

WORDS LIZ WAKELIN

THE STEVE PARR ROUND

RUNNING THE LAKELAND 2500' SUMMITS

Summer 1984, outside the Moot Hall, Keswick, a twenty-eight-year-old man prepares for a run. He is stocky and bearded, with weather-beaten skin that belies his relative youth. Close to forty-three hours later, after many hours of steady rain, low cloud and poor visibility, Steve Parr will be back at the Moot Hall, tired but satisfied.

Seven am, July 2020. The street below the Moot Hall is deserted save for a figure in running gear surrounded by a small group of supporters & pacers. In just under forty-eight hours, Paul Wilson will be running back up the High Street to climb the steps to the Moot Hall door.

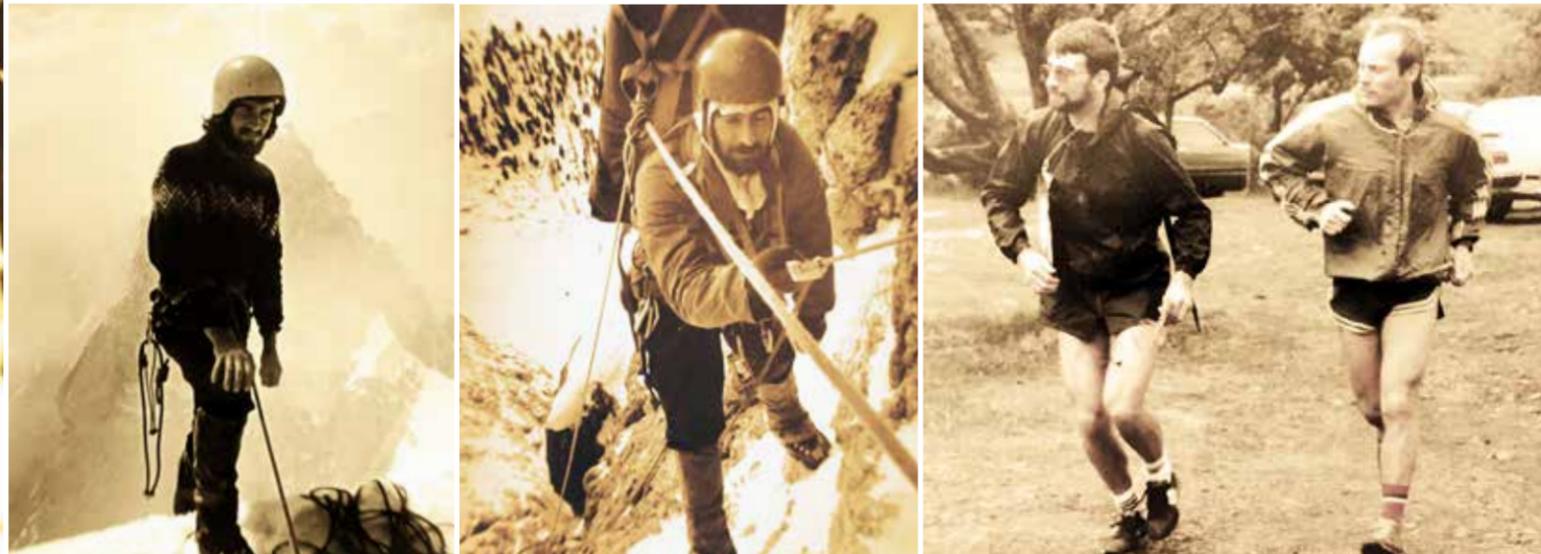
Midday, August 2020, Wrynose Pass. A group of runners appears over the skyline, moving slowly down the fellside. Toward the bottom of the slope a small figure in a blue t-shirt detaches itself from the group, followed by a man carrying a child in a backpack. She reaches the Three Shires Stone and sinks gratefully to the ground.

The woman is Kirsty Hewitson and the pacer with the child is Tim Ripper. Kirsty is about to join a small but growing number of fell runners who have completed the Lakes 2500' summits, a route that has recently started to be referred to as the Steve Parr Round. Paul Wilson had completed the route a month earlier, Tim Ripper a year before and Kirsty was the first woman to complete it, starting from the Three Shires Stone. Although their rounds included a variation made by Martin Stone in the early '90s, adding in another

summit to bring the total to sixty-two, the main route is the one devised by Steve over thirty years ago. John Fleetwood had also completed a round of 2500' summits in 2007 but without visiting the Moot Hall as the others had done.

This year has seen a renewed interest in anytime rounds, understandable during the Covid-19 race cancellations. Records have been broken on so many well-established routes but the time set by Steve Parr on his 1984 round of the 2500' summits had not yet been matched. Steve had based his route on a number of runs undertaken in the '60s and '70s, and by hours of poring over maps laid out on the living room floor. In a time before the internet and GPS, information was disseminated through running clubs and it was fellow runners in Clayton-le-Moors Harriers who had planted the seed for this venture. So how did someone who had only taken up fell running four years earlier come to devise a route and set a record that has stood for thirty six years?

Climbing was Steve's first passion, running came later. In the words of Bob Milward, one of Steve's climbing partners, the 1970s were a 'Golden Age'. The air was filled with a sense that everything was possible. It was a time of total self-reliance, with no mobile phones or tracking devices. In 1977, aged 21, he and Bob made the first British, and first winter ascent of the N Face Direct of the Sassolungo in Italy, six days of climbing in below -20C temperatures. He remembered ploughing for hours through chest deep snow as neither of them could ski or owned snowshoes. Bob recalls that "A chilly gap between gloves and sleeves let the



Main Photo: Steve Parr in 1978 ©Bob Milward; Above left to right: Steve on the summit of the Aiguille Verte, Chamonix 1974 ©Bob Milward; Steve load hauling on the north face of the Sassolungo Italian Dolomites Winter 1977©Bob Milward; Steve supporting Keith McKay on his 1984 BGR ©Martin Bluer



draught in. A fortnight later I shed two rings of skin from my wrists like dirty cuffs. The cold had frost nipped a layer of skin which turned brownish and flaked off."

A year later, he took part in a four-man expedition to the Himalayas. Disaster struck the expedition whilst attempting a new route on Darban Zom, an unclimbed peak in the Hindu Kush region of Pakistan. Close to the summit, the expedition doctor fell, hitting his head and losing consciousness. A YouTube video entitled 'Four Men and a Mountain' (<https://youtu.be/VJpCtkrLf50>) tells the whole remarkable story of more falls and avalanches and granite blocks bigger than houses crashing down around them.

Running was a way of staying fit to climb and, after moving to Preston in 1980, Steve joined Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, completing the Bob Graham Round less than a year later, fuelled by his favoured hill food - rice pudding with a dollop of strawberry jam. He reached the Moot Hall 17hrs and 58mins after he set out, which was, at the time, the second fastest completion ever. Unlike today, when information is so readily available, he was unaware of how close he was to Billy Bland's record (broken again by Billy Bland shortly after). That same year, he broke the record for the Bullock Smithy Hike, a 56-mile LDWA route across the Peak District.



Left: Kirsty Hewitson ascending Whiteless Pike ©Paul Wilson; Above: Kirsty Hewitson and Tim Ripper (and his daughter) descending to Three Shires Stone ©Liz Wakelin

Having completed the Bob Graham Round, he was looking for new challenges and settled on a round of the Lakes 2500' summits, a route pioneered in 1975 by Jim Loxham, Pete Dawes and Ken Brooks, and again in 1983 by Jim Loxham and Barry Johnson. The original 1975 route had selected Wainwright 2500' summits but was not a 'round', which Steve felt was more satisfying and in the spirit of the BGR. Even in 1984, he described the BGR as 'well-trodden' and wanted to create something less likely to receive such footfall. With a feeling for the history and tradition of the BGR he started from the Moot Hall, just as Paul Wilson did this year, and Tim Ripper a year earlier. Just under forty-three hours later he ran up Keswick High Street to the Moot Hall, having covered 116 miles, 61 summits and 42,550' ascent, travelling anti-clockwise as was traditional for Clayton Harriers. In his report, he says that he completed it in 43 hours 1 minute 40 seconds, but a recent checking of the schedule arithmetic reveals that he actually did it in 42 hours 55 minutes 40 seconds, six minutes faster than his account states. He went on to make attempts on a winter BGR, being beaten by severe blizzard conditions in the winter of 1985, and January 1986, before eventually succeeding in December 1986 a week after Selwyn Wright and John Brockbank had completed the first winter round.

Climbing was still part of Steve's life and, in the autumn of 1990, he was on his third expedition to the Himalayas. It was during that time, on a solo exploration above the Rowaling Valley, that he disappeared and, despite extensive searches, has never been found.

In his report, Steve stated that he felt that this route should stand as a challenge 'beyond the Bob Graham Round' with a time limit



of 48 hours. He saw it as more than just a physical challenge, requiring considerable mental strength and logistical skills. Tim Ripper has remarked on how logical a round of all the high tops it is. He sees it as a true fell runners route, covering both classic lines as well as new ground, although the vicious ascent and descent between High Raise and Glaramara may not be fully appreciated at the time. It was the length of time spent on such familiar territory that pleased Kirsty Hewitson, along with the fact that it is truly a test of stamina and determination. She particularly noticed the pleasure of spending such an extended time with her pacers and other supporters. Paul Wilson has compared it to the Ultra Tour de Monte Rosa which has a similar amount of ascent. He rates it as one of the best UK running challenges that he's completed and unlike any other UK hundred mile plus mountain run that he has done. What makes it particularly pleasurable is that it takes you into every area of the Lake District National Park.

The route which Steve called Beyond the Bob Graham is now being referred to as the Steve Parr Round and his time has never been bettered - until now. As these last words were being written Howard Dracup completed the route setting an incredible new time of 42 hours 37 minutes.

This could not have been written without the help of Steve's family and friends - grateful thanks to all who contributed. For Steve's report, and other background information, visit <https://www.gofar.org.uk/lakes-2500s>

For more information about Steve's climbing and running achievements visit https://www.fellrunner.org.uk/fellrunner/1991_June.pdf



Top Photo: Paul Wilson and Rob Allen climbing Glaramara; Paul descending Lord's Rake, Scafell; Paul and a support runner climbing out from Cockley Beck in the early hours ©Victoria Rose (Tory) Miller.