

PETER FULLAGER – UK AND AUSTRALIAN RACEWALKING REPRESENTATIVE

I am saddened to tell the wider racewalking community of the death of UK and Australian racewalking representative Peter Fullager. Peter, based in Adelaide, died in the early hours of Wednesday 23rd December 2020, after battling cancer for some time. Peter was one of my dearest walking mates. We had raced against each other through the 1970's and had trained together on many occasions as we prepared for certain key events. We had maintained our friendship ever since those days, and I always stayed with Peter and Viv when I travelled to Adelaide. Our early morning stroll was a compulsory part of every stay.

Peter was born 19 April 1943 in England and he did not take up racewalking until he was 18 years of age. His first race was a 3¼ mile novice event on 29 April 1961 which his older brother Maurice talked him into entering. He then joined the famous Surrey Walking Club and stayed with them for a number of years before moving to Basilton A.C to join his mate John Webb.

Peter and his two brothers all walked. Maurice, the oldest, showed considerable talent and was unlucky to contract TB when just about to push his way into the top echelon. He was instrumental in bringing Peter into the sport and their younger brother Richard then followed suite. Peter remembered when one year the three of them won the Teams event at the Lambeth Festival 5 Mile walking championship in London.

Peer had joined the RAF in 1959, directly from school, and stayed in the airforce until 1964. Hence his first few years in the sport were spent as as a member of the armed forces. Wherever he was stationed, he found time to train and remembered that, when stationed overseas at one stage, the only place he could find to walk was on the airfield, and he duly marked out a course there and went about his business every day.

When he returned to civilian life in 1964, his walking career took off and, the very next year, he was second to Paul Nihill in the 1965 British 20 km championship in 1:35:15. This was the first of numerous clashes with Nihill and Peter recalled them with great affection. This performance led to his first international vest, when on 5 September 1965, he finished as the first British walker and came 3rd in the 20 km walk in a Great Britain vs East Germany meet in East Berlin. He also surprised with a 4th placing with 1:31:51 (again the first British walker to finish) in the 1965 Lugano Cup at Pescara in Italy.



1965 – a young Peter Fullager in action, taken during the Police Imber Court 7 Miles

1966 saw his career hit top gear. He won the Southern Area 20 km at Victoria Park on 16 July in 1:31:35, the fastest time recorded in Britain that year. He was rewarded with a British vest for the European Championships in Budapest and he again produced the goods, finishing 7th in the 20 km event in 1:33:02 on 30 August. This was the era of Eastern European dominance and the first 5 places went to Russian and East German walkers. Peter was once again the first British walker to finish, ahead of Ron Wallwork (fresh from his Commonwealth Games victory) and John Webb.

At this stage he realized that, to progress his career further, he needed to leave England and base himself in Europe. He chose Switzerland as his base and spent over a year there, working and racing. He trained in places like St Moritz and raced wherever and whenever possible. 1967 was without doubt his best year to date. In July he won the Swiss 20 km

National Championship in a new championship record and he then followed this up on 27 August with a superb 20 km time of 1:26:10 in Lugano (this remains his PB). He represented Britain in the 1967 Lugano Cup and, in Bad Saarow in East Germany where he came a wonderful 6th in the 20 km final in 1:31:13.



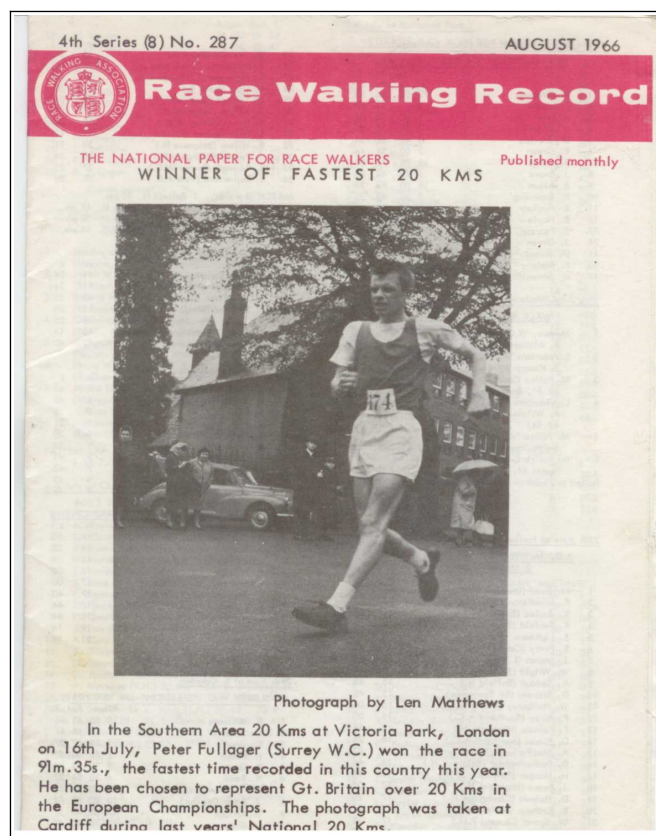
1967 Lugano Trophy in Bad Saarow - Frenkel (GDR), Solodov (RUS) and Peter Fullager (GBR)

He also became the only British walker to win all three of the Italian classics. On 3 September 1967, he won the Rome to Castel Gandolfo (31.5 km) in new course record. A month later, on 1 October 1967, he won the Giro de Roma (approx 25 km). Finally on 5 May 1968, he won the Coppa Città di Sesto San Giovanni 30 km ¹, setting a new course record and beating the 1964 Olympic champion Abdom Pamich. He regarded his victories over Abdom Pamich as amongst his proudest moments. He also pushed out a 1:28:20 20 km performance in Zurich during this period.



*Left: Peter 1967 meets Pope Paul VI after winning the 1967 Rome to Castel Gandolfo
Right: Peter finishing the 1967 Gravesano-Arosio Classic*

1 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coppa_Citt%C3%A0_di_Sesto_San_Giovanni



Peter makes the front cover of the prestigious Race Walking Record in August 1966

But racing in Europe meant little to the deeply conservative British administrators and he missed Olympic selection in 1968. But what such a bland statement does not say is why he missed selection. John Shepherd explains what happened:

Peter was favourite and was leading the trials when a race marshal arrived at a turning point too late. The leading walkers who had missed the turn were directed back on to the course and Peter found himself now 4th. He never made back the places lost. If you've never heard this information before I'm not surprised. I've never seen it reported. I myself was competing in the marathon trial the same day and witnessed this incident while warming up. Apart from the walkers themselves, the marshal involved and myself no more than a handful of spectators saw it.

In fact, Peter was one of three walkers directed off course that day, the others being John Webb and Bob Hughes. Webb and Hughes managed to claw back the extra distance and went on to make the Olympic team. Peter was not so lucky, being the one who missed out. The trial should of course have been invalidated and held anew but this was England in the 1960s and the administration was a law unto itself.

Now living back in England, he bounced back after this major disappointment, finishing 2nd to Nihill in the 1969 British 20 km championship (1:30:58) and this won him his second European Championships vest. In torrid conditions in Athens, he finished 13th in 1:38:24 (Nihill won this particular race with 1:30:48, one of his best victories ever).

On the occasion of Peter's death, British Olympic walker Roger Mills summed it up nicely:

When I was getting started in the sport, I used to travel across London to train with Peter from his home in Penge, South London. In those days you were either a Nihill or a Fullager 'man'. Peter loaned me my first pair of racewalking shoes, a gesture I remember fondly to this day.

Peter's last significant race in England was the National 20 km championship in May 1970 when he came 3rd in 1:33:13. But by this time, he realized that it was time for a major life change and, in August 1970, he migrated to Australia and settled in Adelaide.

He immediately entered the local racewalking scene, winning the South Australian 50 km championship in record time (4:37:52). He quickly reduced this to 4:29:15 in finishing second to Ted Allsopp in the 1970 Australian championship.

In 1971, he won the Federation 30 km event in Melbourne (2:27:36) and followed this up with bronze behind Bob Gardiner and Ted Allsopp in the Australian Olympic 50 km trial.

In 1972 he won the Australian 20 km championship, despite his claims on arriving in Australia that his best days were behind him. He made a big impact here, winning 11 medals, including 3 gold, at National championships. His 3 golds were all over the 20 km distance, in 1972, 1974 and 1980.

He was unbeatable in South Australia, breaking records over all distances and winning 43 State titles and 12 S.A. King of the Mountain 15 km races from 1970 to 1984. His S.A. State titles break down as follows: 9 3000m titles, 9 10 km titles, 10 20 km titles, 3 30 km titles, 8 20 Mile titles and 5 50 km titles. In fact, in 1973, he made a clean sweep of all the S.A. State titles from 3km to 50km.



Peter in action in Adelaide in 1975

Peter won 8 Australian Racewalking Federation titles including 5 Lake Burley Griffin 20 Mile events (1971-1975). This put him second only to the great Willi Sawall in longevity and excellence. His other Federation wins were in 1971 (Federation 30 km in Melb), 1973 (20 km Alexander Cup) and 1974 (10 km Glover Shield in Elizabeth, SA).

In September 1973 in Canberra, he won the Australian Commonwealth Games trial ahead of Ian Hodgkinson (WA), Ross Haywood (VIC) and Robin Whyte (ACT) and gained an Australian vest to go with his many British vests. In January 1974 in Christchurch, NZ, he walked a fine 3rd in the Commonwealth Games 20 Mile event with a time of 2:42:09. The first 2 places were taken by English walkers and Peter, an 'ex-Pom' had taken the bronze.

As the seventies progressed, Peter raced less frequently but he was still a force to be reckoned with when he did toe the line. In the 1978 Commonwealth Games trial at Fishermans Bend in Melbourne, he finished 3rd (in 2:29:18) to Willi Sawall and Tim Erickson. Only the first 2 walkers were selected and Peter missed out on a second Commonwealth Games berth, but not by much.

He was always a versatile walker, as evidenced in 1979 when he won the Australian Inter Collegiate 1500m track walk in Sydney on 1st April in a record time (and a PB) of 5:57:04. He was also selected for the Australian team to compete in the 1979 Lugano Cup in Germany, finishing 43rd in the 20km with a time of 1:34:13. After two Lugano Cups as a British walker, he now had a third vest, this time as an Australian.



Peter competing in the 1979 Lugano Cup 20km walk in Germany

His last Australian title was the 1980 20 km. He continued to race into 1981 but was nearly 40 years of age by now and realized it was time to step back and let the younger generation take over. His last fling was when he was selected in the Australian team for the 1981 Lugano Cup (his second for Australia and his fourth overall). On this occasion, he opted for the 50 km event and suffered one of his few non-finishes, being DQ'd when struggling in the latter stages of the race.



1981 Lugano Cup Team

*Back: Peter Fullager, John Sheard, Harry Summers, Willi Sawall
Middle: Sally Pierson, Sue Cook, John Boas (coach), Anne Ryan, Lorraine Young
Front: Keith Knox, Michael Harvey, David Smith, Bill Dyer*

Peter continued to live in Adelaide and always kept himself fit with daily strolls but he did not see the need to test himself any further competitively. His career spoke for itself. Those of us who raced against him remember a superbly fit and amazingly tough competitor who headed out hard and then peppered us with surge after surge while we endeavoured to hang in and weather the storm.

He won an amazing 350 of the 480 major races that he contested during his long career and he had an international career that spanned 17 years from 1965 to 1981. His international vests make for impressive reading, even by today's standards.

1965	GBR	Britain vs East Germany	East Berlin	20 km	4 th	
1965	GBR	Lugano Cup	Pescara, Italy	20 km	4 th	1:31:51
1966	GBR	European Championships	Budapest, Hungary	20 km	7 th	1:33:02
1967	GBR	Lugano Cup	Bad Saarow, East Germany	20 km	6 th	1:31:13
1969	GBR	European Championships	Athens, Greece	20 km	13 th	1:38:24
1974	AUS	Commonwealth Games	Christchurch, New Zealand	20 Miles	3 rd	2:42:06
1978	AUS	Lugano Cup	Eschborn, Germany	20 km	43 rd	1:34:13
1981	AUS	Lugano Cup	Valencia, Spain	50 km	DQ	

Peter maintained his love for racewalking throughout his life and he was always interested in the latest racing shoes and and new trends in technique and training. He always turned out to watch the Australian Summer 20km championships in Adelaide each February and enjoyed meeting old friends and foes.

He was also a regular sparring partner to Stan Malbut in Adelaide and coached a number of young walkers over the years, in conjunction with Stan. He also remained a member of SARWC and he and Vic were involved in administration for a time.

Peter was diagnosed with bowel cancer in mid 2019 and underwent treatment. Alas, the reprieve was only a small one as the cancer soon reappeared as liver cancer, very aggressive and non responsive to treatment. He battled manfully, always putting on a brave front and always saying he was ok when asked. He managed to keep up his daily walk routine right to the final weeks, although in the end it was little more than a slow shamble around the block.

He was admitted to hospital 10 days ago, hopefully to help him recover slightly before going home again, but it was not to be, as he died peacefully in his sleep early on the morning of Wednesday 23rd December, aged 77 years.

I will miss Peter so much. A trip to Adelaide will never be the same again. I went out early this morning for a walk, just as we would have done if we had been sharing some time together.

To Viv, Marc, Hayley, Ruby and Kai, we pass on our deepest sympathies.

Tim Erickson
Wednesday 23rd December 2020