

KELLY RUDDICK

2014	Racewalking World Cup	Taicang, China	Open 20km	49 th	1:34:00
2015	IAAF World Championships	Beijing, China	Open 20km	DNS	

Kelly Ruddick was born 19th April 1973 in Ballarat, in country Victoria but her career in athletics was not a first choice. Unlike so many of our walkers who have cut their teeth in Little Athletics, Kelly practiced ballet from age 6 -13 until she started having feet trouble that led to surgery and the end of her dancing career.

When she said to my parents “What am I going to do all day Saturday?”, her father suggested she come along to a club run and see if she liked it. She won easily and loved the feeling and the great welcome she received from the members of Ballarat Harriers. At age 15, she joined the club. She initially ran cross country, then she did track, normally training with the junior men, and soon running good times; 800m 2.20, 1500m 4.43, 3000m 9.50. Unfortunately, the years of running led to shin splints and stress fractures so she was forced to stop in her late teens.

By age 21, she was married and had twin sons.

Once the boys were old enough, tried to return to running but still had shin issues. Her coach Ed Smith recommended race walking as an alternative, so she tried it and found it to be fun. The style came easily to her. She never bothered with style work and even now has only ever had one caution.

Again, her career aspirations were short lived, with a third child (a daughter) born in 2003.

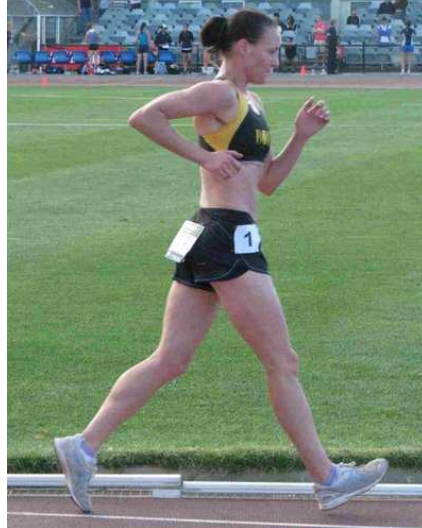
Kelly first came to the attention of the wider Victorian racewalking audience in June 2005 when she came down to a VRWC race at Middle Park and broke 40 minutes for the 8km roadwalk (**39:44**). Her daughter was then aged 2 and she was again able to start doing a bit of serious walking. A few weeks later, she won first Victorian Championship walk medal, finishing 2nd in the Victorian 15km roadwalk (**1:18:28**) behind Simone Wolowiec.



Kelly's first walking race in Melbourne in June 2005 - pictured with Mark Donahoo

We didn't see any more of Kelly until 2006 when she reappeared for another couple of races, coming second to Jess Rothwell in the Victorian Country Roadwalk championships (52:02) and then coming fourth in the Women's Open 5km roadwalk (**23:59**) at the LBG Carnival in June. At this stage, Kelly's world was turned upside down once again with the birth of her fourth child. So she once again disappeared off the scene.

It was not until 2009 that we saw her again in racing mode when she won the Victorian 5000m walk at the annual T&F Championships in an excellent **23:27**. Wins in the Victorian 15km roadwalk (**1:16:31**) and the Victorian 20km roadwalk (**1:43:47**) were followed by a third place in the A.A. Invitational 20km roadwalk (1:46:49) at Fawkner Park in December.



Kelly displays her usual perfect technique as she wins the 2009 Victorian 5000m walk championship

On the basis of these walks, she was invited to the AIS walks camp in Canberra in January 2010, an experience which taught her a lot and which provided the springboard for further improvement. When reflecting on this seminal event a few years later, she said

Yes, I went to the AIS and found it to be amazing. It was such an eye opener as to how dedicated the athletes are and how hard they train. I learnt a lot - mostly that I was training too slow and too little. That trip up there changed my attitude for the better. However time is still a huge factor in my not being able to do much training. A big week for me is 40km. I hope in the next year to be able to train more with our house closer to completion, the kids at school and cutting back at work to put in a big final push to try to be the best athlete I can be before I retire. I don't want to have any regrets and say if only...



Kelly training with Beth Alexander and Rachel Tallent in Canberra in January 2010

2010 saw her win the Victorian 10km roadwalk (**49:46**) and the Victorian 15km roadwalk (**1:12:02**) and she placed third in the Australian 20km Roadwalk Championship (**1:42:32**) in August in Brisbane. In December 2010 at Fawkner Park, she took third again in the A.A. Invitational 20km roadwalk with an improved **1:40:11**.



Kelly battles out second place in the 2010 Australian 20km Championship in Brisbane with Zuzie Schindlerova (CZE)

2011 was even better. She started in January with a win in the Victorian Country Championship 5000m walk in a PB **22:58**. In fact, she won every Victorian walk championship that year - Vic Country 5000m (22:58), Vic 5000m (**23:17**), Vic 10km road (**47:34**), Vic 15km road (1:13:05) and Vic 20km road (**1:40:54**). She finished off her winter season with second place in the Australian 20km championship on a tough course in Canberra in August - her time of **1:39:56** breaking the 100 minute barrier.



Not a bad front line in the 2011 Victorian 20km championships at Middle Park - Tanya Holliday, Chris Erickson, Kelly and former international Paul Van Kopplen

She was now aiming for a spot in the 2012 World Racewalking Cup Team - things were coming into place at the right time.

Of course, we all know that the best laid plans can still go awry. So it was for Kelly as she was forced to miss the A.A. Invitational 20km roadwalk in December when she had to take time out with irregular heart beat issues. She missed vital weeks of training and went into the 20km World Racewalking Cup trial in Hobart very much underdone. To further compound things, walkers in that event faced a horrendous 38°C - she struggled through, finishing 6th in 1:51:47 after taking nearly 10 minutes of breaks along the way. Her World Racewalking Cup dream was over.

While this would have caused many a walker to drop the bundle, Kelly was made of sterner stuff - she continued on with her training and racing, winning the Victorian 5000m track championship in March 2012 in 23:03, then further improving with a big PB time of **22:18** as she chased Claire Tallent all the way in the A.A. Invitational 5000m walk at the National T&F Champs in April. She was rewarded with her first international vest as part of the 2012 Australian Oceania Championships team. Two weeks after this announcement, she won the Victorian Country 10km championship in a PB time of **46:52**.

Her subsequent performances in the Oceania Champs in Cairns were good - 2nd in the 5000m walk in 23:09 and third in the 10km walk in 48:39, both in very hot and humid conditions. She then took a well earned break from competition and did not take to the track again until the summer season kicked in.

She was in good form immediately, walking 13:27 and 13:28 in AV Shield competitions in Ballarat in October 2012. She raced to third in the annual Fawknor Park 20km in December in yet another PB - **1:38:22** - and then came some big track times - **13:02** for 3000m, **8:26** for 2000m and **22:11** for 5000m, all in January. The improvement continued with more PBs in February, culminating in yet another big 20km walk in Hobart - **1:36:58** for fourth place - and a great time of **21:50** in winning the Victorian Open 5000m.

In April 2013, she turned 40 and amazingly, the rate of PBs increased - it seemed like every time she stepped into a race, it was yet another W40 road record. She improved her 10km road time to **46:27** (May), then to **46:15** (August) and finally to **45:26** (August). Similarly, she improved her 20km time to **1:36:46** (June) and then to **1:33:15** in winning the Australian 20km championship in Launceston in September. This was in fact the fastest 20km time done by any of the Australian women during 2013. It was just a matter of timing. If that time had been done in February, she would have been in the 2013 World Championships in Moscow.



Russ Dickenson's 2013 take on Kelly Ruddick says it all

Come the 2013/2014 summer season, she set her sights on the W40 track records and they quickly fell to her - **21:57** for 5000m in October and **13:07** for 3000m in November. With her focus now shifting to the 20km distance, she walked a quick **1:35:35** in November 2013 in the VRWC summer championships in Melbourne. We were expecting a big time at Fawknor Park in mid December but disaster struck as, a few days before the meet, she fell and broke 4 ribs. Sidelined for a month, she could not even resume training until early January 2014. Amazingly, with only 3 weeks training back in her legs, she won the Australian 20km road championships in Hobart on 2nd February with a time of **1:34:44**, just outside her PB. The icing on the cake - this guaranteed her a berth for the 2014 IAAF World Racewalking Cup in Taicang, China.

She did not disappoint in Taicang, crossing the line in the 2014 World Cup 20km championship in 49th place with **1:34:00** and as the second Australian finisher.

It was then back to the relative seclusion of Ballarat for training, working and life in general as a busy mother and parent. Come January 2015, she won the Victorian Country 5000m walk championship in Bendigo in a good **22:24**, especially considering the temperature was up towards 40°C. As a result of this race, she was given the Australia Day Medal for the Performance Of The Meet. This was one of her proudest achievements.



Kelly competes in the 2014 IAAF World Racewalking Cup in Taicang

A month later, she fronted for the Australian Summer 20km roadwalk championship in Adelaide but was disappointed with her second half, being forced to slow to a 4th place finish time of **1:36:17**. She bounced back a week later to win the Victorian Open 5000m walk championship in a very fast **21:49**, only just outside her PB. A DNF in the Australian 10,000m walk championship in Brisbane in late March was followed by another slowish time of 1:39:19 in the IAAF Challenge Series meet in Taicang, China, in early May.

She was now in the hands of the selectors with regard to the 2015 IAAF World Championships. She was one of 5 Australian girls who had qualified and she was amongst the fastest three, but her recent form was patchy. Thus it was that the team announcement in early June did not include her name – the selectees for the women's 20km were Tanya Holliday, Beki Smith and Rachel Tallent.

The following Sunday, Kelly fronted in the Victorian 20km roadwalk championships at Middle Park, easily winning the women's title in **1:36:45**. Perhaps she was maintaining her form just in case... This was followed a week later by a further announcement by AA confirmed that Tanya Holliday had been forced to withdraw and that Kelly had indeed been added. So her World Championships dream was alive once again.

At 42 years of age, Kelly had overcome the many hurdles that had challenged her along the way and would represent Australia again on the international stage, this time in Beijing in August 2015.

Her final 3 races before heading off overseas were good - 1st in the Victorian 15km championship with a PB **1:10:12**, 1st in the VRWC RWA Challenge 10km with **46:55** and 1st in a VRWC 8km with **37:06**.

Come the World Championships and Kelly, the oldest walker in the field at age 42, did not make it to the start line. After a very promising week training in Japan in hot conditions, she moved to Beijing with the team, only to then spend 4 days in bed on medication for vertigo from an inner ear infection. The team doctor eventually recommended that she not race (as she could hardly stand anyway, this was the only decision that could be taken). It was a devastating end for what had should have been a career highlight for Kelly.

Kelly was not ready to hang up the racing shoes yet, with the World Racewalking Cup and Olympics on offer in 2016. But the signs were not promising when she failed to finish in the Fawkner Park 20km in December. A further DNF in the 2016 Australian Summer 20km Championships in Adelaide spelled an end to her international career. The irregular heart beat, which had first come into play in 2012, was now becoming a major issue for her.

She had an 8 month break from racing, coming back to win a gold in the World Masters 5000m track walk in Perth in October. But once again, the heart misbehaved.

Her PBs read very impressively, with all but one achieved as a W40 walker.

2000m	8:22	AV Shield Final, Albert Park	16/02/2013	Age 39
3000m	12:58	AV Shield, Ballarat	01/01/2016	Age 42

5000m	21:46	Queensland 5000m Track Classic, Brisbane	29/03/2014	Age 40
10km	45:25	AA 10,000m Track Champ, Melbourne	04/04/2014	Age 40
15km	1:10:12	AV 15km Championship, Middle Park	03/07/2015	Age 42
20km	1:33:15	Australian Road Championships, Launceston	01/09/2013	Age 40

Kelly's greatest regret in athletics was missing out on her chance to compete at the Commonwealth Games. She led the Australian women's 20km rankings in 2013 and won the Australian Summer 20km championship in 2014. Selection for the 2014 Commonwealth Games would have been certain, if the Glasgow organisers had not gone back on their previous commitment to include racewalks. As it was, the opportunity was lost to her and to the other Commonwealth walkers. This unfortunate twist of fate robbed her of a satisfying way to end her career. She ranked in the top five in the Commonwealth throughout 2014 and her form was superb over the year.

I remember AIS walks coach Brent Vallance commenting during the January 2010 training camp at the AIS that it was a huge shame that Kelly had not been walking in her twenties. By the time she was 'discovered' and added to the talent pool in 2010, she was nearly 37 years of age. She had everything – a tall strong physique, great natural endurance and a near perfect racewalking style. What she achieved over the next 5 to 6 years was impressive. It is worth pondering what she could have achieved if she had started 10 years earlier.