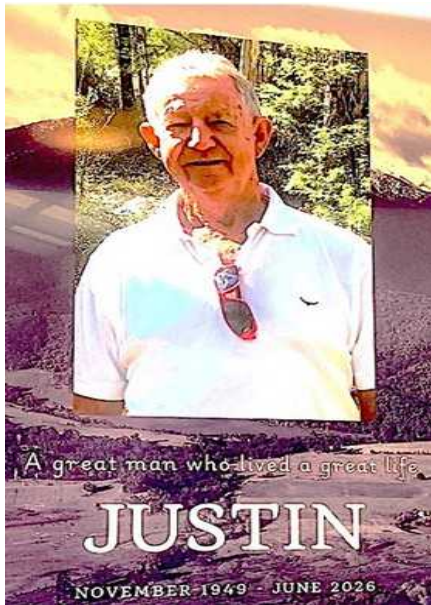


The Victorian walking community was saddened to hear of the passing of former VAWC member Justin Coxhead in early June 2026 after suffering a brain haemorrhage while at home in the Victorian country town of Bright.



Justin, born 26th November 1949, appeared on the Melbourne racewalking scene in the early 1960s as a member of the YMCA Athletics Club. He joined the VAWC around the same time and was noted right from the start for his impeccable long striding straight leg technique and obvious talent.

He reminisced with Stuart Cooper on the occasion of the VRWC Centenary celebration in 2022.

I realise now that it was 60 years earlier this year when I attended the official opening of our old club rooms. April 1962, I seem to recall. I would have been 12.

I met Justin during my first year of walking in 1966 when both our clubs were competing in Interclub at the now defunct Poplar Road athletics track. It was triangular rather than circular, with 5 laps to the mile! As Justin was a year older than me, I usually unsuccessfully chased him around the track. When I joined the VAWC that same year, he was already there and one of our top Junior walkers.



Justin chases Rod Bambury in interclub competition in the late 1960s

He won a number of Victorian Junior Championships and represented the State on a couple of occasions in the yearly Shell East Coast track meets (VIC vs NSW vs QLD), alongside lifelong mate Frank Overton who was the NSW Junior Champion. They each raced in the other's State Junior Championships but normally had to play second fiddle to a super talented Graeme Nichols who stood in their path to winning at the national level.

Justin's first foray into senior championship racing was in 1965 when he contested (and failed to finish) the Victorian 10,000m walk at the Melbourne University track in Parkville. From then on, he was a regular in the various State, Federation and Australian Championships of the era.

With the help of Clarrie and Ian Jack, he quickly moved up to the longer distances, taking bronze in the 1968 Victorian 50km championship at only 18 years of age and gaining 5th place a year later in the 1969 20 Miles trial for the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games.

Always a solid performer for 'Team VIC', his walking career included many highlights. The list included

1968 Victorian 50km	3 rd	5.01.09
1969 Commonwealth Games 20 Mile Trial	5 th	2:47:35
1970 LBG Carnival 20 Mile	2 nd	2:51:36
1970 Victorian 50km	3 rd	4.42.14
1971 Victorian 20km	2 nd	1.36.50
1971 Alexander Cup 30km	3 rd	2:34:36
1971 LBG Carnival 20 Mile	3 rd	2:44:43

1969-1971 were his best years thus far and he was one of the many young hopefuls chasing the likes of Bob Gardiner, Noel Freeman and Ted Allsopp.



1970 Australian 50km Championship in Melbourne - Victorians David Black, Andrew Jamieson, Geoff Laycock, Ted Allsopp, Norm Marr, Graeme Anderson (obscured), Justin Coxhead, Robin Wood (obscured) and Bob Gardiner

Unfortunately, in July 1971, not long after his latest LBG 20 Miler, he badly injured his hamstring, effectively ending his career.

He came back briefly in the mid seventies for a few more races but his return was short lived. The hamstring quickly flared up and he was sidelined for good.

Justin was an energetic clubman who served on the VAWC committee and in 1969 took on the daunting role as editor of the club newsletter *Heel & Toe*. In that role, he showcased his considerable writing skills with entertaining stories of the club and personalities. In mid 1971 he handed the role of editor on to Claude Martin.

Justin commented in 2004 on his time as editor:

When I look back and think how hard it was to produce such a magazine compared to today with computers and modern technology. I used to have an oldvery, very old Remington typewriter which would be a museum piece now. I used to type (cut) my own stencils and take them down to the VAAA office in McKillop St, where Mabel Robinson would duplicate the edition. I would pick them up after work and then collate and staple them for either Sat or Wed evening, depending on the season. In addition, I was the handicapper for quite a while so used to do

that job and type up the handicaps for approx 100 people (you would have a lot of active walkers over a season although not all on the same day).

Justin's penchant for writing entertaining and dramatic race reporting in *Heel & Toe* is evident in his coverage of the 1970 Commonwealth Games 20 Mile Walk Trial, entitled *The Road To The Isles*, which appeared in Vol 1, Issue No 4. in September 1969. This is included as an appendage to this document.

On other fronts, Justin worked for Shell Australia and, with his wife Margaret, raised three sons and a daughter, eventually moving to Perth. After Margaret passed, Justin married Anne and relocated to Bright, where he was living at the time of his death.

To his wife Anne and to his children Simon, Shannon, Matthew and Shaun, we offer our sincerest condolences.

On Wednesday 1st July, seven of Justin's old racewalking mates joined his family and wider friendship circle for a sad yet warm and still cheerful celebration of his life at Richmond's Corner Hotel. The family reminiscences reminded us of many of the things that ensured Justin was firmly implanted in our memories.

He was a fountain of stories and anecdotes, including fond recollections of people he'd held in high esteem. Among these was Bob Gardiner – whom Justin had idolised during his Walkers Club days and whose 90th birthday party he was able to attend in March – and the late Ray Smith, who'd placed 6th in the Melbourne Olympic 50km walk in 1956 and was one of Justin's early coaches.

A lover of literature, Justin harboured a deep love for poetry, including Australian bush poems (his recitations of *The Man From Snowy River* were apparently flawless), collecting them and even writing his own. This would surprise nobody who still recalls his editorials and race reports in those Gestetner stencil-cut 'Heel & Toe' issues, and the erudition and knack for drama he expressed in them. He was, in Shannon's words, 'articulate, thorough and a perfectionist in every sense of the word' – qualities she appreciated through his proof-reading of her postgraduate drafts prior to submission.

Justin's love of vintage cars (he'd been president of the Jaguar Car Club of WA) was not to be overlooked, in particular the treasured 1921 Vauxhall 30-98 he'd inherited from his father and was lovingly – and perennially – restoring. Simon recalled: "As kids, we were kept up to date with every stage of the restoration. But there was really only one milestone we cared about. We'd say, 'Just let us know when the engine's running,' and Dad would say, 'Soon, son.' Then another decade would pass ..."



Some of Justin's old walking mates from the 60s/70s at the wake: Stu Cooper, Ian Jack, Terry O'Neill, Bob Gardiner, Tim Erickson, Frank Overton and Clarrie Jack.

Here is Justin's race report on one of the truly epic contests in the history of race walking on these shores - the trial for the 1970 Commonwealth Games 20 miles in Edinburgh. The report was published in *Heel & Toe*, 30 August, 1969, and captures Justin's sense of the dramatic. Four of the men pictured above – Bob, Frank, Clarrie and Justin himself – raced in that event.

“THE ROAD TO THE ISLES”
by Justin Coxhead
(reprinted from ‘Heel & Toe’, 30 August 1969)

This is what the 1970 Commonwealth Games Trial was entitled by one of our poetic-minded members. Whatever it may be called, the race will go down as one of the greatest ever held in this country outside the Olympic walks. The weather was ideal for a 20 miler and the rather large field of 33 was made up of 16 entrants for the trial and 17 for the Victorian Walkers Club championship.

On the day Noel Freeman, with a recent 2:33:54 started slightly favourite from Frank Clark, NSW champion, who had 2:36:00 on the board. Bob Gardiner had the fastest time in the field with 2:33:12 last year, but was underrated for this one. The event was given an international flavour with the inclusion of Arthur Jones. Arthur competed for England in the Mexican Olympics over 20 kilo and is now living in Sydney. In all there were 6 Olympic athletes in the field. The course was over a 2-mile lap which meant that 30 sharp U-turns had to be encountered during the race.

LAP ONE:

The first 2 miles came up in 15:28 with Freeman, Jones, Clark and Gardiner together at this stage, just feeling each other out. Graeme Nicholls and Ted Allsopp 15:36 were next, followed by Varel Newmark, Robin Whyte NSW in 15:50 with Justin Coxhead 16:14 the closest. Robin Wood 16:42 and South Aust. rep Peter Whitham in 17:03. The NSW boys, Eddy Dawkins, Peter Waddell, Frank Overton and Keith “Gunner” Henness in 17:26 were just shading Vic. Norm Marr. The remainder of the field were settling down into small bunches.

LAP TWO:

The big four remained unchanged holding the same pace with Graeme Nicholls moving up to be only one second down. Robin Whyte went into 6th place ahead of Newmark and Allsopp with Coxhead 14 sec behind. A further 75 sec to Robin Wood and Eddy Dawkins making a forward move. Among the Club title boys, only Norm Marr, Eric Froude and Ray Smith were bettering 9’s. (i.e. 9-minute miles ... Ed.)

LAP THREE:

The trio of Noel, Bob and Frank went through in 46:23, about 5 yards up on Jones. At this stage it appeared to be a very tactical race with Nicholls in close attendance. Whyte was 11 sec in front of Newmark, Allsopp and Coxhead who put in a fast lap. Wood led Dawkins by a minute with another minute to Waddell, Overton and Whitham.

LAP FOUR:

The leaders still remained the same with a slight increase in pace. Nicholls had passed Jones with Coxhead just up on Allsopp and Newmark. Whyte was slowing considerably, possibly feeling the strain of his 4:43 50 kilo two weeks previously.

LAP FIVE:

The halfway came up in 76:43 with Nicholls in 4th place in a fast 77:22. Arthur Jones was finding it tough and went through in 80:00, trailing Ted Allsopp who had made a breakaway burst 79:51. Newmark led Coxhead by 7 secs with Whyte half a minute down.

LAP SIX:

Saw Gardiner and Freeman 3 secs ahead of Clark with Nicholls dropping back. Allsopp was only 2 secs up on Coxhead who was having a good day. Jones and Newmark retired leaving Whyte 45 secs out on his own.

LAP SEVEN:

As they entered the 7th, the small crowd was still wondering who was going to make a break. They weren’t guessing for long as Bob Gardiner stepped the pace up 14:54 for the lap to have 13 sec on Noel with Frank another 23 down. Nicholls was beginning to tire and Coxhead began the long chase gaining a minute on Allsopp with Whyte coming back into the race.

LAP EIGHT:

Bob maintained a 14:58 pace and was well clear. Officials began to realise that Bob was up on the Empire (Commonwealth) track record of Noel’s and was not far off the World record.

LAP NINE:

A 14:54 circuit put Bob in an unbeatable position, 1½ minutes ahead of Noel with Frank another 4 mins behind. Nicholls was hanging onto his lead over Coxhead who was walking his best 20. Robin Whyte had a clear advantage over the gallant Allsopp who was not quite fit enough for a gruelling 20 miles.

FINAL:

Bob did not relent his fantastic pace and crossed the line in a phenomenal 2hr 31min 36.6 sec to be a mere 3.6 secs outside the WORLD TRACK record of Russian athlete, Vedjakov. Noel crossed in 2:34:17, only 23 secs outside his own Empire track record, but as he said himself he had no answer for Bob's speed. Frank Clark, who won this trial in Sydney in 1966, could not match the two Victorians on the day and finished in 2:39:24. Graeme Nicholls found a little extra over the final stages for 2:45:18. Justin Coxhead battled the last 8 on his own also for 5th in 2:47:35.

Robin Whyte kept moving well for 2:49:46 with Ted Allsopp doing well to finish in 2:52:01. Veteran of many 20 milers, Peter Waddell took 8th in 2:57:09. Norm Marr surprised with a tremendous 2:57:52. South Australian champion Peter Whitham walked possibly his best 20 for 2:59:52 making it ten under 3 hours, one of the best results in a 20 mile race for a long time. Eddy Dawkins blew up badly 3:19:02 to be the only other finisher in the trial. Other retirees were Robin Wood at 10, Keith Heness at 8, Frank Overton at 10 and NSW veteran team captain Les Wade at 10.

1. Bob Gardiner	VIC	2;31:36.6
2. Noel Freeman	VIC	2:34:19
3. Frank Clarke	NSW	2:39:24
4. Graeme Nicholls	VIC	2:45:18
5. Justin Coxhead	VIC	2:47:35
6. Robin Whyte	NSW	2:49:46
7. Ted Allsopp	VIC	2:52:01
8. Peter Waddell	NSW	2:57:09
9. Norm Marr	VIC	2:57:52
10. Peter Whitham	SA	2:59:52
11. Eddie Dawkins	NSW	3:19:02
Robin Wood	VIC	DNF
Keith Heness	NSW	DNF
Frank Overton	NSW	DNF
Les Wade	NSW	DNF

Tim Erickson
Wednesday 29th July 2026