

AUSTRALIAN CENTURION DETAILS

56. **Caroline Mestdagh (01/06/65)**
22:40:27
18-19 April 2009
Coburg Harriers Track, Coburg, Vic

Rudy Schoors (C 55) and **Caroline Mestdagh (C 56)** are a couple from Belgium who made the trip to Australia in 2009 to compete in our Australian Centurions qualifier at Coburg. They had been walking for only a few years at that time but have done a lot in a short time. They qualified as British Centurions in 2007 at Battersea Park in London after coming into the event as relative walking novices. Walking together the whole way in atrocious conditions, they reached the 100 mile mark in 23:37:45 to become centurions 1061 (Caroline) and 1062 (Rudy).

The next year, they gained their second Centurion badges by completing the Continental Centurions event at the end of May at Schiedam in Holland. Once again they crossed the finish line together in an improved 23:00:52. Caroline was awarded C366 and Rudy C367. Again he had done the gentlemanly deed and allowed his wife the honour of crossing the line first. Geoff Hain (C 49) was also in that race and finished next to become C368.

This year, they set themselves for their third badge and hence the trip to Australia. They were now regular walkers in the various European based ultra distance events and had done a number of 100 km events in the intervening last 12 months. The improvement was evident at Coburg where, walking superbly, they both easily beat their PBs with times of 22:01:45 and 22:40:27.



Rudy and Caroline on the way to their Australian Centurion badges in 2009

At the time, I wrote: What next – well, there are 3 further Centurion badges to earn – USA, New Zealand and Malaysia. I am sure that 2010 will see a further overseas trip to another exotic location for badge number 4!

We did not have long to wait as in mid 2010 they were off to New Zealand for their fourth badge, along with Dutch walker Frans Leijtens. All 3 were successful, Frans becoming USA C71 with a time of 22.10.14 and Rudy and Caroline crossing the line together in 23:01:38 to become USA C72 (Caroline) and C73 (Rudy).

Later that same year, they were off to New Zealand for their fifth badges and as usual they were successful, Rudy becoming NZ C15 with his time of 21:37:25 and Caroline becoming NZ C17 with her time of 22:51:46.

With the Malaysian Centurions seemingly in recess, they have now captured all 5 badges on offer.

Not surprisingly, Caroline took the Geel (their home city) Sports Lady of the Year for 2010 and Rudy took third place in the men's category. Rudy comments:

It was a very successful evening and our supporters, also long distance walkers, enjoyed it very much. It

not a common thing to achieve this in a sport which is unknown by the majority of people. Some great news for ultra-walking!



Rudy and Caroline at the 2010 Geel Sports Persons of the Year Awards

2011 has seen them continue on with their ultra walking at a steady pace.

Their season started in February with the annual Dutch 80km night walk from Winterswijk to Arnhem.

This was our first night march of the year. It was a chilly walk, temperatures around 0°C to 5°C, with a misty sky. Most of the time we walked with Annie V.D.Meer. The organization was very good and it was a beautiful walk.



Caroline (left) and Rudy (right) test themselves out over a challenging night walk of 80km

Then in April, it was the annual Nacht van Loon op Zand walk in Loon op Zand in Holland on 16th April where they chose the 80km event, Rudy winning in 9:31 and Caroline finishing second (first woman) in 10:10.

In July, they fronted once again for the British Centurion qualifying event and were again successful, Caroline recording a 100 mile time of 21:30:57 and Rudy just behind her with 21:32:02.

The book is still open on these fine walkers and we can expect to see many more trophies lining the walls as time passes.

Tim Erickson
10 August 2011

Ian Valentine (C 57) is yet another centurion to come from an ultra distance running background. In 2003, Ian travelled down from his home in Nowra in NSW to compete in the Coburg 24 Hour as a runner and that was when I met him. The records show that he won the event with 175 km, his first time over 100 miles and his first major win. Of course, that does not really tell what happened on that weekend as he covered 110 km in the first 12 hours and 65 km in the second 12 hours. But it did mark Ian as a runner to watch and over the next few years, he continued to compete and improve. He showed his real mettle in the Gold Coast 48 Hour championship in 2004 when he ran 283 km. But once again, the result does not tell the complete story. On that occasion, he covered 106 km in the first 12 hours, a PB 189 km for the 24 hours and then struggled through only 94 km for the final 24 hours.

He learnt a lot about ultras beyond 24 hours when he crewed for Ken Matchett at Colac in 2005 and probably learnt a lot about the need to pace yourself more carefully. He emailed me in early 2008 to ask about how he should go about doing the 100 mile walk and qualifying as a centurion. He was untested at walking but well known ultra identity Nobby Young reckoned he was a born walker and he was willing to give it a go. By now, he had moved to Queensland and conditions were not ideal for training but he knuckled down and started his preparation.

His first walking effort, in the 2008 Caboolture 48 Hour event in Queensland, ended ingloriously when he was forced to retire after only 110 km. His next effort was in February 2009 in the Caboolture Dawn to Dusk 12 Hour when he was 13th in the mixed field with 81 km in 11:51. Not exactly big walking credentials but enough to convince him to enter for our Coburg event two months later and give it a crack.

The rest is history – passing through the 50 mile mark in a little less than 10:30 (a 90 minute PB), he racewalked the whole way to reach his 100 mile target with a time of 23:37:03 and became Australian Centurion Number 57. He also took second place in the Australian 100 km championship enroute with a time of 13:10:41.

His comments post race:

I arrived back at work today, almost walking properly. Thanks so much for your support and encouragement throughout the night and morning. This race was my most memorable ultra to date. Being presented with the Jack Webber Trophy was very special. I feel a great sense of achievement and will start thinking about future quests shortly. I hope to be back next year to spend some quality time with my fellow Centurions.

He returned the next year, hoping to improve on his centurion time. He started well, covering over 46km in the first 6 hours but an old shin injury put paid to his efforts and he was forced to retire mid race. Since then, his ultra efforts have been few but we wait to see if he can get his injuries under control and take the track again.