

Simone Wolowiec

1997	Racewalking World Cup	Prague	10 km	53 rd	46:45
1999	Racewalking World Cup	Mezidon	20 km	59 th	1:39:31
2002	Commonwealth Games	Manchester	20 km	5 th	1:43:10
2004	Racewalking World Cup	Naumburg	20 km	DQ	

Simone Wolowiec, born 12th February 1974, started racewalking in Little Athletics at age 7. She was coached for the next 11 years by Alan Johnson who guided her throughout an impressive underage career. Simone is lightly built, standing 5'6" and racing at 54 kg.

At age 12, she joined the Knox-Sherbrooke WAC and has been a member since then. Her first Victorian team selection was in 1987 when she went to Brisbane and came 6th in the Australian All Schools Under 15 1500m Championship.



Simone racing in Holland in 1992 in her first overseas trip

Her first International experience was in 1992 when she competed in the Junior 5 km road walk in the Eight Nations Challenge in La Coruna, Spain.

She had an outstanding career as a junior athlete, winning 4 Victorian track and road championships. Perhaps her best walk as a junior was on 25 November 1993 when she broke Gabrielle Blythe's Victorian Junior 5000m track record with a time of **22:35.8**. This record still stands today.

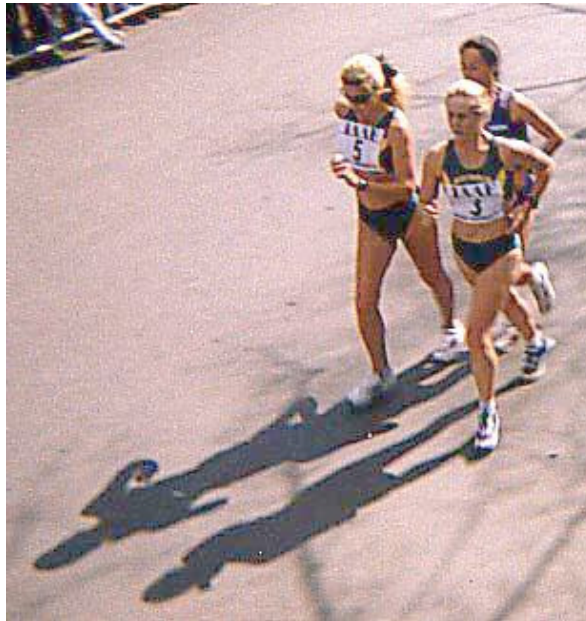
She walked so well in the 1993-94 summer season that she came 3rd in votes for the Victorian Athlete of the Year.

Over the next few years she successfully made the transition to the senior ranks and had her first major breakthrough in 1996 when she won her first Australian Open title – the 20 km roadwalk. Her time was a PB **1:37:14**. This followed a win in the Victorian 20 km road walk two weeks earlier.

1997 saw her improvement continue. She started in February with 5th place in the Australian 10 km title in Melbourne with **45:50**. She followed this up in March with 5th in the Australian 5000m track title with **23:01**. 1997 also saw her gain her first International vest – she contested the 20 km in the Racewalking World Cup in Prague in May and her 53rd place (**46:45**) out of 117 walkers was a very good first up result.

She finished the winter season with 3rd in the Australian 20 km title in Sydney in a good **1:39:55**, then won the 10 km walk which was being held in conjunction with the Australian 50 km title walk in Melbourne in December. Her time of **45:40** was a PB and showed that she was a serious contender for the Commonwealth Games team.

Unfortunately she finished 4th in the 1998 Commonwealth Games trial even though she did a PB of **45:39**. But she still had a good year with 2nd place in the Australian 10000m track title in **46:50**, only 13 seconds behind Jane Saville. Then she finished 2nd in both the Victorian 10 km (**46:04**) and the 20 km (**1:35:14**) titles.



Simone (no. 5) in the 1997 World Cup of Racewalking, Podebrady, Czech Republic. (photo: Jeff Cassin)

In March 1999, Simone finished 3rd in the Australian 10000m track title in **46:27** and then won her 2nd international vest with another Racewalking World Cup selection. Her subsequent Mexidon 20 km performance (59th out of 123 walkers) was another consistent performance.



Simone, 1999 World Cup of Racewalking, Mézidon. (photo: Claus Jørgensen)

In December 1999 she came 2nd in **1:36:51** in a womens 20 km roadwalk held in conjunction with the National 50 km title and Olympic Trial. She then travelled to Canberra for a Grand Prix 20 km walk in February 2000 and won in a PB **1:34.44**. This was an Olympic A qualifier and marked her as a serious contender for Olympic selection. Unfortunately, due to injury and sickness that interrupted her final preparation, she finished a disappointed 8th six weeks later in the Olympic trial with **1:40:06**.

She spent most of 2001 away from the sport and, in January 2002, made the decision to move to Canberra and use her next few years in the sport in an all-out effort to fulfil her potential. This move seemed to have immediate benefit as she recorded good **46:56** in February in the Canberra Grand Prix walk events. Her comment at the time was

“I decided to head to Canberra and train under Ron Weigel. It is just something I need to try. I really want to give the last 4 or 5 years 100% and train with an elite group who are all striving for the same goal. If it doesn't work out at least I have tried.”

She followed this up in April with 3rd place in the Australian 20 km title in Brisbane (**1:38:21**) and gained selection, along with Jane and Natalie Saville, in her first Commonwealth Games team. However, a nagging ankle injury interrupted her buildup and valuable preparation time was lost. Given this fact, her subsequent performance in Manchester (4th in **1:43:10**) was a solid walk in unusually hot conditions.

One would not have been surprised to see Simone retire at this stage - the last few years had seen a succession of niggling injuries and disappointments. To her credit, she was determined to see it through to the 2004 Olympics. Returning to Canberra, she worked hard on her rehabilitation and was back into top shape when she next raced, recording **47:21** for a 10 km roadwalk at Albert Park in early February 2003. Then 3 weeks later she was forced to retire in the Canberra A Series 20 km roadwalk with hamstring problems. Still suffering from this injury, she struggled home in 5th place in **1:43:58** in the National 20 km race in Brisbane in early April.

In May, she decided to return permanently to Melbourne. The Canberra experiment had not really been as successful as she had hoped. She then raced a full winter season at Albert Park, winning the Victorian 15 km (**1:13:22**), the Victorian 10 km (**48:38**), the Victorian 20 km (**1:38:15**), the Canberra Carnival 10 Mile event (**1:19:44**) and the National 10 km title (**47:45**). It was perhaps her most consistent winter season to date.

As the summer started, Simone won the opening State League 5000m walk in **22:57** and looked set for a bumper season. But once more, injury struck – her hamstring again. It was January before she was able to fully stretch out and she returned to racing at that time with **22:37** for 5000m, her best time for some years. She continued to struggle with her hamstring, fine one week and flaring up again the next. Her 4th place in the Australian 20 km title in **1:38:21** was a great result after such a disrupted preparation and was good enough to gain selection in the team to contest the 2004 Racewalking World Cup.

This was the big one for Simone – her chance to achieve an Olympic qualifier and finally put the demons behind her. And it so nearly happened. In an inspired walk, she shadowed fellow Australians Natalie Saville and Cheryl Webb, passing the 10 km mark in a PB of **45:27**. Maintaining the pace, she passed 15 km in **1:08:32**, a huge PB. Then tragedy struck as she was disqualified at the 18 km mark. Natalie and Cheryl went on to break 1:32:00 and achieve Olympic selection. Simone was left to gather her shattered dreams and return home.

It was surprising to see her subsequently win the Canberra Carnival 10 Mile event in **1:20:32** in mid June, her second win in a row. But she understandably lacked motivation and followed this race with a complete break from training. Simone had finally walked the sort of time of which she knew she was capable but it had been snatched from her at the last minute.



Simone and Kellie Wapshott walk to 1st and 2nd in the 2005 Australian 10 km roadwalking championship

August 2004 saw her back in at the Tan for Sunday morning training as she slowly began to work her way back to peak fitness.

A promising 4th place in the Canberra A Series 20 km roadwalk (**1:37:14**) in February 2005 omened well. Then in March in Sydney, she took 3rd in the National 20 km race with an improving **1:35:44**. In late April she travelled to China where she recorded **1:35:26** in the IAAF Challenge Series walk. A week later in Melbourne in a VRWC club walk, she improved further to **1:34:48**, only 4 seconds outside her PB.

By this stage her preparations were continually hampered by niggling injuries. As the 2005 winter season progressed, her racing schedule diminished and she was forced to forgoe many key races. She won the Victorian 15 km title (**1:11:52**), the Victorian 10 km title (**46:21**) and the Victorian 20 km title (**1:37:46**) and did win the Australian 10 km roadwalk title in Adelaide in **47:27** but never seemed to be able to put more than a few weeks of solid work together in any one block.

She was sidelined for most of the summer but tried for one last race in the Australian 20 km roadwalk in Sydney in February 2006. She went out hard but was lacking both race and training fitness and failed to finish.

This was the final roll of the dice for Simone and she announced her retirement soon afterwards. She was proud of her achievements and felt it was time to pass the baton onto the next generation.

Her PBs show how she developed into one of our best ever walkers. Only recurrent injuries prevented her from achieving even greater heights as an athlete.

3 km	13.06	
5 km	22.22	
10 km	45.39	1997
20 km	1:34.44	2000

As an adjunct to this chapter, I am pleased to report that Simone, currently living in America, is now putting back into the sport via her role as a masseur. She was part of the official team management structure in the 2008 World Racewalking Cup and has also helped out as masseur on a number of elite training camps including the 2009 altitude camp in Flagstaff in Arizona