

LEN DUQUEMIN AND JOHN MOULLIN – GUERNSEY WALKERS

Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands and a dependency of the British Crown is perhaps best known for its breed of cattle, the Guernsey. But this small island in the English Channel also produced more than its fair share of quality racewalkers during the 1970s.

It sent 3 walkers to the 1970 Commonwealth Games and then repeated the dose when 3 Guernseymen walked in the 1974 Commonwealth Games. Of these walkers, two in particular are the subject of this article.

Len Duquemin, born 28/11/1930 was a late starter in the sport and only came into racewalking by chance in the sixties when he walked in a couple of the Church to Church annual walks in Guernsey and did well enough that people told him he should consider taking up the sport.

By 1968, he was amongst the best British walkers and was short listed for selection in the British team for the Mexico Olympics. But sadly, his plans were ruined by a doctor's needle. His pre-Mexico jabs caused an allergic reaction and, 20 miles into the 50 km selection race, he collapsed.



Len (right) and Colin Young (left) lead Mal Tolley and Phil Thorne at the Highgate Track in London in 1968

Like so many walkers before and since, he bounced back with Commonwealth Games selection in 1970 and rates his walk in Edinburgh as his best ever race. He was aged 39 at the time and his 6th place in **2:42:48** was a PB. In fact, his time for the last 5 miles in that event was second only to winner Noel Freeman. After a conservative start, he stormed home, passing English walker Shaun Lightman and the Canadians.

He was 43 by the time the 1974 Commonwealth Games were held, making him the oldest man in the field. But he had maintained his form well, coming into the event with a **2:44:31** in the Belgrave Harriers 20 mile championship. He remains disappointed with his subsequent performance in New Zealand when he was suffering the after effects of the flu (no sooner had he arrived there than he was confined to bed for a week) and could only struggle to 9th place in **2:53:37**.

Len migrated to Australia in 2004 and has since joined VRWC as a social member. He currently lives in Hastings and I am sure he finds the distances in Australia rather daunting given that the island of Guernsey is only 9 miles by 5 miles at its furthest point. Len is seen at all our major events with his video camera and is an astute follower of the sport.

The following profile was written by Len in the early nineties for English consumption.

In 1962, I did my first Church to Church walk and said: "Never again"| However, in 1963 I was back and have never looked back since.

My dear late wife (Pearl) encouraged me so much over the years. Even though I was spending hours on the road, my wife never complained.

In 1967, we moved to the U.K., taking up residence in Winkfield, close to Windsor Castle, and we later moved to my present address in Bracknell. It was my wife's suggestion that we initially move to the U.K. For two or three years to further my sport as on the mainland I would be up against the top U.K. Walkers.

I still have my Guernsey accent, having always spoken in Guerneaisis from a boy. When people ask me where I come from, I am proud to say "I am a Guernseyman".

The race which has given me the greatest pleasure was when in 1970 in Edinburgh, I finished 6th in the Commonwealth Games 20 mile walk in a p.b. Time of 2Hrs 42Mins and I recall my wife running onto the track to give me big hug. My worst race was in 1968 in the Olympic 50km Walk trials when at 20 miles and one of the leading "three", I suffered from the after effects of a TAB jab which set off an allergic reaction and I collapsed. I recall waking up the next morning and saying to my wife "How did we get home?" and she replied: "You drove us home"! I had no recollection at all.

Some notable performances are

1962 – My first Church to Church walk.

1963 – My second attempt – 5 minutes faster than in 1962.

1964 – Joined G.I.A.C. And won the Church to Church walk at my third attempt at the age of 33.

1965 – I finished 2nd in the Church to Church but won the Jersey church to Church in a record time of 4Hrs 37Mins 26Secs.

1966 – Won both the Guernsey and Jersey Church to Church walks, setting record times for both (2Hrs 47Mins 26Secs and 4Hrs 26Min 50Secs respectively).

1967 – Individual winner of the Garnet Cup, held at Battersea Park and Sarnia W.C. Winning team.

1968 – Short Listed for Olympics

1970 – Commonwealth Games (see above)

1971 – Won the European Postmans 10km Walk in Stuttgart.

1972 – Finished 5th in the London to Brighton 53 Miles Walk in 8Hrs 44Mins.

1974 – Finished 8th in the New Zealand Commonwealth Games walk

Following a short break, I took up jogging and between the period 1983 – 1988 I completed 29 half marathons.



Len on his way to a win in the 1971 European Postman's 10,000m Championship in Stuttgart in Germany

Len's team mate in the 1970 and 1974 Games was fellow Guernseyman **John Moullin**. They were great friends and started their walking careers in Guernsey before making a move to the UK with their wives to further their walk progress, walking for Belgrave Harriers in London. Their prowess as walkers was recognized when, in the 1974 Games, Len carried the Guernsey flag in the Opening Ceremony and John carried it in the Closing Ceremony.

John, born 8/9/1941 was the second string Guernsey walker behind Len in both Commonwealth Games and finished 10th on both occasions. His real prowess lay in the ultra long distances.

Winning the 100 mile walk held in July 1971 in Ewhurst in Surrey, John was only 90 seconds outside the world record of **16:54:15**, held by Irish walker Frank O'Reilly. The Race Walking Association recognized the performance by the award of the Edgar Horton Trophy which it awards annually for the best individual performance during the R.W.A. year. His 100 km split was **10:21:06**, a superb time and one that is well under our current Australian record of just under 11 hours.



John Moullin nearly breaks the 100 mile world record in 1971

This 100 mile effort came "out of the blue" and, with no one expecting such a fast time, the record was not even thought about. To quote fellow Guernseyman Rob Elliott (who walked in the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane) – "From what I have heard over the years if he had known how close to the World Best he was with a lap to go he would have made the extra effort required!"

Fred Baker added his own reflections

I would like to tell you a little about John Moullin's remarkable 16 hours 55 minutes performance at Ewhurst, Surrey, in 1971. I took part in that race which was over a severe 10 miles loop. On my way to a fairly modest 22 hours 31 minutes, John lapped me twice but that's got nothing to do with my story.

You will remember John Keown (Belgrave Harriers) who did so much as an official on behalf of British Race Walking. He told me that Belgrave realised that John was in the kind of form before the race that made him a serious threat to the British 100 km record. But Belgrave wanted no pressure on John over a

record attempt and therefore kept his intentions very much to themselves. Come the day and John, as you know, flew around the course, setting a new record (10:21:06). he planned to retire at that point but the Belgravians in attendance, seeing how fresh he still looked, persuaded John to carry on to the finish.

He was a modest man with great personal charm and the British walking world was shocked when he died as a consequence of a rare form of lung cancer, caused by industrial dust from his work in the building industry.

Even now, nearly 35 years after this walk, his time still ranks him 4th in the All Time World Rankings List, an amazing testament to his performance.

100 MILES ALL TIME RANKINGS – MEN

| | | | | |
|----------|----------------|-----|--------------------|-------------|
| 16:31:38 | Jan DE JONGE | NED | Bergen | 10-11/04/82 |
| 16:50:28 | Richard BROWN | GBR | Sint Oedenrode | 22-23/05/93 |
| 16:54:15 | Frank O'REILLY | IRL | Leicester-Skegness | 01-02/07/60 |
| 16:55:44 | John MOULLIN | GBR | Ewhurst | 25-26/07/71 |

Sadly John passed away in 1987 at only 46 years of age.



John Moullin (173) and Len Duquemin (171) in the Edinburgh event in 1970

For the record, here are the first 10 placings from the two Games 20 Mile walks in which Len and John competed.

1970 Commonwealth Games, in Edinburgh, Scotland

| | | | |
|----|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| 1. | Noel Freeman | Australia | 2:33:33 |
| 2. | Robert Gardiner | Australia | 2:35:55 |
| 3. | Bill Sutherland | Scotland | 2:37:24 |
| 4. | Bob Dobson | England | 2:39:55 |
| 5. | Ron Wallwork | England | 2:40:10 |

| | | | |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 6. | Len Duquemin | Guernsey | 2:42:48 |
| 7. | Shaun Lightman | England | 2:44:50 |
| 8. | Felix Cappella | Canada | 2:45:16 |
| 9. | Alex Oakley | Canada | 2:48:07 |
| 10. | John Moullin | Guernsey | 2:48:07 |

1974 Commonwealth Games, in Auckland, New Zealand

| | | | |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. | John Warhurst | England | 2:35:23.0 |
| 2. | Roy Thorpe | England | 2:39:02.2 |
| 3. | Peter Fullager | Australia | 2:42:08.2 |
| 4. | Graham Young | Isle of Man | 2:42:55.2 |
| 5. | Ian Hodgkinson | Australia | 2:44:55.4 |
| 6. | Les Stevenson | New Zealand | 2:46:56.2 |
| 7. | Ross Haywood | Australia | 2:50:56.0 |
| 8. | John "Allan" Callow | Isle of Man | 2:53:12.2 |
| 9. | Len Duquemin | Guernsey | 2:53:37.4 |
| 10. | John Moullin | Guernsey | 2:57:27.2 |