

## PREFACE

My name is Jim MacGregor and a brief intro to put some background into who I am and what the challenge and this blog is about. Reaching the age of Fifty isn't an issue for me, but I would like to mark the milestone with another challenge. I have a history of doing physical challenges and fund raising mostly walking and running but also in a kayak and occasionally on bikes. In fact one of my first challenges was when I was 11 and me and two friends, Bryn & Mike, cycled Cardigan Bay in Wales over 5 nights. This was before the internet and with instructions to phone home every other day we set off. Have to say when my son was eleven, I would have worried about his safety but that's just how I grew up.

I have always had a love for the outdoor world from Kayaking solo 6 miles (2miles out to sea!) in an old fibreglass Kayak at 9 years old and some scouting challenges to climbing Mt Blanc more recently to name but a few.

My plan is to try and climb 50,000m in my Fiftieth year. It roughly equates to 1000m a week and to make things harder I am only counting activities where I cumulate at least 600m in a session. The reason for this is it's the equivalent of a UK mountain. Well I am also going to use this year to try and reconnect with various friends, colleagues and family in my challenge.

***"Its all about the journey, not the destination!" (Ralph Emerson)***

This challenge is also going to help raise funds for the Search and Rescue Dogs (Isle of Man) where I am a dog handler along with being its current chairman. This charity provides a 24/7 free service to the Police and the community of the Island. You can donate to this challenge at:

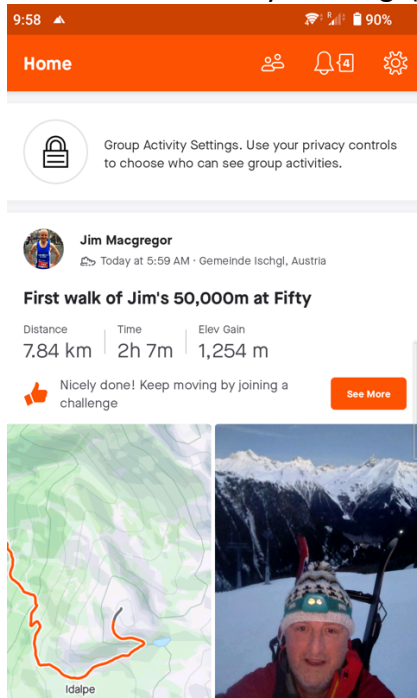
[https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jim-macgregor8?utm\\_source=copyLink&utm\\_medium=fundraising&utm\\_content=jim-macgregor8&utm\\_campaign=pfp-share&utm\\_term=af1b0836fea7471199a1c3c244535563](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jim-macgregor8?utm_source=copyLink&utm_medium=fundraising&utm_content=jim-macgregor8&utm_campaign=pfp-share&utm_term=af1b0836fea7471199a1c3c244535563)

Where we are aiming to raise over £2,000 throughout the year.



January 2023

Walk 1 – Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> Ischgl (Austria) 1254m climbed



(Strava screenshot)

The first walk of my challenge was whilst away skiing with the family at Ischgl in Austria. I have always loved skiing with my family and especially my son. My favourite part are the slopes where you go round a corner and there is no one else in sight.

With that ethos I set off from the hotel at 5.45am to gain the solitude of the mountain. My partner had already joked during the meal the previous night that I wouldn't be able to sleep, as I never can when I have an adventure set! Well she was right as ever. So with my ski blades and ski boots packed in my rucksack, along with some basic food and drink and head torch on I set off. The previous night I had bought some 13euro snow crampons which basically have 6 metal studs on rubber which go over your boots. I had intended to take my own crampons but weight was limited on the flights over to Austria.

Ischgl ski resort is at 1400m altitude and my target summit of Pardatschgrat was at 2624m. The pitch black immediately hit me with temperatures of -4 degrees. The first 400m of elevation up to the middle ski station was a relatively gentle incline which gave me a false sense of how easy it would be. My first and only wobble was some strange noises coming from deep in the forest. I had seen a stuffed bear in the local restaurant the night before so my mind started racing away with itself with an over active imagination. I then managed to navigate badly and walked up a short section of a black ski run! What! What was I thinking. I had spoken to my son the previous night about the need to try and avoid such steep slopes. My lungs were certainly burning.



Just above middle station

On reaching the next red run I had an eventful run in with a man on ski patrol riding a snow mobile. "Spreken ze Deutch?" he asked. "Nine" was the only thing I could reply, "I'm English". He then proceeded in broken English which I basically grasped that the meaning was I should not be on slopes when they are closed. I personally have a strong belief in right to roam and so enthusiastically agreed with the gentleman. I then waited for him to leave before proceeding anyway. My logic was that I was going to break the rules whether I skied down the slope or carried on walking up so I may as well complete my challenge. I hasten to say that every other ski patrol I saw that early morning looked inquisitively at me, but just waved and carried on. (it clearly isn't a regular occurrence for them!)

The higher up the slopes I walked the more severe the inclines coupled with crunching icy snow where I kept sliding back and less oxygen available. My breathlessness increased towards the summit with small gasps of air and stopping every 12 paces or so. This took me back to advice from Richard Beech (a good friend and ex SARDA Wales Handler) when we summited Mt Blanc several years before and the need to take baby Alpine steps and not to rush! Finally, I was rewarded with first light on the snow capped peaks with a golden hue on the tops. The walk took 3 hours although Strava stated 2 hours so clearly I was stopping a 1/3 of the time which isn't as impressive as it only records when you are moving. Just as I was summitting the final section of the mountain the first skiers of the day were exiting the top Gondola with a babble of multiple languages all eager to hit the slopes first!



summit of Pardatschgrat. My face says it all!

My initial plan with the family was to meet them at a particular ski lift at midday as I hadn't a clue how long it would take me. They were meeting at breakfast for 9.30am. As it was only 9.00am when I finished on the summit I changed my boots, put on my skis and retraced my steps skiing in just 20mins back to the hotel! I sneaked into breakfast just before them and to say their faces were incredulous with the walk I had done is an understatement. Chuffed that I can still surprise my family being close to 50! A great first walk to the challenge and fully appreciate not all of them will be as spectacular as this one.

## Walk 2 – Friday 6<sup>th</sup> Ischgl (Austria) 717m climbed cumulative 1,971m



Getting another sneaky walk in before the last day of skiing. I decided to head up a footpath on the opposite side of the valley. Maybe put off from walking on closed pistes again by over-zealous ski patrol or maybe just hunting the solitude I knew the far side of the valley would bring.

I had seen the forest track from the skiing side of the valley and was intrigued where it would take me. Setting off at 7.00am with time pressures of trying to meet the family for a 9.00am breakfast. The main issue I had was the lack of maps for navigating, with just an image in my head from looking at the route from afar. The other issue I had was that Strava doesn't give elevation until you upload the track. This resulted in me estimating the elevation by judging it against the walk two days earlier. I knew I would have to get ½ up that walk to achieve my minimum 600m elevation. I needn't have worried as by the time I got back to the hotel and uploaded the track it gave me the pleasing result of 717m.

The initial route followed a forestry track zig-zaging up through the lower meadows and into the forest. Previous snow had melted and then frozen resulting in quick tricky slippery conditions. As I reached just above the treeline I found a slope of firn (which is compact snow) to walk on and gain more elevation. It was a steep slope and my mind raced back to advice given by Tom from Cairngorm Adventure Guides on avalanche awareness. I did take my transponder with me although with no one around it would be of limited use!



Just coming out of the treeline.

I startled several Chamois which are goat like creatures. Actually on the ridge above it reminded me of the Indians in the old cowboys films and I could almost imagine them quizzing why I was up in their territory.



A poor photo of a Chamois escaping my camera

Proceeding down the slopes I found a small footpath which seemed like a good shortcut at the time, it was now getting tight for breakfast. Initially it was a well trodden track but I quickly lost it and spent the next 300m wandering down a precarious slope, knowing that a lot of slopes in the area have sudden vertical drop offs. Fortunately I picked up the track again which had handy Austrian Flag markers on the rocks to show the route.



Austrian flag markers.

I made it back at 9.10am after quite a magical walk finally through the field pastures which reminded me of Steve McQueen in the Great Escape. The only downside was that I had lost two studs off my 13 Euro crampons.

### Walk 3 – Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> Laxey, Clagh Ouyr, Snaefell, Mullagh Ouyr, Beinn-y-Phott 1043m climbed cumulative 3,014m



Well this was the first of many climbs on the Isle of Man and the first one of the year with my faithful hound Ruby. She is a Search and Rescue dog who is 6 years old and is a wire haired pointer. I think with the case of Ruby “Wired” means strangely wired as she is certainly a character. My first challenge of the day was sneaking out of the bedroom at 5.45am without waking anyone. Well having left the clothes out the night before that was the first success.

Myself and Ruby set off from Laxey Prom just before 6.00am, very much in the dark! I state this as this walk was probably my most least prepared ever. I did have a bum bag with essentials but no head torch and only light weight gloves which didn't help against the bitter cold. The route took me up the Gretch Vane lane from laxey which is a long track uphill to the Green lane that takes you to Clagh Ouyr. The route pretty much followed “Kates Race” Which was a route devised in memory of Kate Burge who was tragically killed while out Cycling. I only spoke to her a few times but I remember one time in the Creg ny Baa pub with my friend Svet when we were chatting to her after a race. Her achievements and experiences were outstanding.

Going back to the lack of planning a lack of head torch proved a real issue. Cant believe I attempted it without properly being able to see for the first 2 hours on a deeply rutted track.

The wind chill was biting but we pushed on. Climbing Snaefell, Ruby was really grateful of a dog treat I had bought back for her from Austria. We pushed on down to Bungalow and headed for the final two climbs. I noticed Ruby was starting to slow, as she had been running around in the heather early on. I decided after Beinn-y-Phott to call it a day and both myself and Ruby were really grateful to get a lift home.

I was so pleased to get the first climb completed in the Isle of Man and to now take the total over 3000m in just the first two weeks is encouraging, although it did dawn on me today how much of a challenge it will be.

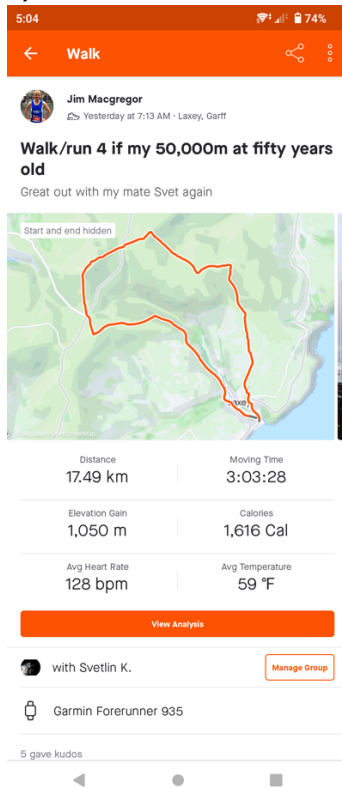


Myself and Ruby



View of Snaefell in the background

## Walk 4 – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> Laxey, Clagh Ouyr, Snaefell, Mullagh Ouyr 1050m climbed cumulative 4,064m



This now seems to be turning into a regular early morning Saturday event! My plan was to do roughly the same route as last weekend but try and add in a few more hills. Today at 7.00am I was joined with Svet who is a bear of a man with the mostly friendly, social side of anyone I have ever known. I got Svet into running years ago and his range of topics and passion for everything is so infectious as we are running around. We hadn't been training for over two years but as soon as you have someone else with you, naturally you push yourself more. He actually cycled down to my house with the biggest rucksack I have ever seen at 6.00am so he was certainly warmed up.

The long track out of Laxey in the dark (although I had my headtorch this time!) was completed quicker this time as we were jogging. I forgot to mention but thick snow was covering the tops which added a little extra effort to the walk/run. With very broken fell shoes letting water and snow in and out, we got into a great rhythm. I have to say my feet were like ice blocks in the end. On summiting the first major hill of Clagh Ouyr we were hit by wind chill on the skyline and didn't hang around on the top. On climbing Snaefell (only mountain on the island 621m) we met Mickael who is a Polish vet who I know from the Search Dogs in Wales. It was a very brief chat before he advised us not to hang around. We descended to Bungalow and then climbed the final hill of Mullagh Ouyr. As we didn't have a lift this time from the TT mountain Road we followed the Snaefell mountain railway tracks back to Laxey which is the shortest route and celebrated with a lovely cup of coffee in the kitchen. I am sure I will be having many more adventures with Svet!





Jim & Svet with the snow summits in the background.

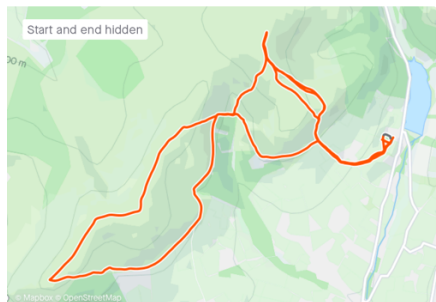
### Walk/ Run 5 – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> Ardwhallin race includes Colden, Greeba Mountain & Slieau Ruy 1054m climbed cumulative 5,118m



Jim Macgregor

Yesterday at 12:19 PM · Braddan, Middle

Walk 5 of Jim's 50,000m at fifty.  
Ardwhallin fell race



Distance	Moving Time
18.96 km	2:48:26
Elevation Gain	Calories
1,054 m	1,719 Cal
Avg Heart Rate	Avg Temperature
137 bpm	54 °F

Lots of firsts today! First race of the year, first long run and first time for a while the tank was emptied during a race. Ardwhallin is traditionally the first race of the year of the Manx Fell runners calendar, with a distance of 12.6km long (although route choices do vary) and 750m elevation. I knew we would have to get a warm up first to add a bit of extra elevation as currently I am aiming at about 1000m a week. Registering early with Svet we were joined by Chris (who I used to teach ..... years ago!). Slogging up to Colden as a warm up I knew this was going to be a challenge for me. Maybe a couple of curries over the last two nights is not the

best preparation? We made it back to the start for 1.20pm with 10mins to spare maybe over cooked rather than warmed up?

Hilarity at the start from Svet who couldn't stop booming when Maria (another ex student) asked if I'd retired. Well the sights were now set on at least one person we had to beat! The long slog up mucky fields already had the eyes watering before reaching the open hill. Myself and Svet had discussed before we set off that this was only a training run, definitely not racing! No not racing until you are surrounded by like minded bunch of crazy people.

The Manx fell runners are probably people I spend most time with. I have never joined and in a way I used to have small pleasures by being the first runner in the leader board who was not a Manx Fell runner. When first coming to the island in 1998 I joined Manx Harriers. This is a great club and my old headteacher Andy was always so supportive. I did switch to Northern Athletic club after a few years on the advice of my old colleague (Rob) who was tragically killed on Richmond hill. Since then I have never left the club.

Back to "racing" I know Svet's strengths and weaknesses so we are well matched although I know he is currently fitter than me. Downhill, he has always been steady but I also knew he has inner strength just to keep pushing. On the back run around to Greeba we really pushed on and started to over take some good seasoned runners. The race then does a 180 and you start heading on the final ridge. It was after the last summit the tank just emptied and I mean really emptied. It starts off with a trickle of runners overtaking you and turns into a flood. With cuts on my legs from the gorse and no energy you start to use extra reserves just to get to the finish. That said you crest the final hill and I was just overcome by the spectacular views of the valley back towards the start.

We finished the race 73<sup>rd</sup> (2 page of the results sheet!) with a time of 1 hour 48mins. This led me to look at previous times with one year completing in 1 hour 11mins, those were the days! The main thing was to race with a great bunch of like minded people and of course Svet. That is now one month gone and a 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the challenge complete by passing the 5,000m elevation. Bring on February.

73	4	1:48:08	Jim	Macgregor	M40	Northern (Isle of Man) AC
74	1	1:48:09	Svetlin	Krastev	MSEN	Manx Fell Runners



Myself and Svet at the finish line at Ardwhallin