

Steve Beecroft

1990	World Junior Champs	Plovdic	10,000m	8 th	42:36
1991	World Student Games	Sheffield	20 km	6 th	1:26:33
1993	Racewalking World Cup	Monterey	20 km	34 th	1:30.36

Steve Beecroft, born in March 1971, was a product of the Victorian Little Athletics scene. Competing at the Mentone venue, his best performance as a young walker was a silver in the Victorian Under 15 Championship behind Peter Lowden.

It was not until December 1987, after a mid-field placing in the Australian All Schools walk in Brisbane, that his career really started to blossom. With training advice from Dave Smith, he returned home and went to work. Within 3 months, he had gone from a PB of 13:41 for the 3000m walk to win the Australian Under 18 track title in March 1988 in **12:31**.

Later that year in December, he also won the 1988 Australian All Schools Under 19 3,000m title in **12:30**. This was followed by a win in the Pan Pacific Schools Competition in Sydney in a new Australian record of **12:09**.



Steve leads from the start in the AFRWC Junior 10 km title in Canberra in June 1990. His winning time was 42:30. Front line shows Mark Fletcher (VIC), Andrew Brown (NSW), Rohan Best (TAS), Shane Pearson (QLD), Steve (VIC) and Anthony Miles (QLD).

In 1989, he retained his Australian Under 18 track title in **12:27** and came 2nd in the Australian Junior title in **21:23**. He was then selected to represent Australia in a series of 2 Australia/China/Japan Junior competitions in Japan. In the two 5000m walks on offer, he gained 2 silver medals, recording times of **22:30.4** and **21:51.5**.

But it was in 1990 that he really hit his straps, coming 4th in the Victorian Open 5000m title in a new Australian Junior record of **20:49**. He then won the Australian Junior track title in **21:22** and won the World Junior 10,000m walk trial in **47:30.2** to gain selection for the World Junior Championships. At the LBG Carnival, he won the Australian Junior 10 km in **42:30** to slash Nick A'Hern's record.

Travelling overseas, his final warmup before the World Juniors was the Scottish Track titles which he won in an All Comers record of **11:41**. He followed this up with a superb **42:36** for 8th place in Plovdic in Bulgaria.

In December 1990 in a VRWC 20 km championship at Albert Park, he came 6th in a time of **1:26:35** while still less than 20 years of age. Then in January 1991, he came 3rd in the Victorian 10,000m walk in a PB time of **42:25**.

With such an outstanding underage career, he was snapped up on an AIS scholarship in early 1991 and immediately extended his focus to the longer events and intensified his training.

He gained selection for the 1991 Racewalking World Cup but was dropped from the team only a month before team departure. The story makes for interesting reading.

Athletics Australia, in some doubt as to the team it had selected and with one final spot in the 20 km team still to be decided, required team members to do a final fitness trial. The designated race was the Victorian 30 km championship in Melbourne on Sunday 21st April. There were no firm guidelines from A.A. and it seemed that walkers could choose their own fitness test distance!



Steve and Andrew Jachno were training partners at the AIS in Canberra and remain mates.

The weather turned for the worse early in the race with very strong winds and rain. Steve did **43:02** for 10km, whilst Kevin Lowden (50 km team member) walked the same distance in 49:32. Paul Copeland decided to walk 20 km to try to help Michael Harvey qualify for the last 20km spot. Paul did 1:25:19 and Mike 1:27:08. Bill Dyer did the 30 km in 2:30:09 for his fitness test.

According to Peter Waddell's April 25 1991 newsletter, Dave Smith had done 41:35 for 10km in Brisbane in early April and this was being followed up by a 20 km race on April 28th.

The A.A. decision to drop Steve and to name Michael Harvey and Dave Smith in the 20 km team came in early May – some 4 weeks before the World Cup in San Jose. This was a shameful affair and one which left bitter memories for many people.

Steve had done what was required and, through no fault of his own, he was badly treated by A.A. and the selectors. There was no performance standard that he knew he needed to better and he should have been in that team.

Trying to kick on from this major setback, he was 3rd in the 1991 Canberra 20 mile event in **2:34:15** and came 6th in the World Student Games 20 km walk in **1:26:33**. These times alone indicate that he should have been in the World Cup team.

As the 1991/1992 summer season started, he was in great track form. In November 1991, he had a fine 3000m win (**11:23**) over Paul Copeland and Dion Russell and looked a real threat for Olympic Games selection. He followed this in January 1992 with 2nd (first Australian) in the Victorian 10,000m track walk in **40:46**. But after only 1 year in Canberra, he chose to return to Victoria in a surprise move.

In 1993, he was once again in good form, winning the Victorian 10,000m title in **41:55**. He finally gained selection for the Racewalking World Cup and subsequently in Monterey he came 34th out of 107 starters in **1:30:36**. The slow time was a reflection of the dreadfully hot Mexican conditions. The place more truly reflected the quality of the performance.

But from then on, his career suffered a series of blows. Injuries from horses cost him further World Cup and Commonwealth Games selections and he eventually had to think about his life after walking. As he said recently, he did not quit – rather, he just faded away. Now married and following a successful business career, he can look back on his time as a racewalker with great satisfaction. His Australian titles, records and top international performances ensure his place as one of our most successful young walkers ever.