

My Frog Graham Round – 21.6.17

I had been thinking about this challenge soon after reading Peter Hayes' *Swim-hiking in the Lake District and North East England* several years ago.

I decided to go for an attempt on the longest day just because I like to mark the occasion every year with something outdoors (it seems to me such a natural thing to celebrate). A pre-dawn start also seemed like the right thing to do – I thought there'd be enough light in the sky to see me through the first bit without a head torch.



Moot Hall and bleary-eyed (did I mention that I'd only managed 20 minutes sleep?!)

However, on arrival in Keswick I realised that the track leading up to Latrigg would still be a bit gloomy amongst the trees, especially as there was a fair bit of mist and cloud hanging around. So to spare myself from the tree root trip hazards, I took the torch, just for the first 20 minutes (then had to carry it for the next 17 hours or so!).

I had been able to recce many sections of the run and had done all of the swims before, so was feeling fairly happy with the route. (Bassenthwaite and Derwent combined made for a good first experience of proper swim-hiking. Crummock and Buttermere is also a popular choice and it's great to read about so many, including the youngsters getting stuck into this – with the right support of course).

However, it had been many years since my last walk up Skiddaw and in the gloom I wasn't sure of the path – I couldn't recall the path split and unfortunately gambled incorrectly that the left hand fork was the one to take (stopping to check the map wasn't for me this early into the challenge!) I started climbing Little Man before realising my mistake and had to traverse across the open moor to get back on track. There were a few other instances of spotting a better line to take – *after* I'd done the section in question, but then just getting out there and giving it a go, solo and unsupported, was part of the attraction for me in taking on this challenge.



Pre-dawn (just) on Skiddaw on the longest day.

Feeling relieved at having ticked off FG 'checkpoint' 1, I was soon trotting down through the woods and starting to contemplate the first swim. I was dismayed to see the wind had got up and big waves were racing down the length of Bassenthwaite. No option for it but to just get on with it! I ended up doing a fair amount of breaststroke (unusual for me) as I was still getting used to the idea of being in the water that early in the morning and coping with the waves! A heavy rain shower passed over during the swim but I couldn't be any wetter!



Looking down from Barf at the first swim.

The ascent of Barf was over sooner than expected. Lord's Seat and Ullister quickly followed and my prep work on the tracks in Whinlatter meant that I was soon down through the forest. Taking on board the "Ditch the hitchers" message, I made use of the tap outside the Whinlatter Visitors' Centre to rinse everything through.



Grisedale Pike, Hopegill Head and Sand Hill were all a bit of a misty blur and the climbing was starting to slow. Reaching Crag Hill my spirits lifted as I gained my first glimpse of blue sky – looking back over Grisedale Pike and Skiddaw already ticked off! I deliberately chose the slightly longer but more gentle line up to Crag Hill, just to give me a chance to eat a bit more than I had been managing. I also started having a few doubts here about whether I'd get round, given the state of my legs. That long, solo swim across Derwent at the end of the day was weighing on my mind!



Still to come ... Whiteless Pike and later ... Red Pike and High Stile.



A fun descent from Wandope!



The other side of Crummock, thinking about the slog up to Mellbreak – I wasn't looking forwards to that!



Looking back on some of leg 2.

I was thinking perhaps of leaving the FG route after swimming Crummock and just treating it as a fun day out, possibly swimming Buttermere, then getting the bus back. On reaching Low Ling Crag I realised I wasn't that far off my plan, so pushed on. However I didn't get the best of lines through the bracken and this was where my time 'cushion' started to vanish.

The never ending path to Red Pike – this was where I started to suffer in the heat! That climb just went on for ages and my energy was going.



After the boulder fields of High Stile ... the bracken. In fact, there was a fairly decent path still through it all. The earlier climb to Mellbreak was worse. As a sufferer of post-Lyme Disease syndrome, I'm very aware of creepy crawlies lurking in the undergrowth – in fact, I kept on stopping to check my legs for hitchers as I climbed through the bracken. The horse-flies were another significant distraction throughout the afternoon! I was also trying to convince myself that the climb up to Robinson on the other side couldn't be that bad ...



The swim across Buttermere was lovely – calm water and I was swimming well. I could probably do with acclimatising to non-wetsuit swims as changing here took longer than the actual swim! All the swims were a pleasant break from being on my feet and I felt slightly more energised after each one. So the climb to Robinson was back on the agenda.



The pain that was the climb up Hassnesshow Beck! Tortuous! On the earlier parts of the climb the fence line just next to the path offered some handholds so I could haul myself up!



Looking across from Robinson.

After what felt like half a day, I finally made it to Robinson, and had a good run down to the col. In my mind's eye, the run off Dale Head looked great. The reality was a whole lot harder! No photos from here until Catbells as I was digging deep! Trudging up to High Spy was hard work – taking photos was far from my mind.



It was such a relief to see Catbells – the final climb. I was still wondering how choppy it might be on Derwent. If it was as bad as Bassenthwaite had been I was seriously questioning whether it would be a good idea to do the final swim – and then thinking to have come that far, and not be able to finish

it off! The closer I got to the water, the more I looked for signs of how rough it might be. On the hill the wind seemed to be dropping and the temperature still rising – so much so that I had to use some of my dwindling water to cool my head down!



Some footpath closures meant a slightly longer descent to Otterfield Bay. I sat on a rock there considering my options – I'd never swum with that level of tiredness before ... but having come this far, perhaps I could make it, no matter how slowly. It was well after the last ferry by this time, but there were still a few other boats to watch out for. I managed to get the water-skiing boat's attention, so I at least knew that they were aware of me. (I also had two bright orange tow-floats and a bright orange swim hat.)

Relieved to complete the final stage of the Derwent swim, I hauled myself out and stuffed everything away without too much care, knowing that I wouldn't need it again and being keen to get going and finish this off. I started thinking about all the fantastic scenery and places I'd been on this journey, energised by the thought that I'd made it over all those tough sections.

I picked my way through people milling about in the streets of Keswick, sort of running, and straight to the steps of Moot Hall. The final time check and then I sat down. No fanfare, applause or crowds – just the quiet satisfaction of having completed one of my toughest challenges to date.

And finally – minus the blood, sweat and pondweed, the time sheet (below). I based my timings on Tim Mosedale's FG report (thanks, Tim!). I was quite pleased with my pace over the first two legs but I wouldn't read that much into the later timings as the heat of the day and lack of training were really beginning to take their toll on me. Conditions on the day are everything – knowing what I know now, I'm sure I could go at least an hour quicker, possibly more. But that's not the point!

Frog Graham - 21.6.17 *Jonathan Wright*

	Estimate	Actual
Leg 1 - 9 miles		
Start - Keswick Moot Hall	1:00 a.m.	3:00
1. Skiddaw (S.M)	1:30	4:26
2. Bassenthwaite Church (R.A.M) 2800' up		5:12
Arr. Bassenthwaite	1:30	5:14
Swim Bassenthwaite Lake from Church Bay to Beck Wythop ~1km	15 mins (incl. changing)	
Leg 2 - 11.5 miles		
Beck Wythop (dep)	1:15	6:05
1. Barf	7:05	6:53
4. Lords Seat	7:20	7:08
5. Ullister Hill	7:31	7:15
6. Grisedale Pike	7:41	7:24
7. Hopegill Head	7:54	7:47
8. Sand Hill	7:59	8:51
9. Crag Hill	7:42	9:24
10. Wandope	7:52	9:56
11. Whiteless Pike	10:06	9:52
12. Low Bank	10:39	10:17
Arr. Crammock	10:56	10:29
Swim across Crammock Water from House Point to Low Ling Crag ~500m	40	
Leg 3 - 5 miles		
13. Low Ling Crag (dep)	11:36	11:17
14. Mellbreak (South summit)	12:06	11:59
15. Red Pike	13:14	12:21
16. High Stile	13:30	13:21
17. Horse Close (Buttermere)	14:22	14:09
Swim across Buttermere from Horse Close to Crag Wood ~160m	15	
Leg 4 - 10 miles		
Crag Wood (dep)	14:57	15:08
18. Robinson	15:52	16:26
19. Dale Head	16:29	17:04
20. High Spy	17:05	17:40
21. Cathells	17:45	18:30
Arr. Otterfield Bay	18:15	19:03
Swim across Derwent Water from Otterfield Bay to	15	
22. Otterfield Island (N)		19:24
23. St Herberts Island (N)		19:47
24. Rampsholme Island (N)		20:00
to West point of Calf Close Bay ~1.8km (total swim ~3.8km) (dep)	19:20	20:05
Finish - Keswick Moot Hall	19:45	20:19
		20:41

Total time 17hrs 41 mins

The Frog Graham Round, 21.6.17. Departure Moot Hall 3 a.m. Return 8.41 p.m.

17 hours and 41 minutes. Solo and unsupported. Full wetsuit used for all swims.

Jonathan Wright, 23.6.17