

AUSTRALIAN CENTURION DETAILS

5. **Stuart Cooper (11.11.50)**

23/24 October 1971

100 miles - 21:36:53

Edwards Lake Athletics Track, Reservoir, Victoria

Stuart Cooper was born just a couple of weeks before me in 1950. He commenced racewalking in 1966 while a student at Caulfield High School. He joined St Stephen's Harriers in Melbourne and started what was to become a life long association with the sport of racewalking.

Stu became an Australian Centurion very early in his career, in 1971 at the Edwards Lake Athletics Track in Reservoir on what was a memorable day. This was the first 24 hour walk in Victoria in the modern era and there were 9 starters. But competitors were unprepared for the weather conditions thrown at them during the race. At noon on the Saturday when the event started, the wind was blowing at over 50 mph. This continued unabated for the first 6 hours of the race, eventually giving way to squally periods of rain which lasted until the early hours of the Sunday morning when the weather warmed.

Jim Gleeson powered through the changing conditions with no breaks at all and passed the 100 mile mark in 18:33:58 (a record that would stand until 1979). He went for the full 24 hours and set our current record of 122 miles 215 yards. Next across the line was Clarrie Jack with the excellent time of 20:39:45. Both Jim and Clarrie eclipsed Gordon Smith's 1938 time. The only other finisher was 20 year old Stuart who completed the 100 mile distance in 21:36:53 to become Centurion number 5.

C3.	Jim Gleeson	40	18:33:58
C4.	Clarrie Jack	26	20:39:45
C5.	Stuart Cooper	20	21:36:53



Stuart, Jim and Clarrie after their historic walk in 1971

Stu competed regularly throughout the 1970's as an A grade walker in the summer season and as a road walker with the Victorian Amateur Walkers Club in the winter season.

He was well known for his great crowd pleasing performances with the guitar during the long bus trips to Canberra for the annual Lake Burley Griffin 20 mile championship. His playing and singing were always in demand and fondly remembered by us.

His last serious season was 1981 in which he competed very well in the Canberra 20 mile championship and completed two 50km events. It was in 1984 that he suffered the groin injury that effectively ended his career and since that time he has only walked intermittently and never regained the form of past years. But to give him due credit, he has never officially announced his retirement and is to be seen on the odd occasion still striding out at walking events.

Stu had best times of 2:38.38 for 30km, 2:53:30 for 20 miles and 4:48:52 for the 50 km event and regards himself as a distance walker rather than a track walker.

Stu is married to Wendy and is a specialist Phys. Ed. and Performing Arts teacher, working with all grades from Prep to Grade 6. Now that is a feat of some proportion in itself. He has spent most of his career teaching at Richmond Primary School where he still fights the good fight.

Stu and I at one stage edited and produced the Walkers Club magazine, 'Heel and Toe' and Stu has always been willing to involve himself at whatever level is required. Nowadays he is member of the VRWC Committee and fulfils the role of Publicity Officer, he is a qualified racewalking judge and regularly judges or officiates when not having a walk himself.

In 2009, he won what was his second ever Victorian racewalking medal when he came third in the Victorian 30km roadwalk championship on 9th August of that year (he had previously taken silver in the 1981 Victorian 50km championship). His time of 3:27:31 was a lot slower than in his prime but it was a proud moment and one that he had earned with a gutsy walk. He was captured for posterity as he crossed the finishing line.



Stuart takes bronze in the Victorian Open 30km championship in August 2009 - some 40 years in the making