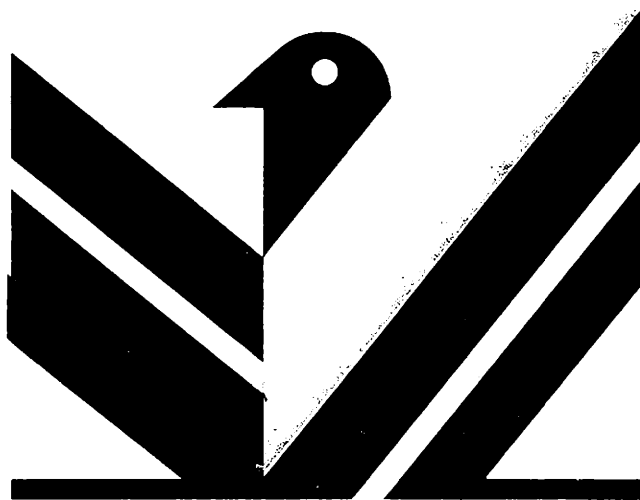


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SOUTH AUSTRALIA - "MARATHON STATE"

by Brian Chapman

Running in South Australia can be traced back to track meets conducted by colleges and the Adelaide Amateur Athletic Club during the 1860's.

From the 1880's, professional running dominated due to the lure of cash prizes offered during the economic recession of the time.

Longer events for men, such as three hour "Go As You Please" and professional match races also took place in Adelaide.

Distance running in general was boosted by the arrival of British migrants and, in 1920, the Bay-City Run appeared as a handicap race conducted by Adelaide Harriers (Est. 1913).

Nevertheless it was very much a minor sport and its handful of participants were looked upon as either iron-hearted freaks or dedicated fools.

Thus in 1920 the first marathon held in South Australia attracted only six starters, three of whom were from interstate.

From Victoria Square the course followed Grote Street, West Terrace, Bay Road (now Anzac Highway), to the St. Leonards Inn, then turning back up Cross Road to the "Big Gum Tree", along Portrush Road, Greenhill Road, Glynburn Road, Lower North East Road, O.G. Road, Upper North East Road, Northcote Street, Melbourne Street finishing with a lap of University Oval.

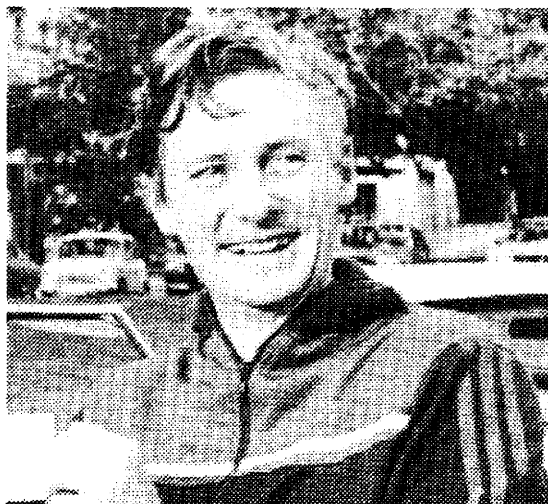
Clem Duncan braved the potholed roads and 74 degree heat to lead at the half-marathon point (Glen Osmond) in 92 minutes.

However, leg cramps put him out of the race and Victorian, Percy Collins, despite slowing to a 12 minute mile pace, came through to take the first South Australian title in 3 hours 18 minutes 22 seconds.

Hugh Wolter, a reinstated professional runner/walker from England, was the first South Australian finisher (3.44.10).

George Lockwood, later famed for his ultra-marathon pedestrian feats of endurance as the "Walking Postman", had a crack at Collins' record in a second marathon in 1925.

A mid-race storm turned the non-bitumen sections into quagmires and Lockwood (97 minutes at half-way)



Premier John Bannon the only runner who has run all seven Festival City Marathons under 3 hours.

withdrew after twisting a knee when he slipped.

The only finisher was novice Charley Kerr (3.24.04) who was denied his scheduled finish lap around Adelaide Oval because a league football match had just resumed.

These early marathons proved so traumatic for runners and officials alike that the event was not conducted again for some years.

Even "modified marathons" over 15 miles were cancelled and it was left to enthusiasts such as Lockwood and Ern Jolly to run their own time trials.

Despite this lack of races, Jolly won the 1932 Victorian Marathon in 3.02.34.

Women's running, which was popular in professional ranks (as well as the Adelaide Women's A.A.C.) in the 1920's was stimulated by the formation in 1931 of the S.A. Women's A.A.A.

However, distances were limited to 220 yards particularly after the 880 yards debacle at the 1928 Olympics when female runners collapsed in varying states of exhaustion.

In addition bad publicity surrounded the common practice of "rub-downs" administered by men to young women runners.

In 1932 the third S.A. marathon was conducted over a flatter course from the War Memorial following North Terrace, Victoria Avenue (now Fullarton Road),

Park Terrace, Bay Road, Brighton Road, "Adelaide Road", South Road, Bay Road and back to the start.

Jolly failed the mandatory pre-race medical check (a feature of all S.A. marathons till the early 1970's) and victory went to sensational 21 year old Malcolm Prince in 3.08.06 (88 minutes at half-way) with only three finishing.

In 1938, Jolly clocked 2.57.06 in a marathon trial before the Empire Games in Sydney but returned with an injury/DNF from the Games themselves.

Unfortunately apathy and public/press opposition on medical grounds saw marathons vanish from the running calendar and in fact they were banned in Victoria.

The notorious five lap "Terraces Marathon" in 1941 was the only 26 miler to take place for almost a quarter century after 1932.

The winner was Harry Chesson (3 hours 46 minutes 48 seconds) with George Lockwood a distant runner-up (4.28).

The severity of the race continued to discourage prospective runners and an apathetic attitude on the part of S.A.A.A.A. officials ensured that marathoning lay dormant well beyond the war years.

Only Allan Howland tackled the distance privately and he contested the Australian Marathon at the start of the 1950's.

An S.A. Marathon reappeared in 1956 thanks to the efforts of a 46 year old Englishman George Venables.

The course from Adelaide Harriers track followed South Terrace, West Terrace, Port Road, St. Vincent Street, Military Road, Seaview Road, Henley Beach Road, and the "Terraces" back to Adelaide Harriers.

There was a festival atmosphere about this race, which precluded the Melbourne Olympic Games, with thousands lining the course and many bikes following the runners.

Venables covered the first ten miles in an astonishing 58 minutes 37 seconds, then slowed to victory in 2.50.38 ahead of only three other finishers.

The 1958 S.A. marathon proved a breakthrough when local star Les Trigg challenged Victoria's Olympic Frank Tutchener through ten miles (54.15) and 20 miles (1.55.30) to finish third in a new South Australian record of 2.42.39.

Each of the annual South Australian marathons from 1956 had its own special story of drama or woe: eg. Rodger Barber's 3.02.50 victory in the heat-affected 1959 race which was thrown into chaos when his pursuers were directed off course by a spectator; the dog attack survived by leader Ron Ford in 1960; and the 1961 win of 55 year old Alf O'Connor (2.27.40) over an Eyre Peninsula farmer, Max Hammond, running his first race and in thongs!

In 1959/60, South Australia's first Fun Run, the "Pepsi Footathon", was conducted to launch a new soft drink in opposition to Coca-Cola.

For the first time distance running was sold to the public as hundreds tackled the 8 mile senior (won by Neville Clarke) and 3 mile junior (won by a Kerry O'Brien of Port Augusta) events starting from the Parade Ground and televised.

Fields from the S.A. Marathon, however, stayed around the 15-20 mark as the reputation of the event still discouraged many.

The race was held in the western suburbs from the last time in 1962, then on an out-and-back course from Pooraka to Smithfield in 1963, followed by Oakbank-Mt. Torrens during 1964-71.

The stars included Peter Brownrigg, till recently a league football boundary umpire (1964 winner: 2.39.04), English migrant Allan Gibson (1965: 2.37.52), former middle distance ace Ian Wheeler (1967: 2.27.34) and Bill James (1968: 2.26.20 and an Australian representative in the 1969 Toronto International Marathon).

As Richard Amery wrote, things had changed from "a time not so long ago, when the only prerequisite for a place in a state marathon title was to stay on two legs for about two hours while maintaining a forward velocity of some eight and half miles per hour".

The staging of the Australian Marathon at Oakbank in 1967 gave the South Australian public a rare chance to see world class runners such as Ron Clarke, Dave Power and Tony Cook in action on the road (though all were beaten by little-known Victorian, Derek Clayton in 2.21.58).

More local stars such as Raie Thompson and Maureen Moyle (World Cross-Country Championships), Chris Fisher (Sub-4 minute mile in 1971, Olympics 1972), Brenton Norman

(Commonwealth Games marathon 1974) and David Fitzsimmons (Commonwealth and Olympic Games 1974-80) broke through to international level, yet distance running remained fundamentally elitist and a minor activity in Adelaide.

This all began to change with the establishment in 1973 of the City-Bay Fun Run by Bob Clarke and others.

The first edition went to Clayton, by then the world marathon record-holder (34.06), and schoolgirl Elaine Stubbs with an amazing 1365 runners finishing.

The event thrust distance running for all ages and both sexes well and truly into the public eye.

Meanwhile the S.A. Marathon continued its search for a permanent home switching from three laps around the Adelaide Airport (1972), to Kuitpo, Roseworthy and finally West Lakes.

Each race continued something to the tradition of drama surrounding the event: e.g. the last minute venue change in 1972 caused by a petrol strike, the shock 1974 win by mediocre youngster Grenville Wood in 2.37.42, and the sensational

disqualification of 1975 winner Richard Amery because he wore red shorts instead of his club's regulation white.

The arrival of world class marathoner John Farrington in Adelaide in the 1970's provided a boost in the latter part of the decade. Jan Brown (Whyalla Marathon) and Sipra Lloyd (West Lakes) became the first South Australian women to complete the 26 miler.

The establishment of a "peoples marathon", the Festival City Marathon, in 1979 by a Distance Runners Club committee headed by Bruce Abrahams heralded the further popularisation of distance running by the S.A. Road Runners Club (est. 1981). Grenville Wood won the inaugural race.

The recent emergency of more international representatives such as Wheelchair Olympian Robert Turner, Desiree Letherby, Janis Hams, Grenville Wood, Lisa O'Dea-Martin, Anne Foley, Donna Gould and Garry Henry together with the ongoing boom in Fun Runs since 1979 shows that without doubt in marathon running "we've only just begun".



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