

## RACEWALKING AUSTRALIA – A BRIEF HISTORY

Although **The Australian Federation of Amateur Walking Clubs** was formed in 1958, it was by no means the first Walking Federation in Australia.

Late in 1921, Laurie Drake (NSW Walking Club) and Frank O'Rourke (VRWC) decided to instigate an Interstate race between the Victorian and New South Wales Clubs.

The walking clubs proposed that this be an official Australian Championship be held on October 1922. The subsequent A.A.U. postal vote was lost as many V.A.A.A. officers were opposed to such an event.

The clubs decided to go ahead anyway and a 7 Mile walking event was scheduled for July 1923 in Melbourne. Some sort of official status was needed so **The Amateur Walking Union of Australia** was formed and the event was billed as the First 7 Miles Amateur Road Walking Championship of the Amateur Walking Union of Australia. The walking clubs were responsible for selection of the walkers who would compete and walkers from Victoria, NSW and South Australia competed.

The race was held on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1923 at the Malvern Cricket Ground. The track was water logged after continuous rain, and times were slow. New South Wales and Victoria fielded sent full teams, South Australia only sent George Wilson, who had won the Victorian 25 mile championship and was later to live in Melbourne. Olympian Ernie Austen from NSW won in 55:44 from the Victorian Victor Dowling in 57:25. Victorian Olympic representative Bill Murray was third in 55:27. Victoria won the team's race.

The 1924 championship, also over 7 miles, was held in Sydney and won by George Parker with a record-breaking time of 53:07. The third championship was held on Adelaide oval in 1925 before a football match. In a very good result for Victoria, Bert Gardiner won in 57:07, with Joe Mulcahy (Victoria) second and William Pitt (NSW) third. Robert Osborne also from Victoria won the Under 21 7 mile championship.

A 1926 NSW racing fixture gives the following information about the Amateur Walking Union of Australia which at that time represented the 4 walking clubs in NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria.

### **The Amateur Walking Union of Australia**

Headquarters:

N.S.W. Sports Club, 10 Hunter St., Sydney, N.S.W., Australia

### **OFFICE BEARERS**

Patron:

His Excellency the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Hon. State Secretaries:

H. C. Campbell (N.S.W.), T. Byrnes (Qld.), T. H. Terrell (S.A.), J. F. O'Rourke (Vic.).

President:

R. Coombes, Esq.

Hon. Gen Secretary:

L. J. Drake, Esq.

The Walking Union was lucky to have powerful friends, particularly in the person of its President Richard Coombes.

Coombes, who had been a successful walker in England, had arrived in Sydney in 1886. He was part of the group which set up the Amateur Athletics Association of New South Wales in 1887 and he went on to become the father of athletics in Australia. Although he mixed with the likes of Pierre de Coubertin and ensured that Australasia was represented at the various Olympic and Empire meetings of the time, he still found time for his beloved walking. In February 1911, when the NSW Walking Club was started, he was the inaugural President. At the same time, he was President of the Amateur Athletic Union of Australia, President of the NSW Association and was Australasia's representative to the IOC.

It was not until 1948 that this Walking Union championship (then a 10,000m walk) was finally recognized as an official A.A.U. of Australia championship. Up until that time, it had been The Amateur Walking Union of Australia which had coordinated the yearly events and awarded the medals to the place getters.

Like its modern day counterpart, it held an annual conference in conjunction with the Annual Roadwalking championship. Through these conferences, the various State based clubs were brought into line and the State track and road championship distances were made consistent.

In 1954 a second Australian roadwalk championship distance was added, over 50 km, and from then on the two distance championships alternated in a 2 year cycle.

The **Australian Federation of Amateur Walking Clubs** was formed in 1958 in the aftermath of the 1956 Olympics. It was not a new concept but simply the revival of the previous entity that had served the Australian walking community well over many years. The sport was now firmly established in the various States and the need for a National body had become apparent.

The first executive was

President	Alf Robinson (VIC)
Secretary/Treasurer	Norm Goble (VIC)
Vice Presidents	Frank O'Rourke (NSW) Frank McGuire (VIC) D. Melzer (QLD) Phil MacCavanagh (SA)
Delegates	Up to 2 delegates from each of the walking clubs.

Phil Cavanagh worked for the Advertiser in Adelaide and the walkers received good coverage in those days.

The 4 walking clubs that initially formed the Federation were VAWC, NSWAWC, SAAWC and QLDAWC.

Two competitions were formulated. The Glover Shield would be held over the 10,000m Track distance and the Alexander Cup would be held over the 50 km road distance. Both would be teams events.

A constitution was drawn up and ratified and a yearly AGM scheduled to be held at one of the major championships each year.

The Federation was immediately active. In the first 2 years, the following took place

- A Walking Committee was formed to advise A.A.U. of Australia on walking matters. The members were Alf Robinson (VIC), Norm Goble (VIC), Vic Sharp (SA), C.W. Kirby (NSW) and D. Melzer (QLD).
- A recommendation was made to A.A.U. of A. to form the positions of Chief Walking Coach of Australia and Honorary Chief Walking Coach in each State.
- The setting up of local rules governing walking events in Australia.
- The setting up of a Walk Coach qualification scheme.
- The publishing of a "Rules of Racewalking" booklet, put together by Frank McGuire.

Many of these initiatives had far reaching consequences and many were well ahead of their time. A.A.U. of Australia took up the idea of the Walking Commission and it became an official A.A.U. body. But they did not take up the other ideas put forward. This did not deter the Federation which was run by a group of determined and farsighted people. As a result, as late as 1967, the two organisations were still at odds over these and other matters.,

A Federation Panel of Walking Judges was formed and its members were nominated by the member clubs and appraised yearly. The Federation ratified any new judges at its AGM.

It was not until the Australian Track and Fields Coaches Association was formed in the 1970s that National Event Coaches were formed – but it had been proposed by the Federation in 1959.

In 1964, WA joined the Federation and the membership now covered 5 of the Australian States. By that time, the idea of a Federation Carnival had come to reality and teams contested for the traditional Glover, Alexander and Robinson Shields and for the new Lorna Carrington Cup (Open Women 2 Mile), and Jubilee Shield (Under 17 Boys 2 Miles).

1967 saw a number of significant items

- ACTAWC (formed in October 1966 with Robin Whyte, Peter Waddell Nigel Crew and Tony Andrews as inaugural members) successfully applied for Federation membership.
- The Lake Burley Griffin 20 Mile Open Walk was held as the first promotion of the newly formed Canberra based club. It was won by Frank Clark of NSW, Harry Summers of VRWC was 2<sup>nd</sup> and Bob Gardiner of VRWC was 3<sup>rd</sup>. From these humble beginnings the Canberra Federation Carnival has grown.
- Frank McGuire, although disqualified by A.A.U. of Australia as a professional coach, was still supported by the Federation who sought to keep him as their National Coach and Judging Advisor.
- The Glover Shield was increased from 10 km to 20 km.
- Two different carnivals were set up. The first carnival, held in even years, would see the Robinson and Glover Shields and the Lorna Carrington Cup. The second carnival, held in odd years, would see the Alexander Cup, the Jubilee Shield and the Lorna Carrington Cup. Each carnival would be held in the May school Holidays.
- Norm Goble resigned after 7 years as Secretary/Treasurer. Reg Tarte of NSW took over.

At this time the 6 clubs of the Federation decided that a national racewalking magazine was warranted and 'The Australian Race Walker' was born. The first edition was distributed in November 1967 with John McDougall of NSW as editor. The idea was simple. Each State would produce its own walking newsletter and forward to John. He in turn would put on a front cover and editorial matter and distribute back to the member clubs. The front cover of each issue featured a photo and was printed by M.G.A. Publications, the producers of the 'Australian Athletics' monthly magazine.

Also in 1967, the two organisations (the 'Union' and the 'Federation') finally came back into sync as the A.A.U. of A. Walking Commission finally recommended that the A.A.U. of A. regularise competition, the appointment of walk judges, the training of walk judges and the standardisation of judging procedures and reports. Edition 2 of 'The Australian Race Walker' included the 'new' judging procedures adopted by A.A.U. of A. for future State and Australian Championships as well as for Olympic and Empire trials. These procedures were those that had been initiated and improved by the Federation over the preceding years.

The Federation for its part continued to refine, produce and distribute its judging handbook for a further 10 years and it remained the unofficial Australian handbook for all things walking.

Unfortunately, after some 18 months and 13 issues, 'The Australian Race Walker' folded. John McDougall had to resign as editor due to other commitments and there were no volunteers for what was a demanding job. The State based clubs went back to their own individual newsletters as a wonderful concept ended. It was not until Peter Waddell's regular newsletters started hitting the mailbox many years later that National news began once again to circulate in an organised way.

In 1972, the Knight Trophy was added to the Federation Carnival schedule for Under 14 girls and was contested over 3 km. In 1974, the Goble Trophy was added for Under 14 boys, also over 3km.

By 1973/74, Peter Waddell of ACFWRC was President and John McDougall of NSWRC was Secretary/Treasurer. Many people felt that with this change of executive, the Victorian stranglehold had been broken and the Federation now had a more Australian flavour.

1974 also saw Gosford Walking Club join the Federation. This meant that there were now 2 NSW based clubs, an indication of the strength of the sport in that State.

At this time the Australian and New Zealand Walking Federations finalised the concept of a trans-Tasman walking carnival, to be held in odd years. The first scheduling was set for October 1975 and the lobbying began with A.A.U. of A. to get the event sanctioned as an official Australian / New Zealand match. Unfortunately, even though the concept was supported by the A.A.U. Walking Committee headed by Alf Robinson, the difficulties of finding funding and sorting out selection criteria at such short notice were not resolved and the event went ahead as a Federation event with competitors travelling to New Zealand as self funded athletes.

The match was won by Australia by 1 point with results as follows

1.	Peter Fullager	AUS	101.41
2.	A. Callow	NZ	104.02
3.	Terry Jones	AUS	105.29
4.	T. Trowell	NZ	106.36
5.	Graham Seater	NZ	107.54
6.	Kevin Taylor	NZ	109.44
7.	J Rayner	AUS	112.02
8.	Brian Carmen	AUS	112.45

By the time the next match was held in August 1977 in Centennial Park in Sydney, A.A.U. of A. had agreed to give the event official status and the competitors wore the official Australian colours under A.A.U. auspices. Once again, Australia won, this time convincingly

1.	Willi Sawall	AUS	95.19
2.	Tim Erickson	AUS	96.05
3.	Peter Fullager	AUS	96.23
4.	Kevin Taylor	NZ	101/46
5.	Clarrie Jack	AUS	103.39
6.	R Pilkington	NZ	105.06
7.	Maurie Hinton	NZ	112.35

Unfortunately the 1979 event was to be held in New Zealand and this would have made it a more expensive option for A.A.U to send a team. Added to that, Australia was sending a team for the first time to the Lugano Cup. A.A.U. felt that this event did not deserve its continued support so once again the event became a Federation event. It went ahead in Auckland in March 1979 and was expanded to include Open 20 km, Open 50 km and Junior 10 km for men. Australia won again with a number of fine performances.

#### 20 Km for Men

1.	Bill Dyer	AUS	1.34.05
2.	Graham Seater	NZ	1.35.48
3.	Joe Anderson	AUS	1.36.28
4.	K Henwood	NZ	1.37.40
5.	Kevin Taylor	AUS	1.41.43
6.	John Sheard	AUS	1.43.39

#### 50 Km for Men

1.	Clarrie Jack	AUS	4.37.15
2.	Ian Jack	AUS	4.38.24
3.	Maurie Hinton	NZ	4.52.56
4.	J Raynor	NZ	4.59.24
5.	M Wall	Indep	5.05.40
6.	Norm Read	NZ	5.12.58

#### 10 km for Junior Men

1.	Ian Jacques	AUS	49.26
2.	Mark Wall	AUS	50.51
3.	P Herbert	NZ	52.39
4.	G. Anderson	NZ	54.20

With the continuing Australian participation in the Lugano Cup, this event was discontinued after 1981. It had been right at the time but times and needs change quickly.

Over the last 20 years, many changes have taken place.

- New walking clubs have joined the Federation and some walking clubs have now ceased to exist.
- The Canberra Carnival has grown into the Premier Walking Carnival in Australia.
- The Masters movement, with its own walking events, has gained a strong following.
- Other age groups have been added to the Federation Carnivals in response to the changing demographic of walking.
- The AIS has developed its own walking voice with its own walks coach and own special needs.
- The National Walks Coach has become a strong voice in all things walking (although there are currently no National Coaches).
- The A.A.U. of A. Walking Committee became the A.A. Walking Commission and its members were no longer drawn from the member walking clubs as initially designed. Membership was now at the behest of the convenor and, although it did many good things, it was often at odds with the rank and file members of the Federation in the decisions it made. This was shelved in favour of an A.A. Out of Stadium Committee which failed dismally. A dedicated A.A. Walking Committee was formed in 2004 but A.A. does not heed its advice and it remains a voice in the wilderness.

- The Federation first removed the word Amateur from its name and became the **Australian Federation of Race Walking Clubs (AFORWC)** and then changed its trading name to **Racewalking Australia** in 2004.

Throughout all this, the Federation retains its place as the premier voice of walking in Australia. It continues to meet annually each year but with many of its original issues now resolved, it focuses on the Federation carnivals and the promotion of walking in Australia as its core business. The success of this strategy is seen in the large attendance at the Federation events and in the way the member walking clubs form a close knit and supportive infrastructure which nurtures walkers of all ages.

What of the future?

In 1967, Vic Sharp, the chairman of the A.A.U. of Australia Walking Committee, wrote

*I have been associated with the Federation since its inception. It has never attempted to dictate policy to the Union or to any State Association but like any other organisation, it has boldly pronounced its view in order to achieve its objective, which is the improvement of race walking in Australia. It cannot be denied that the Federation and the individual State walking clubs that are members of it, have been the one sole body responsible for the rise in Australian Walking standards since 1950.*

It remains as true today as when it was written. The Federation is as necessary as ever. Since 1921, it has existed in one form or another as the only real National voice that represents the interests of all walking clubs throughout Australia. History has shown that A.A. and the AIS focus on the elite walkers. Who is left to focus on the ongoing development of the sport at a grass roots level if not the clubs themselves working through Racewalking Australia.

Tim Erickson  
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