

Mr. BGR

An Appreciation of Fred Rogerson

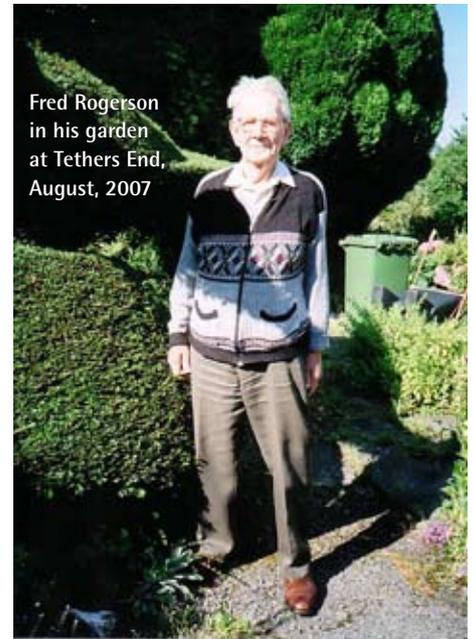
There are several people who have never competed in our sport but who have nevertheless put in a tremendous amount of time and effort in support of it. Prominent among them have been the late Joe Long and Frank Travis, who introduced amateur fell racing and orienteering to West Cumberland during the 1960s, besides helping out at events elsewhere. Both were usually accompanied by their wives, Hannah and Janet respectively, who would also render assistance at fell races.

Two other people whose names loom large in the annals of long-distance fell running especially are Fred Rogerson and his late

wife Margaret of Lindeth, near Windermere. While the names of Travis and Long may mean nothing to the majority of present-day FRA members, that of Rogerson will surely be familiar to those with an interest in the longer challenges such as the Bob Graham Round. There must be well over a thousand people who will feel eternally grateful to Fred.

The quote from one contributor to a special volume of appreciative comments that was presented to him on the occasion of his retirement from the post of Honorary Chairman of the Bob Graham 24 Hour Club in 1998: "If I'd never become aware of, and involved in, Fred's

strange obsession, I'd know a lot less about myself, about the fells, and about my fellow man, than I do now ..." And from another: "... You have selflessly provided an opportunity for many, many people to temporarily abandon the humdrum of modern living so that they can



Fred Rogerson in his garden at Tethers End, August, 2007

Photo courtesy of Bill Smith



Photo courtesy of Fred Rogerson

First four members of the BG Club pictured on Eric Beard's 1963 record round: (left to right) Eric Beard, Des Oliver (not a member), Stan Bradshaw, Alan Heaton and Ken Heaton



Above: Fred coaching his junior girls team at Deer How Hill Scout Camp in the Winster Valley. His daughter Cathrin is second from right, Christine Morgan second from left.



Above: Fred at Bob Graham's Memorial Cairn with Graham's niece, Eva, and one of his pacers, Phil Davidson



focus on and achieve something special that they will remember for the rest of their lives ...” And from yet another: “... The completion of the Round with your encouragement and inspiration is a gift which lasts for life ...”

The War Years

Fred Rogerson was born at Staveley Head Farm in the Kentmere valley on 26.1.21. Two people who exerted a great influence on his early life were the Rev. E.W.J. McConnell of St. James CofE Church and Mr. J.C. Robinson of Staveley CofE school. Double pneumonia in infancy left Fred with a weak chest and he was afterwards “reared on a diet of fresh air, cod liver oil and malt.” His grandfather Robert, a guides racer and miler, encouraged him to walk and run on the surrounding fells. Robert had finished second in the 1900 Grasmere Guides Race and fourth in 1902, at which time it was run up Silver Howe.

“I joined the T.A. as a boy soldier,” recalls Fred, “primarily to learn how to use a map and compass as I’d often got myself lost on the high fells. Another attraction was that Staveley Drill Hall had a fine snooker table! My first competitive year as a guides racer was to have been 1940 as it had been thought that I was not strong enough to run in junior or youth events. However, mobilisation on September 1st, 1939 put paid to all plans for guides races and the mile, my trainer having thought I showed promise as a miler.

“I joined the 4th Battalion, the Border Regiment but later got transferred to the 6th. I was one month too young to go to France but my two mates went and were killed there. My early service involved guarding home coastal air fields and ports, but in 1942 I was posted to the Far East and transferred to the Indian Army Ordnance Corps, ferrying supplies to Ord Wingate’s Chindits. While there, I contracted malaria and dysentery, causing me to lose weight, and so I was sent on convalescence to the Himalayan foothills and visited the Taj Mahal. This was around 1944/45, a most memorable period.”

During his early service, following a local plane crash, Fred was on guard duty at Lindeth Farm, amidst the rolling countryside south of Windermere: “I here met and fell in love with the farmer’s daughter, Margaret. We were

married in 1941 and enjoyed 54 years of happily married life together, raising three daughters.” Margaret had been born at Chapel House Farm, Underbarrow in 1926 but soon moved to Boxtree Farm, Crook, thence to Lindeth at the age of five. Sadly, she died in 1995 at the comparatively young age of 69.

Orienteering Pioneer

Fred has been a builder all his working life and built his own house, which he humorously named “Tethers End”, just round the corner from Lindeth Farm, on the next access road off Lindeth Lane. Colin Brown, a guides racer from Troutbeck and a winner at Grasmere in 1949, used to work for Fred and once paired up with him for an orienteering event at Ennerdale.

Fred was introduced to “the thought sport” by the late Gerry Charnley of Clayton-le-Moors Harrier and met Jan Kjellstrom, who played a major role in getting it established in Britain, on several occasions. “It’s the greatest sport ever introduced to this country,” he enthuses, “particularly for schoolchildren. It’s good for character-building and teaches them self-reliance.” Fred founded Lakeland’s first orienteering club, Phoenix OC, during the mid-’60s at Windermere and promoted his first event at Winster: “I taught youngsters in the Windermere area and had four girls in the English Championships at Sherwood Forest. My daughter Cathrin and Christine Morgan came second in the Pairs event. Christine completed the course so quickly I thought she must have missed out some of the controls, but she hadn’t. As Cathrin approached the finish, I was roaring encouragement and she stopped just before the finishing line and said, “Don’t you shout at me, our Dad!” and then crossed the line.”

Fred took the girls to an event at Ladybower Reservoir in the Peak District and decided to compete himself. The course-planner was Bob Astles, also noted as a long distance fell runner. The first control was particularly difficult to locate and Fred found himself searching for it in mixed woodland and vegetation, along with Gerry Charnley, Ted Dance, Alan Heaton and three Scandinavians: “Gerry then began taking a bearing from a fence corner, but I retraced my steps to the start and then set off again. I tripped over a branch and went sprawling, and there above my head was the kite, on the edge of the thicket! I eventually finished ninth, wearing heavy fell boots to support my weak ankles.” Charnley had been a co-founder of the Karrimor Mountain Marathon, in which Astles and Dance had won the first two events, 1968/69.

The great Skelsmergh orienteer, Maurice Collett, tried to persuade Fred to join South Ribble OC, but Fred had already decided to devote himself to what he calls “mountain endeavour”.

The 24 Hour Record

Fred Rogerson first became interested in Bob Graham’s Round of the Fells and the Lakeland 24 Hour Fell Record around 1945. The earliest known record had been established in 1864 when the Rev. J.M. Elliott of Cambridge made

a horseshoe traverse of nine summits above Wasdale Head in 8½ hours. (Elliott was also a keen Alpinist and fell to his death five years later while making an unroped ascent of the Schrekhorn.) The Lakeland record was developed gradually over the ensuing years, notably by Dr. A.W. Wakefield of Keswick with successful attempts in both 1904 and 1905, and by Eustace Thomas of the Manchester-based Rucksack Club with record-breaking circuits in 1920 and 1922.

Ten years later, a Keswick guest house proprietor named Bob Graham set his landmark record of 42 peaks in 23 hours 39 minutes, a record that was to withstand several attempts to break it for 28 years. "A very knowledgeable man on the high fells was Bob Graham," says Fred, "and his Round in 1932 was one of the epics of the 20th Century. But there are always people who try to detract from a great achievement and I was once informed that a lot of Graham's Round had been done on a pushbike! Fortunately, one of his pacers, Phil Davidson, was able to confirm for me that this was not so. Another fallacy is that Bob played rugby, but he was only a **non-playing** member of Keswick Rugby Club, though he did play tennis."

Fred was not present when Alan Heaton

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completed Graham's round in a faster time (22 hours 18 minutes) in 1960 as he was busy elsewhere, but he and Margaret turned up to render assistance when Alan's clubmate from Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, 48-year-old Stan Bradshaw, became the second man to break Graham's record a fortnight later (23 hours 25 minutes). Seventeen years later, Stan made two more traverses of the Round, five weeks apart, to celebrate his 65th birthday, narrowly failing to get inside 24 hours on the first occasion due to sickness. "I would assess a man's fitness by his recovery rate," says Fred, "and what Stan did at 65 is an unsurpassed achievement. [Bradshaw's record as the oldest man to complete the Round was broken in 1998 by his clubmate, Brian Leathley, who was then 66.] Stan is a great individual amidst his fellow fell runners. He would often forfeit his own position in the Three Peaks Race, and in other events, to help a lad who was suffering. His wife Ida is also a very special person."

Fred was particularly impressed by the climbing skill of Ted Dance of the Rucksack Club when he paced Stan on his successful 1960 Round: "His ability to ascend steep ground, hands on hips, with apparent ease, while burdened with a heavy rucksack loaded



Fred and Margaret with Joe Long preparing for the prize presentation at the Wasdale Fell Race during the 1970s.

Photo courtesy of Fred Rogerson

with food and drink plus spare clothing, etc., for Stan and himself, was to me one of several memorable features of the attempt."

The 51 Peaks circuit of Ken Heaton, Alan's brother, in 1961 is also held in high regard by Fred: "Ken was one of the fittest contenders you're ever likely to see. He looked as fit and fresh at the finish as he had done at the start, but unfortunately he had no intention of improving upon it. 'That was my ultimate,' said Ken."

Alan Heaton has, of course, been one of the greatest long-distance fell runners of all, and most of his records were broken by another "great," Jos Naylor. "Alan made twelve attempts at the record over the years," says Fred, "and on only two of these occasions were the conditions perfect." [Alan twice held the record after his 1960 Round, with 54 Peaks in 1962 and 60 Peaks in 1965].

From Beardie to Bland

The late Eric Beard's 56 Peaks record run in 1963 was "phenomenal," recalls Fred. "His climbing and descending were both very impressive and he was able to put pain to the back of his mind. A blister had developed on the sole of his foot during the first section and should have been treated at Threlkeld but Eric declined to have it dressed, and likewise at Dunmail and Langdale. On arrival at Wasdale, he suggested that Margaret might have a look at it. There was over four inches of skin on the ball of his foot hanging in the breeze. Hard men put pain to the back of their minds, get their heads down and have a go. Eric did just that. He afterwards had to have it treated at Keswick hospital, then travelled to Scotland to set fantastic records for the Cuillin Ridge and the Cairngorm 4,000s. Eric would take any job to pay his way, but once he had earned enough to go wherever he wanted to climb or run, he would finish and leave without giving any notice."

Of Jos Naylor, Fred chuckles appreciatively: "He was told to pack in the wrestling [Cumberland and Westmorland style] when he

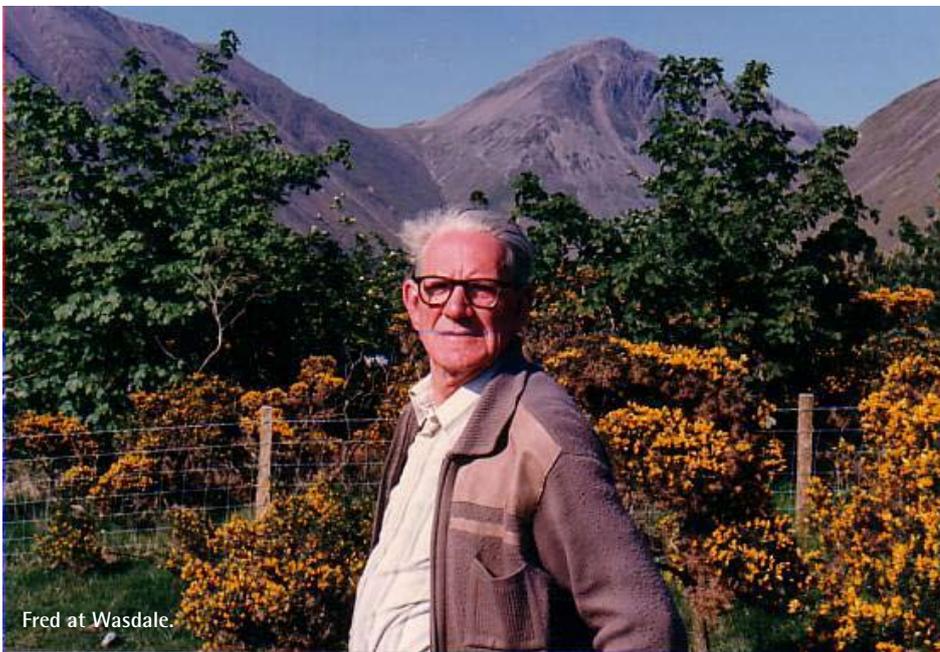
was a lad because of his back problems, so what does he do? He takes up fell running! His 72 Peaks record was a tremendous achievement. [This had improved on his previous records of 61 and 63 peaks.] When Jos starts something, it's there to be finished." However, he is also generous in his praise of Mark McDermott's scientifically-planned record of 76 Peaks in 1988: "Never under-estimate a man's determination. Here was an 'unknown' whose schedule and actual times never varied by more than two minutes over 24 hours." That record was, of course, eclipsed by Mark's Macclesfield Harriers clubmate, Mark Hartell, in 1997 with 77 Peaks.

Billy Bland's momentous 1982 record of 13 hours 53 minutes for the 42 Peaks of the BGR still stands, but Fred reckons that Billy even surpassed that in terms of achievement when he **walked** the route seven years later in 20 hours 48 minutes, his nephew Gavin finishing just ten minutes behind him.

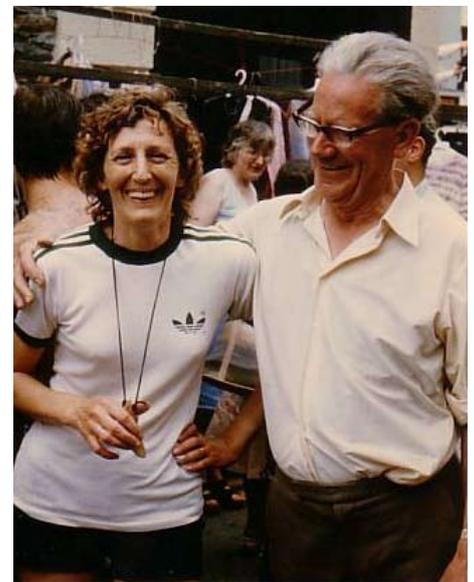
The Ladies

Fred is also full of admiration for female contenders [92 completions at the end of 2006], particularly Jean Dawes (Kendal) who in 1977, at her second attempt, became the first lady of the Bob Graham Club; Anne-Marie Grindley (Clayton) who broke Jean's record with a fast 21 hours 5 minutes Round a year later, then improved on this with a 58 Peaks circuit in 1979; and Anne Stentiford (Macclesfield) – now the wife of Calder Valley's Bill Johnson, also a Bob Graham Club member – who set a new ladies' BGR record of 18 hours 49 minutes in 1991 and three years later raised the ladies' 24 Hour record to 62 Peaks.

His greatest admiration is, however, reserved for Helen Diamantinos (Carnethy), "the most impressive of all female athletes." After completing the BGR in around 22 hours in 1987, she set a new ladies' record of 20 hours 17 minutes a year later, solo and unsupported. In 1989 she lowered this mark to 19 hours 11 minutes in a joint attempt with Adrian Belton, after completing



Fred at Wasdale.



Fred congratulates Jean Dawes, who had just become the first lady to complete the round

the two other major British circuits, the Paddy Buckley Round in Wales and the Ramsay Round in Scotland, over the previous two months – and breaking the existing men's record in both. Her finest achievement, though, in Fred's opinion, was her victory, partnered by Martin Stone, in the 5-day Dragon's Back race over the mountains of Wales in 1992. He recalls, with a smile, telling Helene's mother when she was young (she is now 43): "She's got great potential!"

The Club

It was Fred Rogerson who, in 1971, came up with the idea of forming a Bob Graham 24 Hour Club and he served as its Chairman from then until 1998, when he stepped down to be replaced by Selwyn Wright. [Selwyn was the first man to complete a sub-24 Hour Winter BRG, partnered by John Brockbank.] Shortly after the Club's formation, Fred and Margaret decided that those who completed the Round should be awarded a certificate of merit: "There were then only four or five full members and we decided that one hundred should be enough to start with. I then consulted fellow-committee member Harry Griffin and he suggested two hundred, and we thought these would last till the year 2000! There were 1,328 members up to the end of 2006 and well over 2,000 other contenders have endeavoured to complete the Round and never succeeded. The Club was never founded to make a profit and all surplus funds have been donated to the charity organisation, the Bendrigg and Calvert Trusts."

Fred and Margaret have provided support not only on 24 Hour record attempts but also at many, many 42 Peaks rounds, turning out at all times of the day and night, and in all kinds of weather. They had also assisted Alan Heaton and Mick Meath on their joint Pennine Way record run in 1972 (subsequently broken by Naylor two years later), and also on the Coast-to-Coast achievements of Jos in 1976 and Mike Nicholson (Kendal) in 1978, of which only the latter followed the Wainwright route.

"I had tremendous support from Margaret," says Fred, "and the camaraderie in the sport is beyond compare. There is no greater award in

the land than the book of tributes which was presented to me at the 1998 Bob Graham Club dinner on the occasion of my retirement as Chairman."

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In 1972 Fred published his monumental compilation, *History and Records of Notable Fell Walks, 1864-1972, Within the Lake District*, consisting of reprints of articles by himself, Harry Griffin and Chris Brasher along with schedules and personal accounts of the BGR by successful contenders. In 1978 it was expanded to include further achievements up to 1976, running to 272 A4 typewritten pages secured in a file. Fred has also contributed articles on the Round to *Cumbria* magazine, the *Alpine Journal* (1976) and *The Fell Runner* (July, 1982), and took part in an absorbing interview, completely unrehearsed, for Radio Cumbria which was broadcast on the Sunday morning half-hour programme, *Nigel Holmes Meets ...*

The BGR has not been Fred's only involvement with fell running, however, for he was also a co-founder and committee-member of the Lake District Mountain Trial Association, which was formed in 1965, though he had been a spectator at all the Mountain Trials since the first one in 1952, and later helped to plan courses for the event. He organised the Fairfield

Horseshoe for 25 years when it was promoted by the LDMTA, and was a vice-president of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers for many years too. During the 1960s, he formed "great friendships" with Harry Griffin, Alan and Ken Heaton, Stan Bradshaw, Eric Beard and Gerry Charnley, while "Frank and Janet Travis were also the best of friends and always ready to help out at Fairfield. I first met them at the 1966 Mountain Trial from the Woolpack Inn in Eskdale."

Besides the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and Scotland, Fred and Margaret have also been on walking holidays abroad. In 1991 they did fourteen days of high level routes from Zermatt and the following year fourteen days from Interlaken in the Bernese Oberland. 1993 saw them visiting Austria and Bavaria, 1994 Iceland, and in 1995 they had seventeen days in Canada, three of them relaxing at Whistler.

Among Fred's other interests, all outdoors-related, are giving cine and slide shows to local organisations and attending other social functions, wildlife photography and foxhunting with the fell packs, particularly his local one, the Coniston.

Fred's daughters are Cathrin, the youngest, who lives at Longridge in Lancashire, close to the Bowland fells; Elizabeth, the eldest, of Ambleside; and Sheila of Nether Kellet, near Carnforth. All three have suffered from Breast Cancer and in May this year took part in Cancer Research UK's "Run for Life," a 5K event held to raise awareness of and funds for the charity, from the Westmorland County Showground at Crooklands.

Now virtually housebound due to ill health, Fred only occupies the upper half of this house, reached by a rising path to the right. He is always happy to chat and reminisce with any Bob Graham Club members who may happen to be in the area or to offer advice and encouragement to prospective contenders.

Note: Readers wishing to find out more about the Bob Graham Round are referred to the booklet, *42 Peaks*, available from Pete Bland Sports and most Lake District bookshops.