

42 fells, 23 hours 43 minutes: Pastor Ben Woodd conquers the Bob Graham Round

In June 2026, the Revâ??d Ben Woodd, Senior Pastor of Barneyâ??s Church, Croydon, took on the gruelling Bob Graham Round, a hill running challenge in the English Lake District. It is named after Bob Graham, a Keswick guest-house owner, who in June 1932 broke the Lakeland Fell record by traversing 42 fells within a 24-hour period.

Traversing the 42 fells, starting and finishing at Keswick Moot Hall, involves 66 miles (106 km) with 26,900 feet (8,200 m) of ascent.

Earlier this year we reported on his training program in the Adelaide Hills. Here we post Benâ??s account of his triumphant run and his reflection on what it means to him.

The Birth and Growth of the Dream

In 2008 I read *Feet in the Clouds* a book by Richard Askwith. I remember being gripped by his description of the Bob Graham Round and thinking, â??One day, Iâ??d love to give that a go.â?•

The Bob Graham Round is a 106km circuit of 42 Lake District fells (hills) with 8,200m of ascent, to be completed within 24 hours. Only about 3,000 people have achieved it in the last 100 years and two out of three attempts fail.



I had always enjoyed running, cycling and walking in the Lake District, but after moving to Australia in 2010 my opportunities to prepare became limited. In 2012 a friend responded to my first mention of attempting the Round by reminding me of its enormity and suggesting I â??aim for something a bit smaller.â?• It was helpful advice. It deepened my appreciation of the challenge while motivating me to prove I could do it.

Life intervened. Plans for a 2020 attempt disappeared amid burnout, depression and the global pandemic. By 2026, approaching the age of 49, it felt like my last realistic opportunity. My wife Corinne encouraged me to pursue the dream, willingly solo-parenting many Saturday mornings while I trained in the Adelaide Hills.

Preparing from Australia presented obvious difficulties. I had little trail-running experience, almost no knowledge of the route and no contacts in the fell-running community. Wonderfully, I was introduced to Charlie Day, an Anglican minister and experienced fell-runner, who became an invaluable source of advice on training, kit, nutrition and route preparation. Charlie and his wife Rachel even hosted me during my time in the Lakes. I genuinely donâ??t know how I would have prepared without Charlieâ??s help. This is his round as much as mine.



Training became increasingly focused. Adelaideâ??s hills are small compared with Lakeland, so I spent countless hours up and down Brown Hill, Black Hill and Pengana track building towards 3,000 metres of elevation each week. I added strength training, experimented with shoes and nutrition, and completed several key milestone runs. As departure approached, people kept asking whether I was ready. My answer was always, â??I donâ??t know. But Iâ??m as ready as Iâ??ll ever be.â?•

The Round

After a 43-hour journey from Adelaide, I spent ten days in the Lake District with Charlieâ??s family, helping support another Bob Graham attempt, recceing sections of the route and watching an uncertain weather forecast. On the evening of 19 June I stood at the Moot Hall entrusting myself to Godâ??s mercy before setting off.

Henry Davis had given me a letter before I left Australia quoting words that stayed with me throughout the Round:

â??Run the straight race by Godâ??s good grace;
Lift up thine eyes, and seek his face.
Life with its way before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.â?•



Leg 1

Charlie Day and Tom Cox accompanied me through drizzle towards the first summit of Skiddaw. Conditions deteriorated rapidly as we climbed higher. Wind, driving rain, thick cloud and darkness made navigation difficult and Hallâ??s Fell Ridge became a dangerous descent. Charlie came close to a serious fall, reminding us how hazardous fell-running can be. We reached Threlkeld soaked through and five minutes behind schedule after what Charlie later described as some of the worst conditions he had experienced. Yet it never crossed my mind to stop.

Leg 2

Jacob Tonkin and Alexandra Duesbury guided me over Clough Head, the Dodds and Helvellyn Ridge. Watching Jacob move across his home fells with such ease was remarkable. Alex shared stories from her extraordinary coast-to-coast run, while both demonstrated the generosity that defines the Bob Graham community, giving up their nightâ??s sleep to help a complete stranger from Australia.

We reached Dunmail Raise having survived the night without losing further time.

Leg 3

Simon West and Jeff Roberts joined me for the longest and hardest section. By now fatigue was beginning to bite. I had underestimated how relentless the first two legs would be. The endless steep climbs drained my calves and thighs while the descents battered my knees and feet. Still, there was never any thought of giving in.



Thankfully the weather improved dramatically. Jeff navigated superbly while Simon kept fluids and nutrition coming. Although my legs held up well, my feet did not. Blisters developed and every downhill step became painful. Looking back, I realised that while the Adelaide Hills had prepared my muscles, they could never replicate the punishment of Lakelandâ??s steep rocky descents.

Leg 4

By Wasdale I was 30 minutes behind my 23-hour schedule and suffering badly. But someone told me the fundraising target of $30,000 had been reached, giving me fresh motivation.

Much of Leg 4 is a blur. I was simply grinding it out while Charlie and David Fort navigated perfectly, encouraged me constantly and kept me fuelled. The Lake District was glorious that afternoon and walkers along the route, familiar with the Bob Graham Round, offered generous encouragement.

At Great Gable I finally asked how far behind I was. Forty-five minutes. There was still hope. If I shortened the Honister stop and held my pace, a sub-24-hour finish remained possible. As I climbed

Green Gable I shed a tear, realising I might actually make it.

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Leg 5

After a five-minute stop at Honister we headed onto the final leg, joined by James Connell from our church in Adelaide, who had recently moved to Cumbria.

Every step hurt now, but the finish was within reach. I thought about the months of preparation, my family who had supported me so faithfully, everyone who had given financially, and the causes we were supporting. I thought especially about our daughter Elsie, who died at two days old, and about other premature babies and their families. I thought about our foster son and other children living with autism or in foster care. The Bob Graham Round was the greatest physical challenge of my life, but many of those we were supporting face far greater challenges every day.

As we reached the final summit of Robinson and descended into the evening sunshine, I knew I would make it. The final kilometres through the Newland valley and into Keswick were unforgettable. Friends, family and supporters gathered outside the Moot Hall as I climbed the steps and touched the famous door.

I had done it.

My finishing time was **23 hours 43 minutes**.



Finished

After celebrating briefly with family, friends and fellow runners, my body finally shut down. Twenty minutes after finishing I was shivering uncontrollably despite the warm evening, before collapsing into bed and sleeping deeply.

On Monday I drove away from the Lakes with immense gratitude. It is a very special place, made even more special by the remarkable community that welcomed me so warmly. Throughout the journey I experienced generosity, friendship and encouragement beyond anything I could have imagined.

My deepest thanks go to my support runners, especially Charlie Day and his family; my UK family support crew; my Adelaide family, particularly Corinneâ??s unwavering support; everyone who sent messages of encouragement; and all who contributed to the fundraising.

Most of all, thanks to God. My adventure has come to an end and Iâ??ve absolutely loved it. Above all, I hope I can continue to run with perseverance the race of life marked out for me, fixing my eyes on Jesus, who has run the race before us and is ever present at our side.

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