

THE 1923 AUSTRALASIAN 7 MILE CHAMPIONSHIP

The following historic photo has been passed onto me by club life member Ray Smith and shows the Victorian team that contested the 1923 Australasian 7 Mile championship. This was the first longer distance Australian walking championship ever held in Australia and is hence of great significance.



*The 1923 Victorian Walking Team - photo taken outside the Yarra Yarra Rowing Club Sheds
Back: Eric Sunderland, Les Nicholson, Bert Gardiner, Rex Merrick, Edward Winstanley, Lionel McMillan and Bill Murray
Front: Vic Dowling, Ted Drayton and Frank O'Rourke*

There had been a number of specialist racewalking clubs in existence for some time and Australia's first Olympic walker Bill Murray (1912) had been a member of the Victorian Walkers and Field Games Club, formed in 1911. The Sydney Amateur Walkers Club had also been formed in 1911 and racewalking was also strong in South Australia and Queensland.

The First World War put everything on the backburners with the Melbourne based walking club actually ceasing activities in 1915 as all of its Executive had enlisted. It was not until 1921 that the Victorians reformed, now calling themselves the Victorian Amateur Walkers' Club (VAWC).

Late in 1921, officials from the NSW and Victorian walking clubs met with a view to instigating an interstate walking race. An offer was made by Footscray jeweller *Mr T. Glover and Son* (the son was a sprinter with the Footscray Harriers) to donate a Shield to be known as the *Glover Shield*. The proposed championship date was October 1922 and N.S.W. requested A.A.U. to hold a postal vote amongst member States to validate the championship.

Whilst the majority of States voted in favour of the concept, a number of V.A.A.A. officers were opposed to the event and voted against the motion. Thus it did not win the day. With the A.A.U. refusing to sanction the event, the walking clubs continued with their own planning, targeting a date of 14th July 1923 and billing the event as the Australasian 7 Mile Walk Championship.

1 1 Mile and 3 Mile track walks were held with the bi-annual Australian Track and Field Championships but this was the first attempt at staging a longer distance walk championship.

Each walking club was to select its own team. own team (the Victorian team was Vic Dowling, Ted Drayton, Norman Asker, Rex Merrick, Lionel McMillan, Bill Murray, Bert Gardiner, Eric Sunderland, Bob Osborne, Frank O'Rourke, Jack Merrifield and Ted Winstanley) and the race would be held in Melbourne at the Malvern Cricket Ground. NSW and Victoria selected full teams while South Australia sent George Wilson, the current holder of the Victorian 25 Mile Championship.

Unfortunately the track was water logged after continuous rain so times were very slow. 1924 Olympian Ernie Austen led early from Bert Kitchen and Vic Dowling. After covering two miles, he led them by 100 yards and was untroubled from then on, winning in 55:44. 1912 Olympian Bill Murray showed his experience, moving up through the field to pass all the chasers except for Vic Dowling who finished 2 seconds ahead of him in second place with Murray taking third. Victoria won both the Open Teams event and the Junior Teams event.

For the record, the results read as follows

1.	Ernie Austen	NSW	55:44.2
2.	Vic Dowling	VIC	57:25
3.	Bill Murray	VIC	57:27
4.	Bert Kitchen	NSW	58:25
5.	Norm Asker	VIC	58:47
6.	Eric Sunderland	VIC	58:55
7.	George Wilson	SA	59:10
8.	Ernie Smith	NSW	59:20
9.	Ted Drayton	VIC	59:52
10.	Rex Merrick	VIC	60:10
11.	Mick McNamara	NSW	60:58
12.	Bert Gardiner	VIC	61:03
13.	Frank O'Rourke	VIC	61:10
14.	Lyle Brown	NSW	63:07
15.	Bob Osborne	VIC	63:14
16.	Jack Merrifield	VIC	63:17
17.	Ted Winstanley	VIC	63:52
18.	Jack Parker	NSW	63:59
19.	Reg Foster	NSW	64:10
20.	Lionel McMillen	VIC	65:24
21.	Harry Campbell	NSW	67:23

In the evening following the event, a dance was held, followed by a Sunday trip on the Puffing Billy, then going right through to Gembrook.

The 7 Mile championship was held another 8 times in subsequent years before being replaced with an official Australian championship, over 10,000m in 1939. The winners of the Australasian 7 Mile championships were:

1923	Ernest Austin	NSW	55:44	Victor Dowling	VIC	57:25	William Murray	VIC	57:27
1924	George Parker	NSW	53:07	Albert Kitchen	NSW	55:17	Ernest Smith	NSW	57:30
1925	Bert Gardiner	VIC	57:07	Joseph Mulcahy	VIC	57:09	William Pitt	NSW	58:11
1926	Eric Sunderland	VIC	55:16	Robert Osborne	VIC	55:58	Thomas Wyatt	SA	56:05
1927	George Parker	NSW	53:53	Raymond Latham	NSW	54:32	Bert Gardiner	VIC	54:45
1929	Horace Wilson	SA	53:17	Tom Daintry	NSW	53:26	Joseph Mulcahy	VIC	54:43
1931	Glen Houghton	SA	54:16	Joseph Mulcahy	VIC	54:18	Jack Cummins	VIC	54:28
1933	William Clark	NSW	54:45	Joseph O'Farrell	VIC	54:50	Jack Cummins	VIC	54:54
1937	Alan Reid	VIC	55:17	Keith McCluskey	VIC	56:12	Sydney Sheedy	NSW	56:22

The Glover Shield is still contested in the second Racewalking Australia carnival each year and remains our oldest and most significant walking trophy – see <http://www.vrwc.org.au/documents/Glover%20Shield%20History.pdf>.

Tim Erickson
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