

## LONG DISTANCE WALKING RELAYS IN AUSTRALIA

There have been a number of long distance relay walks in Australia, undertaken by various Racewalking clubs. Here is what my research shows

### April 18-19 1959                      VAWC 24 Hour Walk Relay, Olympic Park, Melbourne (1 mile lap)

In 1959, the Victorian Amateur Walking Club staged a 24 hour relay in the streets around Olympic Park. The lap was a 1 mile loop which commenced in Swan St outside the velodrome, then proceeded to the Olympic Park Swimming Pool, turned left along Batman Avenue to the Anderson Street bridge, then turned along the path beside the Engineer's depot and back into Swan Street.

The event started at 3PM on Saturday 18 April 1959 and there were 2 contesting teams. The winning team of 13 walkers included names like Noel Freeman, Ted Allsopp, Don Keane, Bob Gardiner, Ray Smith, Jim Gleeson, Harry Summers and Alan Hancock – the cream of the Australian walking scene. The second team included 20 walkers taken from the club's remaining members.

The winning team walked a total distance of **181 miles 20 yards (291.250 km)** in what must have been a world's best at that time. The second team walked **160 miles 590 yards (257.976 km)**. The 100 mile distance was reached in **13:13:18**.

Distances walked by each of the walkers in the winning team were as follows

Ted Allsopp	19 miles	Gavan Breen	8 miles	N Brown	7 miles
Noel Freeman	28 miles	Bob Gardiner	9 miles	Jim Gleeson	12 miles
Alan Hancock	15 miles	L Hehir	11 miles	Don Keane	10 miles
Norm Norris	15 miles	Ian Saunders	11 miles	Ray Smith	15 miles
Harry Summers	20 miles				

Many of these walkers walked their mile laps at an average speed of well under 8 minutes (that corresponds to a km speed of well under 5 minutes). They were top walkers!

The performance of Noel Freeman warrants some analysis

1-3	3m	23:26
15-16	2m	14:52
31-33	3m	22:59
53-54	2m	14:37
61	1m	7:20
68-70	3m	23:50
84-85	2m	15:25
92	1m	7:48
95	1m	7:55
107	1m	7:44
110-111	2m	16:34
125-126	2m	15:46
146	1m	7:52
149	1m	7:51
152	1m	7:51
177	1m	7:24
181	1m	7:15

Noel started and finished the relay for the winning team and did the most work. With this sort of training and strength under his belt, it was not surprising when in the following year, he won silver in the 1960 Olympic 20 km event at Rome.

### September 29-30, 1967                      South Australian 24 Hour Walk Relay

At 5PM on Friday 29 September 1967, 4 members of the South Australian Amateur Walkers Club set out to walk as a relay team for 24 hours. This was the first time this had been attempted in Australia as far as the walkers knew (they were not aware of the 1959 Melbourne race) and the Adelaide Harriers Track was chosen as the venue. The walkers, Eddie Folland, Bob Mee, Len Hart and Brian Carman, had set 150 miles as their target.

Late on Friday evening they were well ahead of their target but just after midnight, Eddie suffered an acute attack of stomach cramps and they had to work hard from then on to maintain their advantage. Despite severe cases of blisters, sore feet and other assorted problems, the 150 miles came up in 22:35:59 and the team was able to put in some speedy 2 mile legs during their last hour to record **158 miles 1276 yd.**

With this done, they threw out a challenge for the next year. Was any other club going to attack their "record"? It is not recorded if any challengers were forthcoming but I think not!

#### **08-09 October 1994                      George Knott Athletic Track, Collingwood, 24 Hour Relay**

A 24 hour relay race was put on in conjunction with the 1994 Australian Centurions 24 Hour walk. The rules for team selection were well thought out and looked good on paper but ended up giving too much of an advantage to teams with large junior or veteran representations.

Each team could consist of a maximum of 8 senior athletes (20-39 years of age). Veterans between 40 and 65 years and Juniors between 15 and 19 years were classed as 2/3 of a senior athlete. So for every 2 senior athletes, you could have 3 athletes from this group. Veterans over 65 years of age and juniors between 12 and 15 years were classed as 1/2 a senior athlete. So for every one senior athlete, you could have 2 athletes from this group. For example, a team could consist of

- 8 senior athletes
- 6 athletes from veterans (40y+), 3 juniors over 15 years and 2 seniors
- 16 athletes over 65 years of age or under 15 years
- some other combination

The relay started at 4 PM (to enable competitors to do their scheduled Interclub races first) and took place in lane 3 to make sure that competitors in the 100 miler were not inconvenienced. Four teams of 8-12 competitors took part with competitors doing relay distances of between 400 metres and 10 km.

The teams eventually found that the 24 hour period of such sustained activity really pushed them to the limit and a majority decision was reached (3 teams out of 4) to reduce the race to 21 hours so that it would finish at the same time as the 100 miler.

Final results were as follows

Wendy's Warriors	<b>268.183 km</b>
Essendon Training Group	256.445 km
Victorian Veteran Walkers	230.464 km
Barwon Walkers	211.880 km

The Barwon team decided to continue on for the full 24 hours and finished with a 24 hour performance of 239.54 km.

#### **28-29 Sept 1996                      ANZ Stadium, Nathan, Qld**

In October 1996, the Queensland Race Walkers Club put on a long distance walking carnival which was a fund-raiser for the Queensland Epilepsy Foundation. It incorporated a 24 Hour endurance walk, shorter walking races and a 24 Hour walk relay event. The event was held at the QE II Stadium in Brisbane, the site of the 1982 Commonwealth Games.

A team of 15 walkers from QRWC (including international standard walker David Smith) walked **294 km** to claim a new world record, breaking their own record which they had established the previous year when they had walked **284 km** for the 24 hour period. A second team of walker from Redlands Athletics Club walked 224 km to finish in second place.

Well, their 294 km did in fact beat the 1959 VAWC performance by some 3 km and the team size was similar (15 as against 13) but I am unable to verify if it was in fact a 'world record'. I leave that to others!

## **WHAT OF OTHER PERFORMANCES?**

I have searched my archives to see what other comparable performances have been achieved overseas and came across this 100 mile relay done in England in 1977

### **April 30 1977** **Chelmsford, England, 100 mile relay**

A number of teams of 10 walkers each walked 10 separate 1 mile legs to complete a 100 mile relay at Chelmsford in England in April 1977. The previous record of 14:23:45 set by Colorado TC was beaten by all 6 finishing teams with Enfield Harriers the final winners.

Enfield took the lead at the 20 mile mark and were never headed to finish in **12:37:24**. The average mile times of its 10 members were as follows

A James 7:05, G Robinson 7:21, T Major, 8:10, D Salter 7:51, C Fisher 7:27, G Scott 7:1, P Worth 8:09, C Fogg 7:31, H Stewart 7:28, A Seddon 7:06.

Second was Sheffield United in 12:52:14 and they were followed by Belgrave with 12:53:02, Brighton and Hove with 13:01:48, Ilford with 13:14:52 and Dawlish and South Devon in 13:46:33.

Now that's walking! The 1959 VAWC team covered the first 100 miles of their walk in 13:13:18 but they were of course walking more conservatively as they had another 11 hours of racing to go.

(As an aside, I was a member of Enfield Harriers when in England in 1980 and regularly trained with Adrian James. I shall have to find out some further details from Adrian on this one and see if any subsequent relays were held.)

## **FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES**

The opportunity is always there for any group of walkers to 'give it a go' and see how what sort of distance can be achieved over a long relay period. The 'Walk For Life' 24 Hour walk relay events now regularly scheduled throughout Australia during the summer months provide a ready made infrastructure for such an attempt. Any walkers club would also, I am sure, always be ready to put on a similar event if asked. I wait to see when I can add the next section to this ongoing document.

Tim Erickson  
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