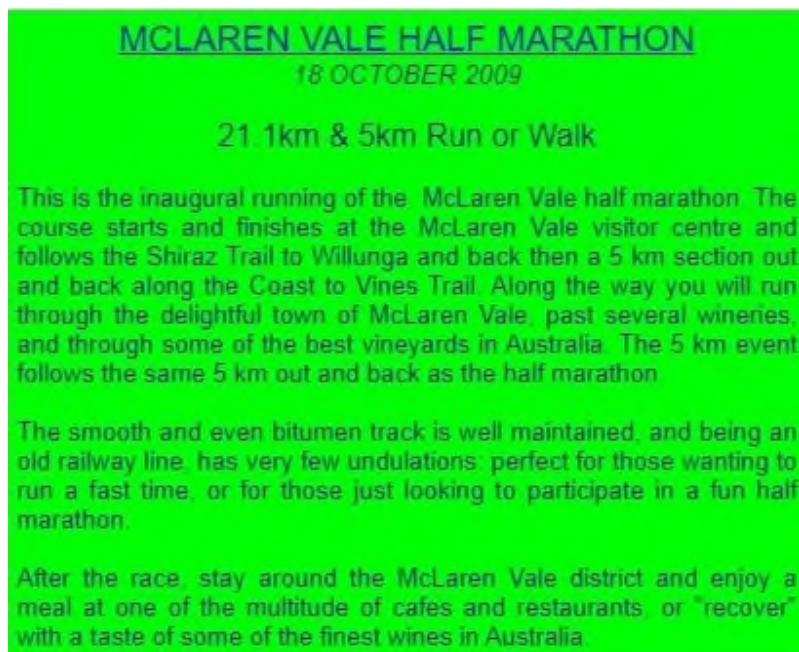


## McLAREN VALE HALF MARATHON – BRIEF HISTORY

by Ian Hill, 14 September 2021

Information is scarce on the beginnings of the annual McLaren Vale Half Marathon held on the second or third Sunday in October. The inaugural event was listed on the SARRC's 2009 Event Calendar, indicating planning started during 2008. The first event was held on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

The club's newsletter eSARRC of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2009 advertised the half marathon for the first time with a course which started at McLaren Vale and followed the Shiraz Trail to Willunga and back, approximately 16km. A 5km out and back section along the Coast to Vines Trail completed the required 21.1 km distance. Although the notice stated only one accompanying event over the 5km distance, a 10km run or walk was added to the program.



As noted, the event started at the McLaren Vale Visitor Information Centre and the course followed the old railway line. The following historical information is taken from a book by Martin Dunstan "WILLUNGA Town and District 1901-1925" and published in 1978:

*The line from Adelaide to Willunga was officially opened on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1915 at Willunga by the Governor Sir Henry Galway before a crowd of several hundred people. Two trains had left Adelaide; "an ordinary train at 10 o'clock for the benefit of the public who desired to see the country, and at 11 o'clock a special train ... with his Excellency the Governor and a party of legislators and others".*

*An adult first class monthly season ticket from Adelaide to Willunga cost two pounds and five shillings while second class was one pound ten shillings. Intermediate stations were progressively cheaper.*

The line was closed towards the end of the 1960s and in 1972 trains went to Willunga for the last time to dismantle it.

### Inaugural Event

The entry fee for the inaugural event was \$21 and the Race Director was David Schmarr. The winners were Ben Hockings in 1:16:39 and Jennifer Cahalan in 1:29:41. There were 223 finishers in the half marathon, 154 in the 10km and 64 in the 5km for a total of 441 altogether.

This report by Sonya Conrad appeared in the eSARRC newsletter of 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009. Sonya's time was 2:04:44 and she placed 179<sup>th</sup> overall and 49<sup>th</sup> female finisher.

#### **McLaren Vale Half Marathon Race Report**

**by Sonya Conrad**

Think down over rolling hills and vineyards. Magpies chortling. A peace and serenity devoid of traffic lights and the cacophony of city traffic. That is the McLaren Vale Half Marathon.

I loved the first section of the run - a nine km out and back. Trees, vineyards, undulating hills and a well surfaced track. Approaching the 1/2 way turn around was a highlight with happy runners greeting me on their way back. I kept myself amused for a while counting how many people were ahead of me (think I gave up at about 60). Lots of regular runners, looking strong and running well. Really enjoyed this part too, because it was all new to me.

After returning to the visitors centre there was a five km out and back in the opposite direction. Another chance to say hello to those in front (now looking a bit more dogged) and to those behind (definitely looking more dogged!) I don't think that I have ever had a 5km out-and-back tagged onto the end of a run and it really tested me mentally. Track was still good, a little less shade and a lovely downhill gradient all the way to the turn around point. So, most of the return was on a long, steady, never ending uphill. I think that I died a runners death here. So beware the sting of beauty ... the claws of the kitten, the thorn on the rose, the 5km tag at the end of McLaren Vale!!

Regardless of this I am really looking forward to this run next year. I will know what to expect. I'm off to practice hills and 5km out-and-back-tags on the end of my long runs!

**Congratulations** Dave Schmarr and all volunteers and officials for a superbly organised inaugural run. The locals at McLaren Vale have a run to be proud of. See you all there in 2010!

The 2010 event directed by Wendy Janssens had slightly more participants with 483 finishers overall and 254 in the half marathon. Ben Hockings was again the male winner in 1:19:43 while Fabiann Robazza won the women's race in 1:32:22.

From 2011, as with running events all across Australia, participation in the festival escalated with 611 finishers. This was the last time the visitor centre was used for staging the event. In 2012 the start and finish area moved to the Hardys Tintara Winery and the course was reversed with the small loop to the west run first and then the long out and back nearly to Willunga. In the early years the course went all the way to the old Willunga Railway Station which required crossing the main road twice. Participation jumped by fifty percent with more than one thousand entries in the three events.

In 2013 there were 1193 finishers which remains the all-time high. The half marathon had 593 finishers and both winners went on to more notable achievements in 2021. Women's winner Isobel Batt-Doyle set the race record of 1:24:57 which still stands and she represented Australia at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in the 5000m (Heat 2 - 15:21.65 for 15<sup>th</sup> place). Men's winner Jacob Cocks also set a race record (1:11:58) and he won the 2021 Adelaide Marathon on his debut in the fastest time ever recorded by an SA resident in the event with a time of 2:22:45.

Cocks' half marathon record was broken in 2017 by Steve McKenna with 1:10:35. Coincidentally McKenna was runner up to Cocks in the 2021 Adelaide Marathon with 2:26:56, also on his debut.

Participation in the festival continued to hover around the 1000 mark while the half marathon reached a high of 726 finishers in 2016. In 2020 as Covid-19 wreaked havoc worldwide the McLaren Vale festival was one of four of the eight major SARRC events still able to be held. Not surprisingly participation was curtailed but even so there were 224 finishers in the half marathon, 132 in the 10km and 90 in the 5km totalling 446, uncannily similar to the numbers in the very first event in 2009!