

# Over the hill ... and far away

## A TREBLE AT 60!

It has become customary among fell runners to celebrate their passing years on the fells as well as in the pub! I suppose Bob Graham started it all with his 42 peaks at 42 way back in 1932. Others have since taken up the theme with 50 at 50, 60 at 60 and even 70 at 70 courtesy of Joss Naylor. Approaching sixty, older but obviously still not much wiser, the possibility of undertaking some sort of challenge to mark the occasion became both inevitable and irresistible. But there were problems. The old knees, long past their 'best before' date, would soon start grating at the prospect of any mega rounds with their punishing descents. Something that would provide enduring memories, rather than memories of endurance, seemed more in order! Always juggling with ideas for peak-bagging routes it did not take long to string together three moderate but still challenging objectives. By the summer of 2009 the target of a treble at sixty was firmly established; three contrasting challenges, three distinct landscapes, three different approaches. I soon began to plan, recce and pencil-in dates for possible attempts. What follows is a brief summary of each attempt and some background as to how it came about. The only advice I would offer: - there are some great routes out there, just don't wait 60 years to do them!!

### **The Dark Peak 15 Trigs – 7 May 2010 15 'peaks', 55 miles and 8,500' in 14-25 (solo, unsupported)**

The Peak seemed a fitting place to start the celebrations. This area had provided the initial inspiration to get involved with ultra-distance running. At the age of sixteen I remember ordering a copy of the now classic 'High Peak' by Byne and Sutton from the local library and being inspired by the exploits of early bogtrotters like "Colonel" Cecil Dawson and Eustace Thomas. They both went on to make successful attempts on the Lake District fell-walking record in 1916 and 1922 respectively, well before Bob Graham made his mark in 1932. Thomas is reported to have 'got a fever in his blood' for long, hard days (now what would that mean I wonder!) and even experimented with diet and lightweight gear. He is, perhaps, best known for devising and executing the Derwent Watershed in 1918. Better known today as

the High Peak Marathon, it is still regarded as one of the most formidable challenges on the calendar nearly a century later.

Reading about those early accounts obviously made an impression. In the early 1970's I made regular outings to the Peak, trained up to walk the Pennine Way and later went on to complete an LDWA 100 miler across the South Downs before finally completing the Derwent Watershed with a handful of enthusiasts in the summer of 1975. It was not long before I switched to running. That set me off on the long and winding road that eventually brought me to the door of the Sportsman Inn on the edge of Sheffield early one morning some 35 years later.

The 15 Trigs was devised by Dark Peak Fell Runners in 1985 as a prequel to their 10th anniversary celebrations and has since become a modern Dark Peak classic. By way of an extra enticement it was the 25th anniversary and Alan Yates threw down the gauntlet for 25 runners to get round it during 2010. The challenge is to visit 15 trigs in the Dark Peak within 15 hours setting off from the Sportsman Inn. No pacers or road-side support are allowed. Although I had toyed with the idea

of making this a joint venture the experience of doing it solo was particularly appealing. For me the freedom and informality of a solo run epitomises the spirit of long distance running and adds an extra sense of excitement, particularly if, like me, you are not a natural navigator or able to readily remember routes! The other obvious advantage is that you can go when you please and readily chop and change plans as circumstances dictate.

The plan was for a Spring attempt when hopefully the peat bogs would be at their driest, the heather and the bracken at their tamest. The plan worked well. Apart from a few soggy bits on Margery Hill and Outer Edge the going was good. I was comfortably within a 15 hours schedule as far as Harry Hut but when I turned south I was up against a strong south westerly wind. Things were no longer a formality and time quickly slipped away as creeping fatigue and the wind made running hard work. To be more confident of breaking the 15 hour limit I took the more sheltered road route from Yorkshire Bridge to Stanage. From there, and with darkness rapidly descending, a relative sprint along tracks and lanes back to the Sportsman Inn ensured success. One down two to go!



The first Wainwright summit, High Raise with Great Gable on the far horizon (photo Tony Wimbrush)

**The Wainwright 7 Summits – 19 June 2010**  
**7 peaks, 65 miles and 19,000' in 21-35 (solo, supported)**

The idea for doing this one came originally from an article in the 1990's by long distance walker Geoff Saunders. He devised a '60 miles at 60' celebration by linking together the highest summit in each of Wainwright's seven volumes. This was a linear route from Haweswater to Bassenthwaite but it posed a number of awkward logistical problems. These were overcome when, in 2008, John Fleetwood completed a circular version of the seven summits from Ambleside in a solo, unsupported training run for the Ultra-Trail of Mont Blanc. This route, also dating back to the 1990's, was prompted by a suggestion from Andy Walmsley (Bowland Fell Runners) on the FRA Forum. For me the particular attraction of the route was its character. It provided a refreshing contrast to challenges like the Bob Graham and Joss Naylor by including only a handful of major peaks in a series of long ascents and descents. There was little hesitation in making a 60 ('ish) at 60 in the Lakes my second objective. Again this was to be a solo outing but to make it do-able in 24 hours I opted for road-side support, courtesy of lifeboat volunteer Mark Highfield.

The plan was for an afternoon start to give easy navigation over the night sections of Grasmoor and Skiddaw, not to mention a relaxed drive up and a pub lunch! Everything went well. After a cold, wet start June gave way to more superb dry weather. Conditions were near perfect all the way round. Although breezy on the tops excellent visibility meant I hardly needed to use the map. There were also some unexpected birthday treats in store. On the ascent of Grasmoor I was able to continually look back across a glowing, panoramic mountain landscape before the sun finally set towards the Solway Firth at about 10.30 pm. Not long after, on the final steep climb on to Skiddaw from Carlside, I was greeted by the sight of the trig pillar silhouetted against vivid narrow bands of blue and orange as the dawn broke. The mountain gods were in a playful mood - perhaps they were joining in with the 60th celebrations!! The summits of Helvellyn and High Street were enjoyed in the serene solitude of the early morning sun before descending to Kirkstone Pass. A relative sprint down tracks and lanes then brought me back to the clock tower in bustling Ambleside. It brought to an end probably the best day and night I had ever experienced in the Lakes. Two down one to go!

**The Traverse of Assynt – 12 July 2010**  
**10 Peaks, 50 miles and 21,000' in 26-59 (joint, supported)**

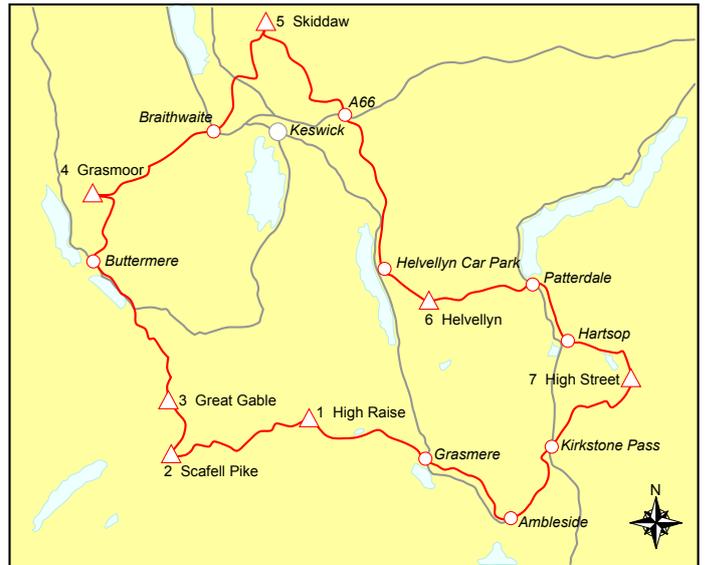
The Assynt region, in Scotland's far, far north, is the home of one of the most spectacular mountain landscapes in Britain and includes some of its most illustrious peaks – among them Suilven, Stac Pollaidh, Cul Beag, Cul Mor and Quinag. Only modest in height they rise dramatically from the surrounding bleak tablelands, giant monoliths of rock; Sirens of the



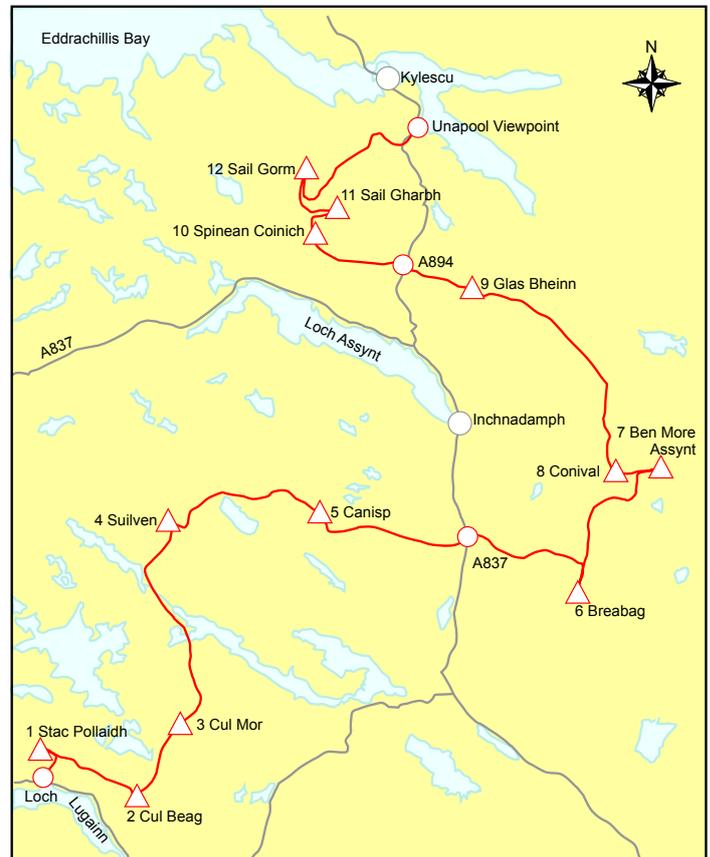
On Stac Pollaidh with Suilven and Canisp beyond (Photo by Clive Lane)



The Dark Peak 15 Trigs: 15 'peaks', 55 miles and 8,500'



The Wainwright 7 Summits: 7 peaks, 65 miles and 19,000'



The Traverse of Assynt: 10 Peaks, 50 miles and 21,000'

western seaboard: enchanting, mesmerising, captivating. After spotting an old cloth 'one inch' Ordnance Survey map of Assynt in an Oxfam shop early in 2009 the seed was sown for a third 60th celebration! With my limited experience of Scottish mountains I knew this would have to be a joint venture. It did not take much to entice Pete Simpson and Colin Brooke, both veterans of some epic challenges. Pete then recruited Clive Lane, a member of North Wales Search and Rescue, to provide road support. Having booked rooms at Inchnadamp Lodge to use as a base for a week in early July, the final piece of the treble jigsaw was in place! The object was to traverse all of Assynt's ten peaks starting from the car park at the bottom of Stac Pollaidh and finish at the Loch Glencoul viewpoint at Unapool (not to be confused with Ullapool!), just short of Kylesque.

It was just as well we had allowed a full week. With low pressure sitting off to the north-west most of the week the weather forecasts were mostly dire – strong winds, heavy showers and low cloud. Fortunately we were able to sit it out long enough to catch a ridge of high pressure which briefly forecast good enough conditions to make an attempt worthwhile. Our patience was rewarded and things again went well. Although I conceived the route, success must be credited to Pete's capable route choice and GPS navigation over largely unrecce'd terrain. Despite its modest height it is all difficult country, ranging from rocky scrambles to steep 'grass root grabbing' slopes, extensive sections of Pennine-like bog to seemingly miles of Scafell-type boulder fields, but potential obstacles were readily overcome. Clive roped up the 'mauvais pas' to the higher western summit of Stac Pollaidh. It was still possible to wade the wide stretch of river linking Fionn Loch to Loch Veyarie on the way to Suilven despite recent heavy rain. The ascent of Suilven itself was not as formidable as it looked. The western summit, Caisteal Liath, yielded a vast expanse of lochs and lochan stretching away to the sea westwards while close at hand was the stunning tower of Meall Mheadhonach, instantly recognisable from the cover of the SMC Corbett guide. With dusk almost merging into dawn there was mostly only partial darkness for the night section over the airy rocky ridges of Ben More Assynt and Conival. The long boulder strewn trek across to Glas Bheinn seemed never ending but by the time we were on Quinag's surprisingly grassy spurs we were bathed in warm morning sunshine. We were able to take the difficult descent north-west down to the road in our stride to end with a pleasant jog along the road to Unapool. A great end to a memorable treble and a memorable 60th season!

### Further Information at [www.gofar.org.uk](http://www.gofar.org.uk)

All three routes have been added to the web site at [www.gofar.org.uk](http://www.gofar.org.uk) which provides outline maps, route details and schedules. The Traverse of Assynt has been incorporated into the Over the Hill Challenge series. Although aimed primarily at the over 50's, the series may be completed by any age group.

# www.gofar.org.uk

## ULTRA-DISTANCE CHALLENGES

The purpose of this web site is to provide a single, ready source of information on the ultra-distance challenges which have been developed over recent decades. It now offers a diverse range of long and short, old and recent, informal and formal routes from around the UK. It is anticipated the five routes below will be added to the site by Christmas.

### The Dales Skyline – 36 miles and 11,000'

A linear route of ten peaks between Barbon and Settle in the Yorkshire Dales which featured in the last Fellrunner. This may prove to be a popular Dales companion to the Cumbrian Traverse.

### The Dales Top Ten – 74 miles and 11,000'

A round of ten peaks from Horton-in-Ribblesdale in the Yorkshire Dales mentioned in the last Fellrunner.

### Tranters Round – 40 miles and 20,000'

The 1964 predecessor to the Charlie Ramsey Round, it still remains a creditable challenge in its own right.

### The Traverse of Assynt – 50 miles and 21,000'

A new Scottish route completed in July 2010 and featured elsewhere in this edition of Fellrunner. It will form part of the Over the Hill Challenge series and it is open to any age group.

### Wainwright's 7 Summits – 65 miles and 19,000'

A round linking the highest summit in each of Wainwright's seven guidebooks, originally devised in the 1990's.

To Subscribe: If you wish to be directly notified of further additions please email [info@gofar.org.uk](mailto:info@gofar.org.uk) and put "subscribe" in the subject line.

### The Over the Hill Challenge Series

The OTH Series was founded in 2002 to

encourage the continued participation in ultra-distance challenges by all runners, but particularly the over 50's. There are now five peak-bagging routes in the UK series plus a Canary Islands Three Peaks Challenge for those who prefer somewhere warmer! All are between 40-50 miles with generous time limits and certificates for completion. Full details are on the web site.

Congratulations to Andy Roberts for completing the Tan Hill Inn to Kirkstone Pass Inn during May in a v 55 first class time of well under 15 hours. Tony Wimbush, Pete Simpson and Colin Brooke inaugurated a new 50 mile Scottish route - The Traverse of Assynt - in a v 60 first class time. It has been given a 48 hours time limit to reflect the difficulty of the terrain and the unpredictable weather! This allows for an overnight stop for the standard class while it must be done in one go to attain a first class registration. Full route details are on the web site.

### The 2010 Calder Valley Round (16 miles and 4000')

This training run-cum challenge was re-launched in 2010 with its own web page to mark its 21st anniversary (1989-2010). Operating in conjunction with the FRA Forum it has attracted loads of interest with over 40 completions registered so far including some consecutive doubles. There will be a year-end summary on the Forum in January so you will have some records to aim at in future! It will continue to operate as an annual challenge but there will be 3 new target times for 2011: Elite – sub 2-45, A class – sub 3-15, Standard – over 3-15. Go to [www.gofar.org.uk](http://www.gofar.org.uk) and click on 'general' for full details of the route.

To help kick things off in 2011 there will be a run out on Sunday 9th January, 8-30 am from the White Lion, Mytholmroyd. All welcome – both on the run and or in a pub afterwards!! Please ensure you register your completed run on the FRA Forum with your time and club – go to Recce - 2011 Calder Valley Round thread.

[www.gofar.org.uk](http://www.gofar.org.uk)

ULTRA-DISTANCE CHALLENGES



UK Ultra Routes by Region

The UK Big 3 Rounds

Over the Hill Challenge Series

[home](#) [about](#) [gofar](#) [definitions](#) [general](#) [acknowledgements](#) [contact](#)