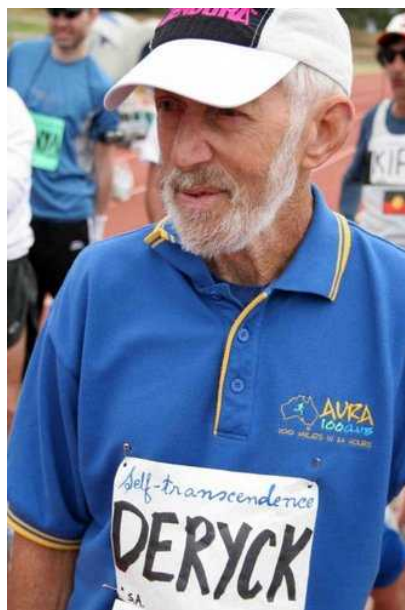


VALE DERYCK SKINNER (C 51) : 1932 - 2020

51. **Deryck Skinner (27/11/1932 - 19/05/2020)**
22:39:55
17-18 October 2005
Santos Stadium, Adelaide, SA



Deryck Skinner burst onto the long distance walking scene in October 2004 in his first ultra at the Adelaide Sri Chinmoy 24 Hour event, rewriting the M70+ record books with new standards for 50 Miles (**11:15:30**) and 12 Hours (**85.583 km**).

It was a case of “Deryck who?” as he had literally come from nowhere. He subsequently explained:

Back in 2000, when I first retired and came to Adelaide to live, I bush-walked two or three times a week with a local club in the Adelaide Hills, and I believe that this was the groundwork for my success in ultras at a later date. I thoroughly enjoyed it, having having spent a good deal of my life living and working in the bush.

After a couple of years bushwalking, he had joined the Adelaide Masters Athletics Assn and learnt about racewalking. With his bushwalking fitness and with a bit of work on his racewalking speed, he was ready for a new challenge and hence had entered the annual Sri Chinmoy 24 Hour event.

With that initial success under his belt, Deryck knuckled down for his next challenge – could he keep up the pace and complete 100 miles in 24 Hours?

A year later he returned to the same venue to become **Australian Centurion number 51** with a superb 100 mile time of **22:39:55**. His significant splits on that occasion were as follows

50 Km:	6.16.29
50 Miles:	10.23.05
100 Km:	13.10.44
100 Miles:	22.39.55
24 Hrs:	166.033 Km (415 laps + 33.2 mtrs)

It was a record breaking spree for Deryck, setting new Australian M70 walking records at 50 miles, 12 Hours, 100 km, 100 miles and 24 Hours and new Australian M70 running records for 100 km, 100 miles and 24 Hours (even though he was walking!). His 100 miles and 24 Hour records were probably M70 World Walking bests for track and he became the first Australian male in that age group to cover 100 miles whether running or walking. He also became the oldest ever Centurion Walker on Debut. This performance gave Australia the rare distinction

of boasting both the youngest Centurion debutante (Bill Dyer at 16 years and 6 months) and the oldest Centurion debutante (Deryck at 72 years and 10 months). Deryck was born 27 November 1932. Hence he was only just short of his 73rd birthday when qualifying as a Centurion! This superb performance won him the inaugural Gordon Smith Award.



Deryck in action in Adelaide in 2005 – 22:39:55 for the 100 miles

Deryck journeyed east in April 2006 to participate in our Centurion qualifier at Coburg and was one of 4 walkers to achieve the centurion distance (the others being Jens Borello, Pat Fisher and Geoff Hain), stopping the clock at **23:23:43**.

Deryck was now on a roll and in August 2006 he travelled to the Gold Coast in Queensland for the Australian 48 Hour Championship. He astonished all present by coming 3rd overall with a distance of **257.877 km**. This was an Australian best ever 48 Hour walking performance (previous best of 230.3 km was set by John Harris in 2002). What made it even more amazing was that Deryck covered **162.8 km** for the first 24 hours to record yet another centurion mark (100 miles in less than 24 hours). At the half way mark, he was only 3.3 km behind his current M70 Australian record for 24 hours. Deryck's 200 km and 48H marks also set Australian M70 walking and running records!



Deryck in action at the Gold Coast in August 2006

After this huge race, he commented

This was my first 48 Hour event so it was a steep learning curve, and the second 24 hours was really hard going - I had hoped to walk the whole distance without taking a rest. This proved impossible and I had to take four short breaks in the last 24 hours. As it happened, this was probably a good thing as I felt better for a while after each break and was able to put in a few (comparatively) faster laps. At the end I was able to say, for the first time, that I could not have done any better - that was quite satisfying.

As I usually do, after each ultra, I vowed never to do another one - but a few days in I find myself planning for the next one - Ultras are just about as addictive as family history research!

It was not long before Deryck's words proved true – 7 weeks later and he was back in action in the annual Sri Shinmoy 24 Hour event in Adelaide. Unfortunately it always depends on the weather and this particular weekend was HOT and sunny, with daytime temperatures nudging 30°C. The attrition rate was high but Deryck was not put off. In fact, he was the outstanding walker, finishing his fourth centurion qualifier within a 12 month period – **23:30:12** at just under 74 years of age. Deryck's comment - *“The heat was cruel and it was the most rugged 24 hour I have contested so far.”*



Deryck on his way to his fourth hundred in October 2006

Deryck's next event was the April 2007 Australian Centurion qualifying event at Coburg and the contrast could not have been greater, with cold weather and intermittent squalls of rain, some quite heavy. He was content for an easy stroll, completing only **89.200 km**. His body was not yet ready for another big effort.

Six weeks later he was back on the track and attempting what was undoubtedly his toughest challenge thus far. Inspired by Jack Webber's 1980 endurance walk around the Adelaide Harriers track (when Jack, at 66 years of age, had covered 1062.25 miles in 38 days 2 hrs 30 mins at an average of more than 27 miles per day), Deryck decided to emulate the feat. He started his 1,000 mile walk on 28th May 2007 at the Adelaide Harriers track, with Geoff Peters seeing him off. He had set himself an even tougher task than Jack – he aimed to complete his 1,000 miles in about 23 days and, if he felt ok, would do another 100 miles to better Jack's performance. He commented to me in an email before he started: *“It is all uncharted territory and the weather conditions will probably play a big part.”*

How true this turned out to be. His basic plan was to start at 6AM each day and walk for 12 hours, covering as much distance as he could and hopefully averaging around 80 km per day. But on day two, the Adelaide weather turned bad and he battled gale force winds for the entire 12 hours, still covering 80 km. But his back was now gone after only 2 days and the weather did not let up. On day 4, it rained so heavily all day that the old cinders track was unable to cope and he walked the whole 12 hours in ankle deep water. He confided to me that he walked in continuous pain from day three onwards. It says a lot for his personal toughness and determination that he soldiered on for 13 days, covering **780 km** (an average of 60.5 km per day) before he was forced to retire.

With such a gruelling endeavour behind him, we did not expect to see Deryck back in action for quite some time but in late September 2007, he toed the line yet again for the annual Sri Chinmoy 24 Hour championship in Adelaide – it was perhaps not surprising when he passed the 50 mile mark in just under 12 hours and then called it quits.

Deryck now had to take some time off to allow his body to recover physically. He was just hitting 75 years of age and had done so much in such a short timeframe. It was nearly a year before he felt ready - his next appointment was the Australian 48 Hour Championship at Caboolture in Queensland starting on 29th August 2008. The course was a 500 metre circuit with a compacted decomposed granite road surface and the race direction was reversed hourly. He and Andrew Ludwig (C 25) were never far from each other and beat all but the first 3 runners. The final results showed Andrew 4th with 240.033 km and Deryck 5th with **238.811 km**. Deryck had announced his entry into the M75 division with new Australian records for 100 miles, 200 km and 48 Hours.

Amazingly, 5 weeks later and he was back at the 2008 Sri Shinmoy 24 Hour event in Adelaide setting a whole swag of new M75 records for all categories up to 24 Hours.

*I set new times/distances for all the M75 standards. However, with the exception of the 100 km, which was clear cut, all the others were a very close call. I was never going well, and it is obvious that 5 weeks between Caboolture and Adelaide was not enough. The body just did not respond, and I am probably not going to do any competitive walking for 12 months. My final distance was **143.033 km** - it was very obvious early on that a centurion qualifier was not possible and I had to go off the track for a couple of hours in the early morning on Sunday.*

Lorraine Billet took on the role which you usually do when things are a bit tight, and "bullied" me into finding a little bit extra when it was needed.

Now with his new M75 records in Adelaide, he had all the M70 and M75 records up to and including 48 Hours. But it had taken a great couple of walks by Deryck to beat Stan Miskin's M75 records which were themselves outstanding performances. It is astonishing to me that we had two such wonderful walkers in close succession. I suspect that the new records will last a long time.

M75 50 Miles	11:35:51	M75 6 Hours	43.852 km
M75 100 Km	14:49:42	M75 12 Hours	83.229 km
M75 100 Miles	30:04:37	M75 24 Hours	143.033 km
M75 200 Km	38:53:58	M75 48 Hours	238.811 km

It was no surprise when he won the 2008 Gordon Smith Award, his second win in 4 years.

Deryck's last ultra walk was in March 2009 at the Coburg Carnival 6 Hour Walk at Coburg and, although the oldest competitor in the field at 76 years of age, he showed that he has lost none of his form with a fine **43.836km**, just 16m short of his M75 record.

Later that same year, Deryck announced his retirement from ultras. He explained

Hi Tim,

Just a note to let you know that I have finally decided to retire from ultra-walking. I was quite disappointed with my last 6 hour, which was well below my expectations, and I was never comfortable in the event. I am now carrying a slight injury, which is unusual for me, and this may have helped my decision.

Thanks for your help and support in the past and I hope the club continues to prosper and turn out many future Centurions.

Regards,

Deryck C51

I was not too surprised to get this email as I knew that Deryck had been battling niggling injuries for a couple of years and that his recent performances had been below the high standard that he had set for himself. But I was so grateful that I had been able to witness first hand Deryck's performances over the previous few years and I have no hesitation in saying that it will be some time before we see someone who can match that sort of quality.

There was a further unpublished reason for his retirement, as he had recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer. An operation and chemotherapy followed quickly.



Deryck's final walk at the 2009 Coburg 6 Hour Carnival

Deryck's racing days were now over but his commitment to the Centurions continued. Each year from 2010 onwards, he volunteered as an official for the annual City Bay Run Run in Adelaide, generously donating his earnings to the Centurions.

In October 2011, Deryck emailed me to advise that he was feeling exceptionally well and now walking everywhere.

I look forward to seeing the results of the 24H. I am still considering getting back into training for my 80th.

Deryck's records in the M70 and M75 division were awesome but Stan Miskin's M80 records were just as challenging. Deryck as an M80 walker was indeed a mouth watering proposition!

Alas, it was not to be. Deryck did enter the 2013 Coburg 24 Hour event but emailed me in February of that year to withdraw. His training has not been good enough and his cancer was spreading, something of which his urologist had warned.

He continued with his annual fundraising via Adelaide's City Bay Run Run until 2015, when he had to retire from that activity, the effort now becoming too much for his failing body.

He suffered a further setback in December 2016

Hi Tim

Thanks for the update. You might like to know that I received somewhat of a surprise to find myself hospitalised in December, with the need for a triple heart bypass, from which I have emerged quite well. The fact that I had maintained my fitness held me in good stead and I was home within 5 days without any complications.

I continue to walk wherever I need to go rather than take public transport, although not at a speed which my brain wants and my body doesn't!

In early 2019, his health had deteriorated to such a level that he was forced to move into palliative care in Adelaide, his long battle with cancer now seemingly getting on top of him. The specialists gave him only months to live, with the cancer now spreading to his bones.

I rang him monthly for a chat during his final year, always expecting to hear the worst, but he continued to hang on, his body not yet ready to pack it in. I was in Adelaide in February and was lucky enough to pop into the home and spend some time with him, before the COVID lockdown put paid to such activities.

He finally died on Tuesday 19th May 2020, aged 87, after 12 months in palliative care. He had remained alert and mobile during that whole time, although his walk had become more of a shuffle in the final months. He is now at peace after a long battle.

Deryck's name will live forever in our Centurion annals – his career inspired us all and his superhuman efforts are etched in the record books.

Tim Erickson
Friday 29th May 2020