went up that Mark would be with us shortly. Although we were only pacers, we were still nervous to not let him down. I didn't really know Mark, being a last minute addition to the team. Waiting there, seeing the clag on the tops and wind in the trees and feeling drizzle on my face I thought it likely he would quit. But as he arrived there was not a single negative word cheery greetings to one and all. He grabbed some food and was gone before the event sack, due to be worn that day on many different backs, had been made ready. A few things stand out about the next few hours. The weather far from good. At least the wind was a tail-wind, but it really needed to clear and dry up if he was to have a fair chance. All the way south to Helvellyn we kept imagining that the clag was clearing and weather improving, but of course it wasn't. With the extra peak, Catstye Cam, in the bag we dropped off Dollywaggon to Angle Tarn and it was definitely looking better to the west. Returning a little later from Greatrigg Man, Mark had gained minutes on the schedule and conditions had improved enough to give him a fighting chance.

We were a team of 3 pacers and such was the pace that a pause to record times, extract a jacket, food or drink instantly left one lagging behind and required an immense effort to make up the ground. By the ascent of Fairfield, Mark was stronger than any of us and two of us dropped a little behind, meeting up again on the return from Hart Crag. We were meant to be pacers, know the route, keep spirits high and be strong enough to provide encouragement. Yet, he could quote bearings from memory, foresee and warn of possible navigation errors, was never breathless but chatty and good humoured, relentlessly clawing minutes back from the schedule. By Dunmail we were all weary, glad to have done our job on such a historic day, happy to see Mark step over the stile on his way up another steep climb. Another 16 hours of this with no respite and we could only look on in awe.

Mark Elsegood Leg 3 -> Langdale

We arrived at Dunmail to find that Mark was believed to be just ahead of schedule despite the less than perfect weather. Encouragingly though the lower tops were beginning to clear and the forecast for a brighter afternoon seemed correct. The party gathered in anticipation of Mark's arrival included the then holder of the record Mark McDermott, still jetlagged from the previous days flight from the Middle East. A roll call of the others included Martin Stone, Craig Harwood, Debbie Hartell and Isla the dog, also Rex Stickland, Andrew Addis, Karen and Dan Parker, Emma Moody and Debbie Thompson and of course the pacers for the next section, John Kewley and myself.

After a swift distribution of kit, John and I were ready for Mark's arrival, just. Mark

was 12 minutes up on schedule and no sooner had he arrived than he was ascending Steel Fell after his usual rolling stop, closely attended by Martin and Craig and a tray full of goodies. He was in good spirits and climbed like a demon. The diagonal traverse he showed me on my successful round two weeks earlier worked well and we started the leg up on time. The tops were now clear and the running was good. Mark had thoroughly recited the route and stuck to it religiously to the mild astonishment of a group of rambles who had chosen to picnic on one of the short cuts. Whilst John and I politely ran round, Mark went storming through. The climb to Sergeant Man was hard. Mark was feeling light headed and John and I steadied the pace to allow Mark to feed and recuperate. This seemed to work as the time losses over the rest of the leg were reduced to just a few minutes. This leg provides a lot of good running and not much chance to gain time. Navigation in the clear weather was not a problem, but it was a good job Mark was concentrating because as I was setting off for Harrison Stickle from Thunacar Knott, Mark sternly reminded me, "Pavey Ark if you don't mind!" Whoops!

The fells were beginning to fill up and amongst them were two of Mark's old university friends who were a bit bewildered as to why Mark was unable to stop and chat. Some kind of run against the clock he said as he sped on toward Loft Crag. The end of the leg was now in site across the valley floor and Mark led the way down the tortuous descent into Langdale. Another descent and the knees were beginning to hurt and Nurofen was requested of the advanced support team scouts who were jogging down the road to meet us. Langdale is probably the psychological low point, being just under halfway with 10 hours under your belt and the big climbs to follow and so it seemed. Mark was tired and aching but determined and feeding of all the sincere encouragement the team could muster.

M. H.

Two hours later, after the many short climbs of the Langdales I begin to wonder about paying the price for the early speed and enthusiasm. Six precious minutes have slipped from that schedule and the effort is beginning to tell. New section, new pacers however and we have Ben the dog coming along now.

The climb up Pike O'Blisco is quite tough and I am facing up to the prospect of sustaining this pace for another 14 hours. Once we are up Blisco I perk up and start catching up on the news of the pacers - we can relax a bit now as the rock is dry and the cloud is clear of the tops. Going over Bowfell though, I can see that the Scafell's are still in the clag and wonder how wet the rock will be. We decide that Ben really shouldn't tackle Broad stand since he is not a very big dog and so it is just Bob Berzins and myself who tackle the drip-

ping wet rock of the intimidating corner. He heaves me up then has a desperate struggle to follow. What do I do? - I dread the thought that I might be responsible for an accident and then, with a big sigh of relief, he has sorted the awkward move and we can press on. Great Gully and the West Wall traverse demand similar respect but shortly we are traversing over to Lingmell and soon we will be down into Wasdale and still just about on schedule. Hell, this is going to happen!! I can see the cloud lowering again as night draws nearer but my schedule has time in for a 78th top, Fleetwith Pike, and I know I only need to do 77. I can use those 23 minutes to counter the slower pace which may be forced if we are in the mist at night.

Ben, the Dog (Alias Dan Parker) - Leg 4 -> Wasdale

We arrived in Langdale an hour or so early and had to hang around waiting for this bloke called Mark to turn up. There was someone else called Mark there already so I'm not sure why he wouldn't do instead. After a couple of bowls of water at the Old Dungeon Ghyll I amused myself with an attractive looking Collie called Isla. First we played 'lets see who can bark the loudest' and when that wasn't approved of we tried 'face licking while shoe laces were being tied' instead.

Eventually the particularly important Mark turned up - rather slowly I thought considering how long we had been hanging around. He did look rather pale and unwell though, so I let him off. Once we got going the pace was quite reasonable as we climbed up the first hill - 'Pike of Blisco' I think it's called. My first problem came on the way up Crinkle Crag when we hit a rather steep and rocky bit - not so easy when your legs are as short as mine. However with a bit of help I made it up and we carried on into the mist. There was clearly a risk of getting lost here so I made sure to run ahead and find the way before coming back to fetch the rest of the party. There was never any danger of not finding them in the mist with all that puffing and panting going on.

The descent of Bowfell to Rossett Pike was entertaining, for me at least, though I'm not sure if Mark liked it as I tried to show him at close quarters exactly where to put his feet. I eventually gave up and did a few hill intervals up Rossett Pike to keep me amused. I must say if I had chosen the route around here I'd have gone to Esk Pike first and then Rossett Pike, but apparently there really isn't anything in it, or so I was told by Isla later.

At Esk Hause we met up with a very nice man called Barry who proceeded to dish out heaps of food and drink. Mark's favourite seemed to be Rice Pudding and Peaches. Personally I think he'd have done a lot better on half a tin of Pedigree Chum (or PC as we dogs call it) every hour, but there's no accounting for taste.

We quickly proceeded along the tops over Scafell Pike and down to Mickledore where Karen was waiting for me. Initially she had been a bit apprehensive but I soon won her over with my charms. At Broad Stand I finally met my match - there was no way I was going up, and certainly not having seen Mark alarmingly spread-eagled above me. While we were waiting for Mark and Bob to reappear I discovered that the rocks here gave a particularly loud resonant echo when you barked (so I made good use of the fact). A few dozen more hill intervals chasing and demolishing a stick was also quite fun.

The others finally reappeared and we headed over towards Lingmell before a very rapid descent down into Wasdale. I raced on ahead to try to get a quick bite to eat, hoping to be asked to help on the next section as well. Unfortunately it was not to be - something about not having suitable headlight I think...

M. H.

Wasdale then; and here is the President himself, my Macclesfield club mate, Mark McDermott. Despite only arriving back in the UK from Oman 24 hours earlier he is here and is going to run with me to Honister. There is a massive team of well wishers assembled and the road support pair of Craig Harwood and Martin Stone are going to any length to ensure I eat and drink enough - Craig even follows me up the hillside balancing a tray of food in one hand until the fell wall makes this impractical: the Campari girls have nothing on you, Craig.

On many occasions I had visualised the route and how it would feel. Nearly always I expected the relentless climb up the side of Yewbarrow to be my nemesis but with the joking and chattering I suddenly realised the top was in sight. Brilliant!! The cloud was still threatening and down on Pillar but the pace was adequate and there was a final few seconds of brilliant light as the setting sun came below the cloud layer out to the West. Darkness threatening now and as we tackle the rocky descent of Great Gable it becomes tricky, headtorches on and concentrating hard but every time we reach a top it seems like I have lost a couple of minutes. Descending into Honister the ground seems rougher than I remember and as I repeatedly stumble I feel the record beginning to slip from my grasp. Arriving at Honister I am briefly angry - everybody seems so cheerful and light hearted but don't they realise... this is serious!! I am losing it!!

Mark Elsegood Leg 5 -> Honister

To a lot of people this leg is the decider. If you can manage the climb out of Wasdale up Yewbarrow you are well on your way. The pacers were prepared for this and were ready to provide all the encouragement necessary. Mark arrived on time and seemed in fine form. Another expert rolling stop and we set off up Yewbarrow. Mark McDermott had joined Richard Calder and

myself for this section as Craig was injured (and very disappointed). Talk of the Himalayas, the Middle East and the forthcoming Hardrock 100 kept Mark occupied for the duration of the first climb. Things were going well again, up on time and a relatively fine evening in prospect. The low clouds were now only hovering over the very high tops of Gable and Scafell, although Steeple was strangely isolated in its own zone of mist. We were joined by an irrepressible John Kewley on Scoat Fell who had unwisely ascended the screes of Wind Gap to meet us. The pace was steady, but the climbs were hard with a few minutes dropped on the climbs of Pillar and Kirkfell. Support though seemed in abundance as Jo Faulkner and Ruth were col hopping and providing a welcome supplement to the pacers rations. As dusk was beginning to fall at Beck Head the mood was lifted again by new blood as Andrew Davies appeared out of the mist to do another stint.

Andrew Davies - Leg 5 -> Honister

I waited for what seemed like an age, sat on my perch above Beck Head in the mist, straining to hear the sound of the team approaching. Mark, flanked by his pacers and supporting friends eventually appeared and about 5 of us set off up Gable. Mark was looking a little tired like it wasn't easy any more and yet he was still on form, focused and attentive to the navigation, happy to talk every so often. The mist cleared but it quickly became dark enough on the descent of Gable to require head torches. Many torches lit the way as pacers running to the side, shone their beams across the way, trying to prevent any slowing of the pace. The soft run out to Base Brown was a welcome change from the rocky tracks of the last few hours although the contour route to Brandreth was exceedingly hard going in the dark. Mark McDermott dropped low from the start and gained on all of us. We were slightly behind schedule at this point and the pacers were preparing to persuade Mark to drop Fleetwith Pike. No need, he had already realised that this was unwise and was heading directly for Honister. Dropping in to the welcome of many lights at Honister one could feel a sense earnest which had brought everyone to this place in the middle of the night to urge Mark on.

M. H.

Five hours to go and this is not going to be easy but we negotiate the short leg to Newlands Hause with only 5 more minutes lost and the support team have even sent Wendy Dodds up onto the fell with her broken arm to shine a torch at the start of the steep descent to the col by the waterfall. Still no time for the planned brief rest stops, I must use every minute to make forward progress. Coming off Ard Craggs we are 50 metres too far right and have a brief flounder in the heather - it's slipping away again. The pacers sense my tension and double up on navigation, plan-

ning to use the extra people on this section to mark the key points on the dog-legs out to Whiteless Pike and up and down Grassmoor. Everything seems to be going OK but Grassmoor is in the cloud and the expected dawn still hasn't materialised. Suddenly I have lost over 10 minutes just on Grassmoor and only have 8 minutes in hand. Time to pick it up but have I got any reserves left? Traversing out to Whiteside I take a line slightly too high and, in the half light of dawn, the top seems further along the ridge than I remember. Chris tells me I am on schedule but I don't believe it. Back then and more tricky contouring under Hobcarton Pike and round to Ladyside Pike. I have definitely picked up now, only two tops remain and the pain in my toenails doesn't seem to be getting any worse. Back along the fault lines to the top of Hobcarton Pike and Anne Stentiford, holder of the Ladies 24 hour record, reminds me to "pull my finger out". Really pushing now, even running up the easier parts of the climb and then I am on top of Grizedale Pike.

Andrew Addis Leg 8 -> Braithwaite

I had been privileged to pace this final leg on Mark McDermott's 76 peaks, when in perfect weather, a fiery Mark bagged the extra two peaks and with time to spare celebrated on Grisedale Pike, before taking Joss' legendary Lake District 24 Hour Record. Nine years almost to the day and this time it was so very different. On a very long and dark night, with clag and drizzle on Grassmoor and Sand Hill, a struggling Mark lost precious minutes as the whole adventure became terribly tense. As I waited on a misty Hobcarton with Ann and Bill, the spare time was slipping away when suddenly crashing rocks below us signalled the arrival of a resurgent Mark. We fly onwards to Grisedale and soon a new record is set and history made Mark, that was too tight for comfort!!

M. H.

Seventy seven tops and just the final descent to do. Still no time to relax, however, so I ask for everybody to give me plenty of space and set off down the stony ridge. Now I can see the campsite and after a final slither down the wet grass onto the valley path I hit the road and step up the pace once more, round the final corner and for the final 300 yards I am sprinting and there are nearly 20 people at 4.47 on a Sunday morning cheering me in with just 13 minutes to spare. With the amazing support, dedication and encouragement of some of my best friends and fellow fell-runners I have achieved the ambition which sowed itself as a tiny seed seven years before.

I only managed one extra top but you have to leave something for the next man or woman don't you ?!!

Background: Langdale Pikes from Blea Tarn