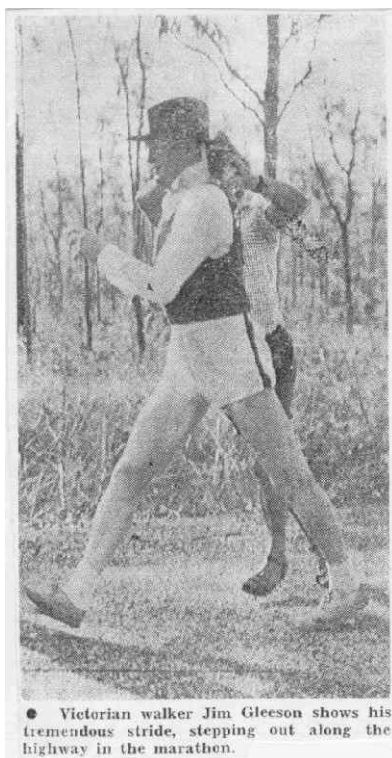


## JIM GLEESON AND THE DARWIN 'BIG WALK'

I recently came across this fantastic newspaper clipping of **Jim Gleeson**, the Australian 24 Hour Walk Record holder, in action in action in the 1965 Darwin 100km Big Walk. I have published this information before but it makes for an interesting re-read with the photo to add some extra lustre to a great story.



In September 1961, The Northern Territory News sponsored a 15 Mile walk in Darwin and the event proved so popular with the Territorians that in 1963, they extended the concept and added a 62 mile walk relay for men and a 42 mile relay for women. This event gave a unique opportunity to some of the best Victorian walkers as the newspaper sponsored first one walker in 1964 and then teams of walkers in 1965-1967.

Jim Gleeson was the first walker to benefit from the Northern Territory News sponsorship. A week after successfully defending his 1964 Victorian 50 km title, he flew to Darwin to compete by invitation in the gruelling race against eight teams of relay walkers (7 walkers per team). The starting temperature was 92°F and the humidity registered a massive 87%. Jim was to walk singlehanded against his rivals who only did a mile or two at a stretch before handing over to a fresh walker. The course was over laps of 8,333 km (5 miles) and a boomerang was used instead of a relay baton!

From the start, the temperature rose higher and higher, and after only 20 miles, it seemed the fair skinned Victorian couldn't last out much longer – his skin was a deep red and the cruel sun was effecting even the local walkers. Jim held 3rd place most of the way and was doing a magnificent job at about 11 min miles. As the day dragged slowly on, Jim still refused to give in and kept plodding stoutheartedly on, earning the intense admiration of all who followed the marathon race.

Very very tired, Jim was still only 6 mins behind the Navy team at the finish in the late afternoon, the race being won for the second time by the Army team in 10.36.10. Jim's time of 11.03.35 was a heroic exhibition and was marked by a handsome trophy presented to him after the race. Although on the point of collapse, Jim stood as the crowd roared and clapped continuously for nearly 10 minutes. His sterling achievement was described by the organizers as 'a superb athletic performance and classic example of endurance and plain old-fashioned guts'.

In 1965 Jim was again invited to go to Darwin along with Bob Gardiner (3 time Olympic representative and one of our greatest 50 km walkers ever) and they formed a 2-man relay team to compete against the other 7-man teams. Conditions were similar to the previous year with temperatures of up to 95 degrees.

Bob took off like a steam train doing the fastest 5 mile leg. Jim was just over 2 mins slower than Bob for his 5 mile leg. Bob powered on, doing quick times for his next 2 legs of the journey. By the time 30 miles had been covered, they were miles ahead of their nearest rivals. Bob's next leg was the slowest that he had ever done, the heat and humidity taking their toll. Bob had to retire and spent the next few days in Darwin hospital getting over sunstroke. Rather than retire,

Jim decided to continue on and walk the remaining 30 miles alone. He did that and finished the race in 11.01.14, just over a mile ahead of the Army team which finished second and another mile back to the R.A.A.F team in third place. Again another performance to write home about and the subject of the above photo.

It was for efforts like this that Jim was known for many years as the 'Iron Man' of Australian walking.

Tim Erickson  
Thursday 26 August 2010