

## AUSTRALIAN CENTURION DETAILS

- 39. Carol Baird (15/03/1949)**  
 22:16:43  
 18-19 September 1999  
 Coburg Athletics Track, Coburg, Vic

Carol Baird of Canberra fronted as a complete unknown to our Centurion qualifying event at Clifton Hill in September 1998 as an entrant in the 100 km walk. She duly won in an impressive time of 16:16:10.

12 months later, in September 1999, she was back to challenge herself over the 24 Hour distance in what was the highest ever quality Centurion qualifying event. The 50 mile splits told the story for the first half of the race with overseas competitors filling 5 of the first 6 places at that stage. Carol was back in 8<sup>th</sup> place at that time and trailing fellow Canberra walker Ann Staunton, But she came into her own in the second half, finishing strongly to claim 5<sup>th</sup> place and setting new Australian Residential standards for 100 km, 100 miles and 24 hours along the way. Thus in only her second walk, she became Australian Centurion number 39 - her time **22:16:43**.

For completeness, the finishing list in that historic race reads:

|                   |         |           |          |            |
|-------------------|---------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Sandra Brown      | England | 100 miles | 19:14:56 | <b>C36</b> |
| Herbert Neubacher | Germany | 100 miles | 21:03:07 | <b>C37</b> |
| Jill Green        | England | 100 miles | 21:15:35 | <b>C38</b> |
| Robin Whyte       | ACT     | 100 miles | 21:34:48 | <b>C29</b> |
| Gerald Manderson  | NZ      | 100 miles | 21:36:09 | <b>C31</b> |
| Carol Baird       | ACT     | 100 miles | 22:16:43 | <b>C39</b> |
| Gerrit de Jong    | Holland | 100 miles | 22:51:24 | <b>C40</b> |



**The 1999 finishers – Herbert, Gerrit and Gerald in back, Jill, Robin, Carol and Sandra in front**

Four months later, in January 2000, she finished second to Robin Whyte in the Gosford Coastal Classic 12 Hour event with a distance of **95.23 km**, breaking Ann Staunton's Australian 50 Miles (Carol's time was **10:00:24**) and 12 Hour records. She now had the full set of women's records. Robin had this to say about the race:

*Carol Baird is quite unbelievable, I gained 4 laps on her between about 2.30 and 3.30 hours but from then on I feared she would overtake me. She was so positive all the way, whereas I was wondering how I was going to keep going from as far out as 8.00 hours to go.*

Three months later, in April 2000, Carol gave another a flawless walking performance in the annual Coburg 24 Hour Carnival to break her Australian Residential 100 km (**13:04:33**), 100 Miles (**21:47:47**) and 24 Hours (**171.927 km**) records. For her, this latest race capped off a wonderful last 6 months.

In September 2000, in the annual Australian Centurions qualifying event at Coburg, she was the first of 3 centurion finishers and broker more records - 100 km (**12:57:47**), 100 Miles (**21:26:10**) and 24 Hours (**175.460**)

**kms**). She was getting better every time she stepped on the track.

The next year started once again with the Gosford Coastal Classic but this time she beat Robin Whyte by over 4km to win and once again break her 50 Miles (**9:42:06**) and 12 Hours (**97.290 km**) records.

Looking for further challenges, she journeyed across the Tasman in July 2001 to compete in the annual New Zealand Centurions qualifying race in Auckland. Once again she won with her fourth Centurion finish and another set of PBs and another set of Australian Residential records for 100km (**12:37:50**), 100 Miles (**21:26:10**) and 24 Hours (**175.460 km**).

Seven weeks later and it was another overseas trip, this time to Malaysia for the first ever Malaysian 24 Hour endurance walk which was held at the Genting Highlands resort on 25-26 August. The event was huge with over 180 starters in the 24 hour walk and included 20 international male walkers and 10 international female walkers. Carol had her trip fully funded and her husband Bob, who accompanied her as her handler, had a subsidised airfare and all accommodation costs covered in Malaysia. The course, at 5000 feet altitude, was very tough – steep ups and downs, sharp turns, rough sections of road and varying road surfaces (paving, cement, speed humps) all in one 800m lap. Overall, 9 men and 2 women (Sandra Brown and Carol) completed the 100 miles within 24 hours,. Carol passed the 100 mile mark in about **23:15** to become Malaysian Centurion number 9 - the slower than normal time reflecting the toughness of the course.

January 2002 saw her back in Gosford for the Coastal Classic where she finished second to NSW walker Alex Crawford, her 12 Hours distance of **96.065 km** just outside her best.

April 2002 and the yearly Australian Centurion qualifier beckoned. As usual, another first place and another swathe of records - 100km (**12:18:57**), 100 Miles (**20:31:24**) and 24 Hours (**182.657 km**). This was her 6<sup>th</sup> centurion finish in only 3 years.

She then returned to New Zealand in July for the annual New Zealand Centurion qualifier in Auckland, improving on her 2001 performance to record **20:48:53** for the 100 miles. She was 4<sup>th</sup> overall and the first walker to finish.

Only three months later, in October 2002, and she travelled to Adelaide for the annual Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence Ultra Running Festival. As usual, the venue was the old Adelaide Harriers Track and Carol and Stan Miskin were carrying the flag as walkers. Carol did yet another hundred (**21:13:27** - her 8<sup>th</sup>) and went on for the full 24 hours to be just outside her Australian best of 182 km set at Coburg earlier this year. Stan Miskin, at 76 years of age, also toed the line in his first ever walking race and walked to a distance of 121 km. Carol was 2<sup>nd</sup> overall, being beaten by only 1 runner (David Standeven) while Stan was 11<sup>th</sup>.

Following her usual recipe, 2003 started with the Gosford Coastal Classic which Carol won with **94.813 km**. Then it was onto Coburg in April for the annual Australian Centurion 24 Hour event which she won with **166.890 km**, passing the 100 mile mark in **21:55:35** for her 9<sup>th</sup> centurion qualifier. This was perhaps her toughest hundred yet as even she was effected by the trying early conditions. But a finish was never in doubt as she powered through in typical style.



**April 2003 at Coburg - Carol completes her 9<sup>th</sup> centurion qualifier**

Perhaps feeling it was now time for a change, she entered the Queensland 24 Hour Championship in August as a runner. What a debut performance - she was the overall winner, breaking five W50 Australian Records in the

process - 50 miles, 100 miles, 100 km, 12 Hours and 24 Hours. Her 100 mile run time was 19:29:12 and she completed 188.645 km for the full 24 hours. With this performance, she joined Lyn Lewis as the second Australian women to do the run/walk hundred mile double.



**Carol in running mode in the 2004 Queensland 24 Hour Championship**

Two months later, she was back in action as a runner in the Sri Chinmoy 24 Hour event in Adelaide. There she finished third overall and was the first lady, completing 180.919 km (100 miles in 20:52:52).

January 2004 saw her back in Gosford for the annual 12 Hour event, but as a runner once more, and she was the first woman runner to finish with a fine 103.767 km. On to the Coburg 24 Hour Carnival in April where she was the overall winner in the run division (beating all the men) with 189.292 km.

While not listing every run over the next few years, I will mention the Sri Chinmoy 24 Hour run in Adelaide in September 2006. Although Carol had missed a lot of training due to a nagging ankle injury, it did not stop her setting a whole swag of running records including a new Australian W55 100 km age category record and new WORLD W55 age category records for 12 Hour and 100 miles. She held down second place throughout the race and only one runner could beat her overall. It was a fantastic run – 192 km in hot and oppressive conditions.

The troublesome ankle eventually forced her into retirement in early 2007. When you look at the superb walks and runs that she had done over her career, it was perhaps not surprising that she eventually paid a heavy penalty. After surgery, she was told that she would never compete again.

In January 2009, her ankle seemed to have recovered enough for her to test herself out with a solo walk over the full length of the Australian Alpine Walking Track. She reported post-event

*The great news is that I have just completed the Australian Alps Walking Trail (last time in 2004 I walked from Walhalla to Tharwa), this time walking from Tharwa to Walhalla. It was again a great challenge and I am pleased my ankle survived the 46 days of carrying about 24 kilos in my pack and covering over 680 km of the most challenging terrain the Great Dividing Range has to offer.*

I walked part of the route way from Mt Howitt to Mt Feathertop back in the 1970s and I remember it as a tough but inspiring walk. With names like Mt Desperation and Mt Buggery, I think you get the general picture! The track essentially follows the crest of the alpine range (the Alps) from southern Victoria through to the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). On the way it crosses all the highest mountain regions from the Baw Baw Plateau, the Mt Howitt area, the Bogong High Plains, the Cobberras, then the Kosciuszko National Park and finally into the Namadgi National Park near Canberra. In many ways, it is the grandest and most difficult of all the long distance tracks in Australia. It is not the longest but with over 27,000 metres of climbing and descending it is indeed a tough walk (equivalent to more than 3 ascents and descents of Mt Everest!).

Doing a long solo walk is one thing but doing a 24 Hour event is quite another. So it was a great surprise when, in July 2009, her name popped up as a starter in the annual British Centurions qualifying race at Newmarket. Carol kept her trip very quiet - I did not know about it until I received emails a few weeks before from Peter Bennett and Rudy Schoors - they had seen the start list and noticed Carol's name. Apart from a 20 mile racewalk

in Canberra the previous month she had not done any competitive walks since 2003. She told me in Canberra that the ankle seemed to have recovered sufficiently for her to do some competitive walking again but the last thing I expected to see was her name on the English start list.

And the result - after battling stomach problems and 7 hours of heavy rain, she became British Centurion 1071 with a finish time of **22:34:05**. This is her tenth Centurion walk finish and earned her a fourth badge to match her Australian, New Zealand and Malaysian ones.



**Carol qualifies in England in 2009 - a feat to savour!**

What a magnificent career in every sense, both as a runner and as a walker. Carol sits at the top of Australian ultra distance walking. Her records continue to withstand attack. Will we see her in action again or was her English walk her swan song. Only time will tell.

Tim Erickson  
11 August 2011