

BOB GARDINER'S NEW ZEALAND TRIP: 1957-1958

Thanks to Bob Gardiner for giving me the information that enabled this short article to be written.

Following the visit to Melbourne in 1956 by a group of New Zealand walkers, including Melbourne Olympic 50km winner Norm Read, an open invitation was offered to VAWC members to go to Wellington to live and race. Bob was one of the group of 5 walkers who took up this invitation to travel there in 1957 (the others being Murray Lang, Rex Chugg, Len Chadwick and John Smythe). At that stage, Bob was aged 21 and an up and coming walker who had not yet made his mark nationally.

The original party eventually whittled down to four – Rex, Murray and Bob would travel over initially, with the much older and more experienced Len Chadwick to follow later.

Bob sold his scooter to Harry Summers for £40, bought gallons of goanna oil for NZ walker Harry Tetlow and, after eventually getting clearances from the Taxation department, where he worked, picked up his tickets and left Melbourne by bus for Sydney on 12th November 1957. The young walkers met in Sydney and sailed

Harry Tetlow installed them in the Trentham Hostel, 20 miles from Wellington, at the tail of Hutt Valley, where for £3-11-6 per week, they got 2 meals and accommodation. They received lots of publicity during their stay and it started immediately they arrived. This from a local NZ paper, noting their arrival.

Three Walkers Here from Australia

Aboard the Monowai when she arrived from Sydney this morning were three young Australian walkers who are here for the purpose of travelling around the country and competing in as many athletics meetings as they can attend.

They are R. J. Chugg, M. A. Lang and R. Gardiner, all from Melbourne. The walkers, all 21 years of age, belong to the Victorian Amateur Walkers' Club. They were not, they said, a selected team, but were merely an unofficial touring team in New Zealand because they wanted to visit this country and could finance this trip themselves.

Their first engagement will be at Hewera next weekend and then they will travel through most of the North Island, hoping to race every week. They will also compete in the New Zealand A.A. Championship meeting early next year.

Chugg and Gardiner are to stay in New Zealand for six months, while Lang is to remain here for only 2½ months.

All three were loud in their praise for last year's Melbourne Olympics. Gardiner had acted as an official at the Games and the three of them had been thrilled with the two walking events.

They will compete in both long and short distance walks in New Zealand.

This newspaper clipping from some time later catches the 3 young walkers in a formal mode in their VAWC jackets.



Murray took a job with a wool firm while Rex and Bob started at Todd Motors, Rex on interior trimming and Bob on body beating. Start time was 8AM and on 3 nights a week, they worked until 8:30PM. It was not a cushy lifestyle.

Over Christmas, sports meetings were held in country centres. These would include highland dancing, grass track cycle racing, and often a one and a two mile walk on the same day with some good trophies for both.

The Wellington 20km championship was walked on a course which the boys subsequently measured by car speedos at 13.9 and 14.1 miles (20 km is actually 12.2 miles). How the course was chosen, nobody seemed to know. Yet it had been accepted by the Association.

After this event, they journeyed to the South Island for a week of racing. Then they bid farewell to Murray (who was returning to Australia) and returned to the North Island for a bit of a rest after their hectic week of racing.



A twilight race on grass in New Zealand – from left to right: Bob, Murray Lang, Harry Tetlow and Rex Chugg

And one further photo which shows Bob breasting the tape to win a track walk during his NZ sojourn.



By early 1958, Len Chadwick had joined them.

Len, a former Australian 50km champion (1950-1953), was specifically targeting the New Zealand 50km championship, to be contested in Wellington in March 1958. On that occasion, he won convincingly, beating a struggling Harry Tetlow. The following two photos say it all:



Left: Len Chadwick wins the NZ 50km title in Wellington

Right: Caption: After walking for more than 5 hours in the 50,000m road walk, H. Tetlow (Wellington) was grateful for this assistance given him after he crossed the finishing line at the Hutt Recreation Ground on Saturday. Although Tetlow finished second to L. Chadwick (only two finished), he becomes New Zealand Champion as Chadwick (Australia) was an invitation walker in the event.

On the spur of the moment, Bob had also entered the New Zealand 50 km championship to make up the numbers but a lack of distance training took its toll and the 25 miles he completed ruined his arches and he could not train for the next month leading up to the National 20 km.

With that final race out of the way, they travelled for 2 months before finally packing the bags and returning to Australia in late April 1958.

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