

## **VALE PETER WADDELL, 25 JANUARY 1931 – 11 DECEMBER 2002**

We were all saddened to hear several weeks ago of the death of Peter Waddell in Canberra. Peter had been fighting cancer since it was first detected early this year but it was already too far advanced when diagnosed and treatments were not effective. He kept his typically positive outlook right up till the end and he died peacefully in his sleep on the evening of Wednesday 11 December.

In the more than 50 years of involvement in the sport of athletics, Peter was a champion race walker, a popular and successful administrator, an Athletics Australia selector, an inspirational coach, successful author, renowned T&F statistician and an enthusiastic gambler and golfer.

He was a very successful long distance walker for many years, setting many records and winning numerous state and national championships. Long before his involvement with veteran athletics, Peter had represented NSW in 35 track and road walk teams between 1955 and 1979. At the 1955 Interstate Titles he broke the Australian Record as well as achieving an Olympic qualifying time for the 50km walk (4hr 53min). Peter was well favoured for selection for the 1956 Olympics but a blood disorder at the time ruined his chances.

Continuing his career as a competitor, Peter was third in the 1961 national 2 miles walk, and achieved PBs of 1:41.52 for the 20 kms walk and 4:44.55 for the 50 kms walk, both in 1965. Peter continued to racewalk throughout his later life, even competing in some of the winter 2002 ACTRWC events, following his diagnosis with cancer in April 2002.

In 1972 Peter was a member of the Australian team that competed in the first international T&F meet for "mature aged athletes" held in Cologne, Germany. He subsequently participated in the 5000m track walk and 20km road walk at four World Veterans' Championships (in Christchurch 1981, Rome 1985, Melbourne 1987 and Brisbane 2001). It was typical of Peter's unassuming nature that he never talked about his many successes but preferred to focus on the successes of others.

Between 1996 and 2000 Peter enjoyed a "purple patch" as an endurance race walker completing seven 100km+ walks. These included completing 540km in the 1997 Colac Six Day event and in August 1999 setting an Australian Record for the 48 hours walk of 229km. He tried on a number of occasions during this period to qualify for the Australian Centurions by completing 100 miles within 24 hours but he had left his attempts too late and he could not sustain the required pace for the full 24 hours. This remained one of his unfulfilled ambitions and he talked about giving it one final go even earlier this year. The accompanying photo shows Peter in action in the 1998 Centurion event in which he completed 120 km.



He was a Life Member of the Western Suburbs AAC and the NSW and ACT Walkers Clubs and was president of the Australian Walkers Federation from 1972 until his death. In his capacity as President of AFRWC, he oversaw and guided Australian racewalking over a 30 year period during which the whole sport of athletics was revolutionised. During this period of upheaval, he remained the one constant in racewalking – Peter was always there at the helm as our spokesman.

He always worked closely with both State and National bodies and held many positions of importance along the way. The most recent example in this regard was his position as an Athletics Australia selector for the 2000 Olympic racewalking and roadrunning teams.

Peter was synonymous with the Lake Burley Griffin carnival. He was a regular competitor in the 20 mile event on the Sunday morning and then manned the microphone in the afternoon to commentate in his own unique style during the remaining events. He knew everyone in the walking fraternity and enjoyed pointing out past and future champions and anything else of interest that caught his eye. No one was safe from his witty comments.

During his time in Canberra he worked as a telegraphist and teletype operator at the former Post Office in East Block and also in the Press Gallery at Old Parliament House. He was one of those people who could walk into a room where morse code was being transmitted and recognise the substance of messages being tapped out.

Perhaps Peter should have been a journalist. From 1969 onwards he produced a racewalking newsletter which incorporated difficult to obtain race results within Australia and overseas. This information, and his occasional witty and provocatively 'stirring' comments, guaranteed its readership among groups of isolated walkers scattered around Australia. The newsletter was printed and posted mostly at his own expense. It was originally printed on the old Canberra telex machines and he eventually transitioned to the internet and moved into the world of email for his

newsletter. But Peter, for all his technical skills, was never able to fully master the computer and his email newsletter was always an amusing mixture of cuts and pastes and apologies for being late due to the latest computer problem!

He produced other more substantial publications, including "A History of Australian Racewalking Part 1" (1989), "A Guide for Judges, Coaches and Athletes" (1990), and "Racewalking in Australia" (1991). But his writings were not restricted to sport alone. At one stage he produced a small booklet on how to win at blackjack and he was a keen gambler who felt he could beat the system.

Peter was also an honorary publicist for the Canberra City Harriers, and later the Woden Harriers, ACT Athletics and, of course, the ACT Racewalking Club. Many a young ACT athlete who had scored a notable success, achieved a PB, or broke a record, was certain of receiving an encouraging write-up in the ACT sports media whose journalists welcomed the clever way Peter could fashion a news story.

Peter had a lifelong love of sport and had an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things athletic in Australia. If you ever wanted to find out about the result of a race or the particulars of some past issue, you had only to ask Peter. His extensive archives always threw up the correct answer and his own interpretation of events normally came with the answer.

Peter was an enthusiastic golfer who at one stage played off a handicap of 4. Like all else at which he tried his hand, he was successful at golf.

Peter was everyone's friend and I never met anyone who had a bad word to say about him. He was consistently positive in all matters and over the years he encouraged many athletes, especially injured, frustrated or bored distance runners to "have a go" at race walking. He took an interest in all facets of walking and in his retirement, could be seen regularly training around Lake Burley Griffin with various people. Training with Peter during this time was not so much a training session as a social occasion. The pace was never too fast to stop the chatting and there was always time to drop in on someone and say hello.

Peter's services to race walking in Australia were officially recognised with the Australian Sports Medal in 2000. It is unlikely that we will see his like again – his commitment to the sport of racewalking and his boundless enthusiasm placed him apart from the rest of us. I shall miss the regular phone calls and the yearly reunion with Peter each June in Canberra.

Tim Erickson

Secretary, Victorian Race Walking Club  
Secretary, Australian Centurions

Tuesday 31 December 2002