

ARE THE VRWC WALKS EVER CANCELLED?

With the gale force winds encountered on Saturday 11 July 2009, I thought it worthwhile resurrecting an article I published in the club newsletter in 2004 after a particularly bad Albert Park day. On that occasion, I commented

Saturday 14 August 2004 was easily our worst day for quite some time from a weather perspective. Bitter cold strong winds and rain made it survival of the fittest for the 31 competitors and the small band of officials who braved the elements.

The two questions that always spring to mind on such days as Saturday are pretty obvious

1. Have we ever had to actually cancel events due to the weather?

The answer is yes. In the 1980's when our clubrooms were on the other side of the lake, our regular course was on Lakeside Drive which we shared with traffic. On two occasions, the rain was so severe and visibility so reduced that the events scheduled for that particular day were cancelled.

2. What are the worst weather conditions in which anyone remembers racing?

The answer seemed pretty unanimous when discussed in 2004. Bob Gardiner and Alan Lucas, who both have long memories, were in agreement that a 10 mile road event, held in Traralgon, in May 1969, was the worst ever. The event was held in what they both described as 'horizontal sleet' Competitor Justin Coxhead was in such bad shape at the end of the race that it took an hour or more of hot drinks, brandy and blankets at a friend's house to stop him shivering. For the record, I reproduce the race report which was written up in the Heel and Toe magazine of the time

The Unforgettable Traralgon Ten Mile - 31 May 1969

The club conducted its country meet at the new venue of Traralgon but unfortunately the atrocious prevailing weather conditions kept most members home. Only 13 men and 3 girls ventured out in the biting cold win and teeming rain for the events. Organization was not up to scratch and the course was inaccurate, adding to the morbid atmosphere. However, after the first few miles which resembled a pack walk as all warmed up, Bob Gardiner strolled away to win in 79:08. Robin Wood 81:06 and Geoff Laycock 82:49 showed out well with surprise efforts coming from Alan Lucas 84:20 and Andy Jamieson 85:12. Justin Coxhead suffered from crook shins for most of his 85:18 after chasing a determined Ray Smith who clocked 85:55. Another to have a nudge was Kevin Bolton 87:35. Jim Forrest 99:38 and Graham Anderson 102:24 were fine performances in the conditions. Frank Overton sat down after 7 miles.

The junior section of 4 miles was won by Greg Carter in 38:57 from Gary Knape who clocked 39:17. The girls 2 miles was taken off by Kay Pitman in 19:12 from R. Knape 22:50 and Julie Smith 22:50.

A word of sincere thanks to our club president Mr Alf Robinson and secretary Mr Norm Goble and Ron Wood. These men made the race possible and took times and gave directions to the miserable wretches along the way.

Alan Lucas reminisced that there was also a running event on in the area that day and Geoff Watt (the late father of Olympic Gold Medal cyclist Kathy Watt) who was renowned as the toughest runner going said that they were the worst conditions he had ever experienced.

Geoff had won fame by running to the top of Mt Kilimanjaro in Kenya (20,000 ft) without climbing gear, surprising a Japanese climbing party. Sadly, a few years later, he got lost in the hills north of Traralgon on a training run and ended up dying of hypothermia.

Closer to home, last winter season we had a dreadful day on Sunday 10 August 2008. The newsletter reported it as follows

The weather was dreadful – and I see that in the hills surrounding Melbourne, it was snowing. I think Stu Cooper's comments summed it up: "Conditions wet, freezing cold ... so cold it hurt to hold the camera. Road flooded in parts, no hope of bailing or sweeping."



The photo below shows Tom Barnes labouring along the flooded roadway on that occasion.

Anyway, enough history. Suffice it to say it was cold and miserable on Saturday but not as bad as 31 May 1969!

Tim Erickson
13 July 2009