

## VALE C22 GEORGE AUDLEY: 1935-2020

### **C22. George Audley (21/08/35)**

28-29 May 1988

23:28:48

McGillivray Oval, Perry Lakes, WA



George Audley, born 1935 in Birmingham, England, migrated to Australia as a young man and settled in Perth.

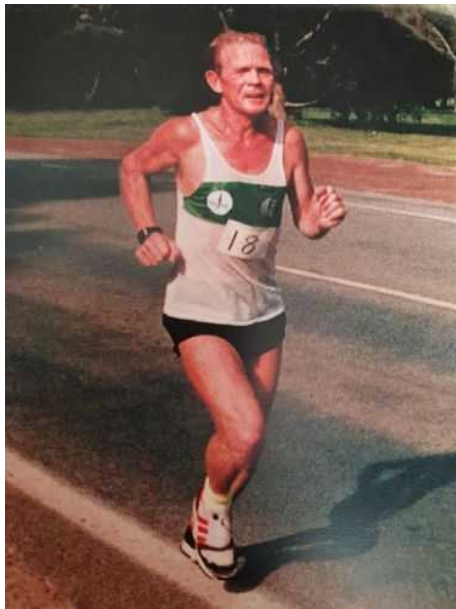
He took up fun running in 1981 at the age of 45. He was keen to make up for his late start in sport and soon added racewalking as a further way of challenging himself. He joined the Western Australian Race Walking Club, attracted by the tough 50km event. He actually competed in Australian 50km championships in 1984 and 1986. In the 1984 race in Adelaide, he finished 10<sup>th</sup> with 5:17:10 but in 1986, again in Adelaide, he was disqualified.

He had also discovered by this stage the joys and challenges of ultra distance running and was clocking up some good performances on the local Western Australian front. He was keen to participate in the 1987 Westfield Sydney to Melbourne Ultra Marathon but this would require a 24 Hour Run performance to confirm his credentials. He duly lined up for the Hi-Tech 24 Hour Ultra at McGillivray Oval at Perry Lakes in Perth in October 1986 – the result was a win with a superb distance of 219.361km (with a 100 mile split of 16 hrs 45 mins).

As expected, he was one of 26 of 218 applications selected to contest the 1987 Westfield which was held in late March 1987 over a new course, the overall distance of 1060km making it the longest and most demanding ultra ever staged in Australia. His performance was impressive, finishing 6<sup>th</sup> in 8 days, 1 hour and 34 minutes, at an average of just over 130km per day.

George was keen to contest the 1988 Westfield so needed another qualifying time on the board. He chose a 48 Hour race in Perth in October 1987, winning with 335km. With that box ticked, he turned his attention to Victoria, travelling to the country town of Colac to contest the iconic 6 Day race held there each November. Once again he produced the goods, coming 6<sup>th</sup> in a very high quality event with 805.2km.

The 1988 Westfield, held in March of that year, was slightly shorter than in 1987 (only 1015km), but the field was a lot bigger – a total of 42 runners had been accepted. The attrition rate was high, with only 23 runners reaching the finish, George amongst them. His 13<sup>th</sup> place finish in 7 days 21 hours and 16 minutes averaged out at 130km per day, almost identical to his pace in 1987.



*George the runner circa 1988*



*George lining up for the 1988 Westfield*

1988 also saw a challenge of a different sort for George. As far as he and fellow WARWC member Jim Turnbull knew, no one had both walked and run 100 miles within 24 hours. George had completed a 100 mile run in 1986 (16 hours and 45 minutes) and Jim had done a 100 mile walk in 1986 (23:38:53). George chose a 1km grass loop at McGillivray Oval at Perry Lakes in suburban Perth and set the date for his walk attempt as 28-29 May 1988.

Once Jim Turnbull heard about the attempt, he decided to line up also, but this time as a runner. History tells us that Jim finished his run in 21:54:36 while George finished his walk in 23:28:48. It was a personal success for both athletes. Jim had done little running in preparation for this event while George had limited walking in the legs. George confided to me some years back that he regards his 100 mile walk (done on the grass track) as one of the hardest events he has contested.

Both Jim and George forwarded details of their performances to the Australian Centurions President but unfortunately, no action was taken until 1994 when we retrospectively verified and confirmed their performances and awarded them badges number 21 and 22.

It was only years later that George and Jim learnt that they had been beaten to the run/walk double by Claude Martin who had completed his walk in 1975 and his run in 1987. So Jim became the second Australian and George the third to achieve this unique double.

1988 saw further long ultras from George. In September, he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Perth to Albany 406km road race (2 days 11 hours and 14 minutes) and completed his second Colac 6 Day 2 months later, coming 15<sup>th</sup> with 661.4km. There seemed to be no stopping him.

George subsequently continued on with a successful ultra-distance running career in which he regularly competed in the Colac 6 day race, the Albany to Perth (560 km), the Perth to Bunbury (202km) and the Geralton to Perth (434 km).

The Colac 6 Day race was one that George made his own. He competed in this event on 14 occasions, finishing 12 times, with a best distance of 816.8km, set when he came 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1996, aged 61 years. To put it in perspective, his cumulative Colac distance of over 7000m is over half the distance around Australia!

1987	6 <sup>th</sup>	805.2km
1988	15 <sup>th</sup>	661.4km
1991	6 <sup>th</sup>	641.2km
1995	6 <sup>th</sup>	713.6km
1996	2 <sup>nd</sup>	816.8km (PB)
1997	4 <sup>th</sup>	782.0km
1998	4 <sup>th</sup>	742.4km
1999	7 <sup>th</sup>	570.4km
2000	18 <sup>th</sup>	242.0km (hamstring injury put paid to a big distance)
2001	4 <sup>th</sup>	704.0km

2002	8 <sup>th</sup>	593.6km
2003	DNF	205.5km
2004	9 <sup>th</sup>	526.5km
2015	DNF	150.8km



*George competing in the 2004 Colac 6 Day race*

George's strategy at Colac was different to other competitors and it seemed to work. The course was a 400m track set up in the Memorial Square in the centre of Colac. Rather than oval in shape, it was rectangular, and George used this to his advantage. Once the race was underway and the first hard yards were covered, he would settle down into a regular pattern of 100m walk, 100m run, 100m walk and 100m run to complete each lap. This enabled him to stay on the track for long periods, whereas those who relied principally on running were apt to need greater rest.

He was also noted for his lap counting, using a set of beads that he held in one hand. Given that a Colac 6 Day run might mean up to 2000 laps, this was no mean feat. Timing feedback was sometimes lacking at Colac but, with his beads, he was able to keep tabs on how many laps he had completed each hour.

A reunion of sorts took place in March 2002 when Jim Turnbull and George walked together the 963.1km Bibbulman Track in West Australia. It stretches from Perth to Albany and is a bushwalking trail with magnificent views. The walk took some 6 weeks. It did not have the urgency of their centurion efforts, and I am sure it was a wonderful experience.

George was honoured with a leg in the 2000 Olympic Torch Relay, one of the many sporting figures who helped carry the flame in its vast traversal of Australia. He was also a torch bearer for the 2006 Commonwealth Games.



*George with the Olympic Torch in 2000 and the Commonwealth Games Torch in 2006*

Another notable performance was his finish in the 2001 Trans Australia "Race of Fire". This event required entrants to run from Perth to Canberra, a distance of 2656.6 miles (4274.5 km) in 63 daily stages, at an average of 42.2 miles

(67.8km) per day. Given that this crossed some of the toughest desert country in Australia, it was no race for the faint hearted. As an aside, the race was stopped for two days because of a tragic incident, when Australian ultra runner Bryan Smith died suddenly on day 28, so it lasted 65 days, with 63 days of actual running.

Of the 24 starters, 14 finished, with George coming in 11<sup>th</sup> with a total time of 513 hours 35 minutes and 35 secs. With that run, he became the oldest man to run across any Continent.

When Deborah DeWilliams did the Western Australian leg of her solo Walk Around Australia in 2004, George was on hand to guide her through that section of her route. This photo captures the moment.



*George with Deborah DeWilliams in the WA leg of her Walk Around Australia in 2004*

George disparagingly called himself *The Flying Fossil* and perhaps in later years it was an apt description. Standing only 5 feet 5 inches and weighing in at 65kg, he was small and steady, but never gave up. His favourite saying was *Ultra runners don't quit*, and that summed him up well. He can be truly regarded as one of the legendary hard men of ultra-distance running.

Even nowadays, in 2020, his name appears twice in the AURA Age Group Records

M60	500km	George Audley	WA	3D:17:00:00	Colac VIC	22/11/1997
M65	500km	George Audley	WA	5D:00:00:00	Colac VIC	17/11/2002

Another of George's long ultras that caught some media attention was his 406km run from Perth to Albany in August 2005 to celebrate his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is captured in the following newspaper article.





**GOOD TO BE BACK:** Christine Audley congratulates her 70-year-old husband, ultra-distance runner George Audley, on his arrival at the Albany Town Hall last Friday.

## By George, what a run!

**HE MAY not have felt as fresh as a daisy, George Audley showed no signs of having run 406km from Perth over six days when he strode down York Street to the Albany Town Hall on Friday.**

After a congratulatory hug from his wife Christine, Audley calmly talked about his latest marathon effort, his way of celebrating his 70th birthday.

This was the second time the veteran ultra-distance runner had run from Perth to Albany. The first, 17 years ago, he completed in 2½ days.

"I was a lot slower this time, but I could still do it," he said.

Audley, who started from Burswood at 10am on August 21, ran 12 hours a day from 6am most days, averaging 6.4kmh.

He said conditions were ideal, despite a head wind all the way, the only problem being spray from passing trucks.

Putting his feet into bags of baking powder every day for a week before the run prevented blisters, and he wore mostly the same pair of running shoes, with soles made from a car tyre

for longer wear. Audley listened to music to beat the boredom, and was spurred on by well-wishers along the route.

Audley's wife Christine played an essential part, driving the couple's campervan just ahead and stopping at intervals to refill the runner's water bottle and prepare food. Mrs Audley left him just north of Albany to welcome him at the Town Hall, where he arrived on time at 2pm.

Audley was a late starter in long-distance running, competing in his first Port to Point fun run at the age of 45.

"I haven't stopped since," he said.

He logs his training runs and calculates he has clocked up 137,000 kms in training and competition.

Audley's latest achievement was a warm-up to his 15th Colac Six-Day Race, the Victorian ultra-distance event held every November.

'Audley spent the weekend relaxing and cycling, and plans to get the running shoes back on in a week or two to start training for Colac.

George finally hung up his running shoes in 2006, well satisfied with a career that had spanned 25 years and which had seen some wonderful successes.

George returned to the UK shortly after suffering a stroke, and moved in with his sister Patricia so she could care for him.



*George (right) with his younger brother Vic in Birmingham last year (photo Julie Emma Dibble)*

George passed away on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at the age of 84, at home in Birmingham, with Patricia.

While George has now passed on, his memory will live on, both to his fellow Australian Centurions and to the wider Australian ultra distance community.

Tim Erickson  
Secretary, Australian Centurion Walkers  
Sunday 5 July 2020