

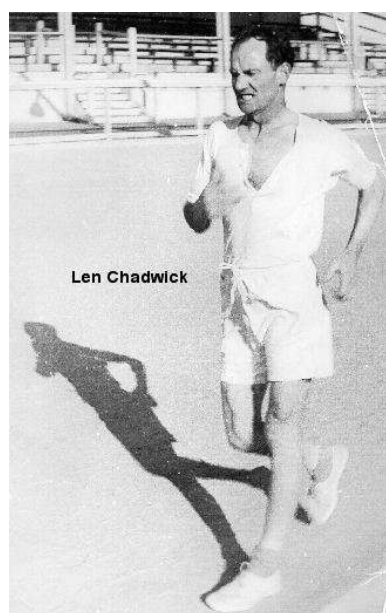
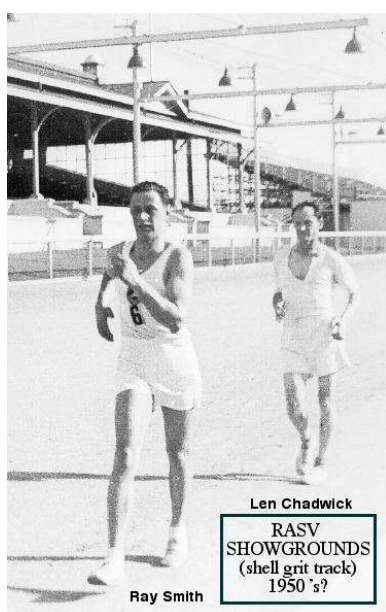
LEN CHADWICK

Len Chadwick may be long gone but has certainly not been forgotten and I thought it time that we reviewed his walking achievements and honoured his career and life with a short article.

Len must have been born around 1912 and rose to prominence as a walker at a relatively late age. While not possessed of great speed, he was a fierce competitor and was ideally suited to the longer distances, especially the 50 km event. The record books showed that he won four Victorian 50 km titles in a row and finished four others – a total of eight 50 km finishes in all. That is a major achievement in itself.

He did not start his walking career until 1950 and he was immediately successful, winning his first 50 km title that same year. 50 km times in those days were slow, given the tough nature of the courses, the lack of proper footwear, the fact that the event was basically walked with little or no chance for refreshments and finally because the competitors worked hard and had little opportunity to train in the modern manner to which we are accustomed. His four 50 km wins were:

1950	Len Chadwick	VAWC	5.08.45	Gus Theobald	GLEN	5.17.24	Bill Medcalf	NSW	5.27.15
1951	Len Chadwick	VAWC	5.09.28	Les Hellyer	BRUN	5.19.46	Bob French	CHEL	5.23.58
1952	Len Chadwick	VAWC	5.18.58	Jim Short	MHSOB	5.20.25	Clive Mackay	RICH	5.34.12
1953	Len Chadwick	VAWC	5:00.44	Jim Short	MHSOB	5:01.25	Les Hellyer	BRUN	5:14.39



**Len competes in a Victorian 10 Mile championship at the Showgrounds in Flemington in the early 1950s.
A young Ray Smith leads in the first of the two photos.**

Interestingly, he never joined an athletics club and always raced Victorian championships with VAWC (Victorian Amateur Walkers' Club) as his club designated. He also won the VAWC 50 Mile championship in 1951, taking 9:15:35 to walk from Melbourne to Frankston and return. Placings in that event were

Len Chadwick	9:15:35	John Busst	9:19:23	Clive Mackay	9:35:46
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His other Victorian 50 km finishes were

1959	5 th	5:21.04
1961	3 rd	5:44.06
1963	5 th	5:17:18
1964	5 th	5:30:00

His last Victorian championship walk was in 1965 and after this he restricted his activities to VAWC club events.

Following the visit to Melbourne in 1956 by a group of N.Z. Walkers, including Melbourne Olympic 50 km winner Norm Read, an open invitation was offered to any VAWC members to go to Wellington to live and race. Len was one of the group of 5 walkers who took up the invitation (the others were Murray Lang, Rex Chugg, Bob Gardiner and John Smythe). During their 5 months there, they raced in club events and at many lovely country meetings in tiny towns, often Highland Games meetings, all on grass tracks. The following photo was taken during the Wellington Province 50

km championship in March 1958 which Len won, but as he had started by invitation, he could not claim the title.



Len wins the Wellington Province 50 km championship in March 1958

He was a familiar figure on the roads of Melbourne's western suburbs and used to often pick up money from the road, especially near hotels. He also found tools and, on one occasion when out training, found an axe which he carried for several miles back home. Older members of the club will remember the familiar sound his supersize Dunlop volleys slapping the road as he loudly huffed and puffed his way around Albert Park.

Len's demise is an interesting story in itself. He had retired from work by the early 1970s and was receiving a pension but was also working under an assumed name and had returned to athletics under that false identity. While at a Veterans Athletics competition at Box Hill, he collapsed in the clubrooms and died. It was lucky that Harry Summers was there because he was one of the few who actually knew that this was Len Chadwick. The body had no identification and the only thing in the pockets was a railway ticket. Given that the name by which he had registered was a false one, we can only wonder how long it might have taken to identify him if Harry had not been there that night.

It is interesting now to look at our walkers nowadays and think how "normal" we are compared to the slightly eccentric people like Len whom the club used to boast. They hailed from an era which is long gone and they helped to make a club membership that was both memorable and colourful. Older members will remember with warmth the many 'interesting' characters, including Len, who graced our club.



Club legends - Len Chadwick, Norm Goble, Jim Gaylor, Tom Kelly, Fred O'Grady and John Busst at Albert Park, circa 1955

