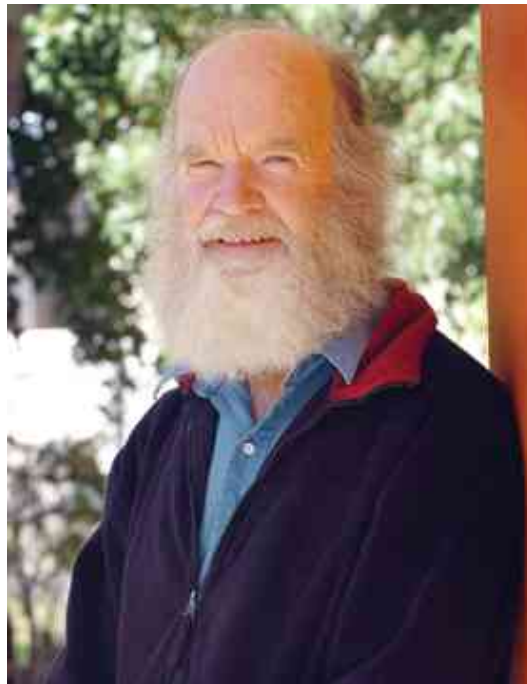


## WHERE ARE THEY NOW - GAVAN BREEN



Older members will remember VRWC and MUAC walker Gavan Breen who raced on the Victorian front in the 1960's and 1970's as part of the strong Melbourne University team. I trained with Gavan when he was a member of the Linguistics Dept at Monash University in the early 1970's and I raced against him on many occasions during the latter part of his walking career. He is remembered especially for his Dunlop Volley sandshoes with the toes cut out and for his never-say-die attitude to racing.

His best years were in the early 1960's when he was a regular place getter in Victorian Championships over all distances, second only to the likes of internationals Noel Freeman, Bob Gardiner, Ted Allsopp and Peter McCullagh. With MUAC team mate McCullagh, he spearheaded Victoria's stongest club team which regularly won the coveted VAA Teams events. During a 5 year period from 1960 to 1964, he won 5 Victorian silver and 9 Victorian bronze medals in individual championships. The list reads as follows

1960	10 Miles	Freeman, Noel	1.16.07.8	Allsopp, Ted	1.17.28	Breen, Gavan	1.20.27
1960	20 Km	Freeman, Noel	1.31.05	Allsopp, Ted	1.36.16	Breen, Gavan	1.41.00
1961	10 Km	Gardiner, Bob	47.18.0	Allsopp, Ted	47.34	Breen, Gavan	48.45
1961	10 Mille	Gardiner, Bob	1.17.43.4	Breen, Gavan	1.18.21	Allsopp, Ted	1.19.16
1962	10 Km	Gardiner, Bob	47.24.0	McCullagh, Peter	48.55	Breen, Gavan	49.26
1962	20 km	McCullagh, Peter	1.38.28	Allsopp, Ted	1.38.44	Breen, Gavan	1.43.45
1963	20 km	McCullagh, Peter	1.36.28	Breen, Gavan	1.39.45	Allsopp, Ted	1.41.33
1963	10 Km	McCullagh, Peter	48.52.0	Breen, Gavan	49.00	Marr, Norman	49.26
1963	10 Miles	Freeman, Noel	1.18.58.0	McCullagh, Peter	1.19.37	Breen, Gavan	1.22.31
1963	50 km	Gleeson, James	4.52.56.2	Breen, Gavan	5.02.23	Newmark, Varel	5.13.31
1964	10 Miles	Gardiner, Bob	1.18.47.4	Allsopp, Ted	1.19.04	Breen, Gavan	1.20.55
1964	10 km	Freeman, Noel	43.44.4	Gardiner, Bob	47.42	Breen, Gavan	48.25.6
1964	2 Miles	Freeman, Noel	14.00.4	Gardiner, Bob	14.36.2	Breen, Gavan	14.54.6
1964	20 km	Freeman, Noel	1.32.06	Breen, Gavan	1.39.30	Hancock, Alan	1.45.10

Eventually his life outside walking took more and more of his time and he would disappear for months on end, travelling to the remotest outback areas with his tape recorder and note books as he sought to record the various indigenous dialects and languages before they died out. I remember him telling me that on occasions, he would record the last known speaker of a particular language.

Eventually he moved to the Northern Territory to continue with his linguistics work and has been based in Alice Springs for many years now. I came across the following article and photo (see above) which appeared in the 1<sup>st</sup>

October 2007 edition of the Northern Territory News – see  
[http://www.ntnews.com.au/article/2007/10/01/2211\\_ntpride.html](http://www.ntnews.com.au/article/2007/10/01/2211_ntpride.html)

*Gavan Breen's love of languages has helped preserve important parts of Australia's history. Gavan, from Alice Springs, has dedicated most of his life to researching indigenous languages. His research has led him to preserve indigenous stories, concepts and vocabularies that were at risk of extinction. Gavan, who works as a linguist for the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs, has worked particularly hard at preserving the Arrernte language. His efforts have helped indigenous people take pride in their language. He also drives town camp residents to church.*

Gavan's work in linguistics can be divided essentially into three main streams: salvage studies of a substantial number of now-extinct Australian languages, based on fieldwork with the last speakers; development of orthographies and literacy courses, and teaching vernacular literacy and other skills relevant to work in bilingual education programs, mainly in Central Australian languages; studies of Central Australian languages, including phonology, kinship and ethno-classification, but mainly directed towards production of dictionaries.

Gavan may be long gone from his Victorian haunts but we remember him fondly and are proud to see that he continues to fulfil such an important role in Australia's ongoing reconciliation with our indigenous people.

Three years after this initial article, I was able to chat with Gavan via email and he forwarded me the following photo of himself finishing the 2010 Alice Springs King of the Mountain walk.



Tim Erickson  
27 September 2010