

**MARCO BLOEMERTS C77: 22:19:38**

Dutch walker Marco Bloemerts became Australian Centurion number 77 with his successful 100 mile walk in the 2019 Coburg 24 Hour Carnival.

For 53 year old Marco, it was his sixth centurion badge, with his progression as shown below

Continental Centurion	2015	22:25:21
African Centurion	2016	22:46:27
NZ Centurion	2017	22:43:30
USA Centurion	2018	23:26:11
English Centurion	2018	22:40:48
Australian Centurion	2019	22:42:30



*Marco on his way to his sixth centurion badge at Coburg in April 2019*

With this sixth badge, he joins a very select group of seven walkers who have earned all available badges, the others being Jill Green, Caroline Mestdagh, Rudy Schoors, Rob Robertson, Justin Scholz and Sharon Scholz. Of course, Sandra Brown remains at the top of the badges list with seven, harking from the period when a Malaysia Centurions badge was also available.

Marco started long distance walking 7 years ago, experimenting with regular efforts of 30-50 km. When a colleague told him about the Kennedymarch concept, he just had to give it a go. A few months later he completed his first Kennedymarch (80km) within 12 hours. He was amazed that he was ahead of so many other participants.

He was hooked! That year he completed 11 Kennedymarches.

When doing such long walks, there is plenty to talk about, and the Continental Centurion was something about which he soon learned. Here was another challenge and one that he felt he should try. Two years later, in May 2015, he participated in the annual Continental Centurions qualifying race in Weert.

*I heard people talking about the Continental Centurion race. Two years later I participated in it, I remember that I had no time schedule at all, just "Keep on walking". I reached the finish and thought "Never again !!". But it went the same way as for the Kennedymarches: if you succeed once you want to try it again. So finally I ended in Australia.*

For the record, his time in Weert was 22:25:21 and he finished 4<sup>th</sup> overall, one of 24 qualifiers.

For his next Centurion badge attempt, he chose the inaugural African Centurion race on Robben Island in Cape Town in October 2016. He was one of a large group of English and Continental walkers who made the trip, eager to support a new Centurion chapter and keen to conquer the new challenge. And he did, walking the one hundred miles in 22:46:27 and coming in 13<sup>th</sup> of the 19 qualifiers.

In August 2017, he travelled to Bury St Edmunds in England to attempt his third centurion, but this time things did not go according to plan and he was forced to retire at 95 miles, reached in 21:44. He had only 5 miles to go and over 2 hours left, but his legs refused to carry him any further.

Two months later, he travelled to New Zealand for their 2017 qualifier and had no such issues this time. He passed the 100 mile mark in 22:43:30, going on to reach a final distance of 105 miles within the 24 hours. Yet conditions were horrendous, with the dry weather of the few hours of the race giving way to nearly 19 hours of incessant rain and wind!



*The 2017 Centurion walk in New Zealand*

*Right to left: Gertrude Achterberg, Arie Kandelaars, Marco Bloemerts, Antione Hunting and Damien Wood*

2018 saw two further centurion badges, taking his tally to five.

In June, he travelled to Minneapolis for the annual American Centurions qualifier, finishing second overall with 23:26:11, one of five centurion qualifying performance. It was his fourth badge, as was the case for IOM walker Andrew Titley and fellow Dutch walker Arie Kandelaars and it was the fifth badge for American Rob Robertson.

Two months later, Marco travelled to Douglas on the Isle of Man for the annual English Centurions qualifier. It turned out to be a war of attrition, with torrential rain and high winds for the entire Saturday night (shades of New Zealand the year before). Amazingly, 13 of the 22 starters completed the hundred, with Marco finishing 9<sup>th</sup> with a time of 22:40:30.



*August 2018, English Centurion qualifier – Marco contemplates the task ahead (left) and gets down to it (right)*



*and finishes to earn his fifth centurion badge*

With this walk, he became the first Dutch walker to earn 5 of the 6 possible badges. The question was now: When would he come to Australia to try for the one remaining badge?

We did not have long to wait, with his name appearing on the 2019 Coburg 24 Hour Carnival entry list in early January.

He was one of a number of European walkers (six from Nederland, one from Belgium and one from the IOM), who toed the start line at Coburg in April 2019, with everyone heading off confidently and at the required pace. Marco settled into second place, behind Kim Janssens, reaching the 50 mile mark in around 11:02, and maintaining his position to reach the 100 mile mark in 22:42:30.



*April 2019 at Coburg*

*Marco chats with fellow finisher Jurgen de Waart mid race (left) and shows the joy of finishing (right)*

As of May 2019, Marco has a wonderful resume. He explains

*I have walked in total 37 official Kennedywalks (50 miles) and 35 organised walks longer than 100 km. Twice I have done Nijmegen-Rotterdam (160 km) and twice Amsterdam-Leeuwarden (150 km). Apart from these, I have walked about 20 Kennedywalks and 20 100+ km walks on my own for training. These have all been done in The Netherlands.*

With all 6 badges, the obvious question is “What is next?”

*Looking at the future:*

- *I want to set a new personal best time in an official Centurion race (ie better my time of 22.25.21, done in Weert 2015). I don't know yet which country I will target.*
- *I may go to Owego (USA) in 2020 to earn their Kennedyfriend title (50 miles in 12 hours). That's a new title for the USA but a long time popular walk in The Netherlands.*
- *I may target other walks abroad, for instance Dodentocht (Belgium) or the Parish Walk (Isle of Man) or marches that I hear or read about. I may even come back to Australia.*

Marco is someone who has packed a lot of walking into a short time, and he is certainly not ready to hang up his training shoes any time yet. I think we should all stay tuned for more news!

Tim Erickson  
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