

Two officials remained at the park all night to check the walkers at the end of each two miles and to attend to their wants. Three other officials assisted them at intervals. The competitors were supplied with coffee, energising fruits and other specially prepared food. Smith consumed a considerable amount of glucose.

Massage treatment was available to the walkers and they had the option of adjourning to snatch a brief sleep if they so desired. Those who completed the full day had little rest. An official stated last night that Smith had received some massage treatment, but had not been off the course for a total period of more than 15 minutes.

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| 1. Gordon Smith | 110 miles 831 yards |
| 2. Jack. Debert | 100 miles 266 yards |
| 3. Dave Stead | 80 miles 371 yards |
| 4. C. N. Smith | retired at 20 miles (4hrs 11m 3s) |

The winner's sectional checkings showed:

10 miles in 1h 54m 10s; 20 miles, 3h 51m 1s; 30 miles, 5h 49m 55s; 40 miles, 7h 56m 48s; 50 miles, 10h 7m 50s; 80 miles, 17h 2m 14s; **100 miles, 21h 38m 4s**; 110 miles, 23h 55m 20s.

A 30-mile scratch race held in addition to the long race

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| 1. Bill Hall | 5h 49m 55s |
| 2. Max Gentle | 6h 12m 45s |
| 3. Dorothy English (F) | 7h 11m 45s |

The Sydney Bush Walkers competitors were indeed a strong additional presence in the races. The November 1937 edition of the Sydney Bushwalker proclaimed:

Gordon Smith and Jack Debert walked for 24 hours, Gordon covering 110 miles and Jack 100. They are probably the only men in Australia to have accomplished such a feat. Dave Stead put up a fine showing also when he covered 80 miles in the 24 hours. In fact he says he holds a world record because he spent more time off the track than on it. Dot English saw to it that the women were not left out of things altogether; she came third in the 30 mile scratch race, Bill Hall and Max Gentle being the two first.

Now onto 1938 when, in the space of one month, Smith completed 12 hour and 24 hour walks and shattered all his current records. His 12 hour walk resulted in new State records for 50 miles and 100 km and 12 hours. His 24 hour walk broke his own NSW State record set the previous year.

Sept 17, 1938 NSW Amateur Walking Club 12 Hour Walking Trial, Centennial Park

The first of the 1938 Sydney walks was a 12 Hour Trial put on by the NSW Amateur Walking Club and staged in Centennial Park in Sydney on Saturday 17th September. The top NSW distance walkers were all present, but it was Smith who proved in a class of his own, winning by over 5 miles with an Australian record distance of 65 miles 781 yards. Along the way, he bettered his own 50 mile best time of 9:16, set in 1927, one of a swag of new records.

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| 1. Gordon Smith | 65 miles 781 yards | (50 miles in 8:50:25, 100 km in 11:21:30) |
| 2. Harry Barrett | 59 miles 1367 yards | |
| 3. Jack Debert | 57 miles 781 yards | |
| 4. Max Gentle | 54 miles 414 yards | |
| 5. M. Stannett | 53 miles 1514 yards | |
| Dorothy English | 40 miles in 10 hours and 20 mins | |
| Mary Stoddart | 32 miles in 7:39:15 | |

Sealed Handicap results: M Gentle 1, H Barrett 2, J Debert 3, G. A. Smith 4, M Stannett 5.

The following newspaper article recorded his feat as follows

Sunday 18.09.1938
SMITH SETS NEW RECORDS
Walked 65 Miles in Twelve Hours

At 7:30 a.m. yesterday, G.A. Smith, State 50 km champion, started to walk in Centennial Park. He stopped 12 hours later. He had covered 65 miles 781 yards, broken two records and probably set a third.

Smith, who was engaged in a 12 hours time trial, displayed the best form of his career. He left the mark with five others and, walking continually throughout the day over a two-mile lap course, finished at 7.30 last night.

He soon left the others behind and made the pace so hot at the beginning that D. G. Stead was forced to retire after covering 18 miles, suffering with cramp in the leg. Smith increased his lead with every circuit, and set new figures on two occasions and probably made a third one.

The first record came when he slipped past the 50 mile mark in 8:50:25, reducing his own 1927 figures by 16:35. He covered 100 km (62 miles 245 yards) in 11:21:30, setting a new State record for the distance.

With this added encouragement, he increased his pace to see the time out. This is the first occasion on which the event has been held in New South Wales and Smith's distance will be considered for record recognition.

He was remarkably fresh at the finish and said that he could have gone further. He will have an opportunity to do this on October 15, when he will attempt a 24 hour trial.

Smith finished with a lead of 5 miles 1174 yards from H. Barrett who was also walking strongly while J. Debert, M. Gentle and M. Stannett finished in that order. Smith's times for intermediate distances were: 10 miles 1:40:45; 20 miles 3:24:40; 30 miles 5:10:35; 40 miles 7:00:25; 50 miles 8:50:25; 60 miles 10:53:01; 100 km 11:31:30

**WALKED FOR
12 HOURS**



HIS AVERAGE SPEED was nearly 6 m.p.h. for 12 hours, so Gordon Smith, New South Wales 50 mile and 24 hour walking champion, could be excused for wiping the perspiration from his brow during the New South Wales walking marathon on Saturday, in Centennial Park

Oct 15-16, 1938 NSW Amateur Walking Club 24 Hour Walking Trial, Bankstown Oval

The second of the two Sydney based ultra distance walks of 1938 was just as astonishing. This time the NSW Amateur Walkers Club used the hard asphalt track around the Bankstown oval and Smith improved by over 3 miles on his 1937 24 Hour walk.

Five men and a girl started walking the event at 10:37 a.m. on Saturday 15 October. All were members of the NSW Amateur Walkers Club, with most also members of the Sydney Bush Walkers. The girl, Miss Mary Stoddart, a stockily built 22-year-old, had a reputation as a bush walker and hoped to establish a record for a 12 hours walk. Amongst the men, S. Sheedy was expected to drop out after 20 miles, it being his intention to establish a new NSWAWC record for that distance. The other contestants, all of whom hoped to stay on the track for the full time, were – G. A. Smith, D. D. Stead who was third last year, H. W. Barrett, an English walker who had previously competed in the London-Brighton walk and other events, and E. Mitchell.

Only a handful of officials and relatives and friends of the competitors were present to see the start. The men were initially bareheaded but there was a call for panama hats at around 11.30 a.m. from Mitchell and Stead. Sheedy and Barrett distained the head protection. They were refreshed at intervals with cups of tea, cocoa and glucose. Timekeepers and recorders worked in relays. Sheedy completed the first 5 miles in 45 min, 43sec with Smith and Barrett 4 laps back. Walking strongly, Sheedy reached his 20 mile mark in 3 hours 6 mins. 32 secs. to break the record by over 2 minutes and then retired. Smith began to draw away from the 48 year old Barrett while Stoddart walked her own race at the back of the field. Stead dropped out in the 143rd lap and Mitchell in the next, after covering about 38 miles. At a steady pace, Stoddart went round and round the track until she reached the 50 mile mark in 12 hours 16 minutes 45 seconds. Not surprisingly, she suffered from blistered feet and fatigue.

Barrett began to suffer from an ankle that was becoming worse with every step. He rested about 11.45 p.m. and had his ankle massaged with methylated spirits. He had then covered 58 miles and Smith was approximately 5 miles ahead of him. He made a gallant effort to continue, although in considerable pain, until he was persuaded to give in when he had done 78 miles. This left Smith on his own for the remainder of the race.

There was a large crowd at the ground at midnight, after the closing of the Bankstown picture theatres, and when the public realised it was illegal to charge for admission on Sundays. There was also a large number present at the finish. After the race, Smith paid tribute to his masseur who he said was a key factor in his success.

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| 1. Gordon Smith | 113 miles 1309 yards (New Australasian Record) |
| 2. Harry Barrett | retired at 78 miles |
| 3. Mary Stoddart | retired at 50 miles (12:16:41) |
| 4. E. Mitchell | retired at 38 miles (144 laps) with cramps |
| 5. Dave Shead | retired at 38 miles (143 laps) with cramps |
| 6. S. Sheedy | retired at 20 miles (3:06:32) |

Again, the newspaper report says it all

Mon 17.10.1938
WALK RECORD IN 24 HOURS TRIAL
G. A. Smith's Effort NEARLY 114 MILES

Gordon A. Smith, of Summer Hill, set what officials of the New South Walkers Amateur Walking Club claimed to be the first official Australian record for a 24 hours road walking trial during the weekend by covering 113 miles, 1309 ½ yards at Bankstown Oval.

Apart from tiredness and several blisters on his feet, Smith showed little sign of his gruelling experience and finished his walk strongly. Smith averaged more than four miles an hour. Last year he covered 110 miles, 871 yards on the Centennial Park Circuit.

There was a large crowd at the ground at midnight, after the closing of the Bankstown picture theatres and there were a large number of people present at the finish yesterday morning.

Smith continued on his lone walk through the night and was given an ovation when he passed his previous best distance of 110 miles at about 9:45 am. He had then walked round the track 450 times in 23 hours, 12 mins 45 secs. He was suffering from the heat and frequently placed a panama hat filled with water on his head. He was given a great reception at the finish.

Smith attributed his fitness to careful massage treatment. He had three-quarters of an hour's massage by his trainer, Mr Victor Revelle, before he started, and said that his muscles were in fine condition. After the event he was again massaged on the limbs.

Gordon Smith was retrospectively awarded the honour of Australian Centurion Number 1 when the Australian Chapter of the Centurions was formed in 1971. Unfortunately the results of the 1937 24 Hour race were not known at that time, resulting in two errors.

1. Firstly, Jack Debert's 1937 100 mile walk performance was not honoured. Badge number 2 was awarded to SA walker Jack Webber, in recognition of his 1971 100 mile walk in Adelaide.
2. Secondly, Gordon Smith was awarded Badge number 1 in recognition of his 1938 100 mile walk time of 20:58:09. This is displayed on our Centurion honour board. The official records have now been updated so that Badge number 1 reflects his 1937 100 mile walk performance of 21:38:04.

It was only in 2019 that Jack Debert's walk was unearthed and he was retrospectively awarded a special Badge 1A. As his 100 mile split was not known, his final 24 Hour distance of 100 Miles 266 Yards has been used to estimate a 100 mile time of approximately 23:59:00.

The first two centurion walks in Australia are now recorded as follows

C1	Gordon Smith	Centennial Park, Sydney	15-16 Oct 1937	21:38:04
C2	Jack Debert	Centennial Park, Sydney	15-16 Oct 1937	23:59:00 (approx)

You can read all about Gordon and Jack in the following two biographies:

Gordon Smith: <http://vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wa-gordon-smith.pdf>
 Jack Debert: <http://www.centurions.org.au/centprofiles/01A%20Jack%20Debert.pdf>

Tim Erickson
 Monday 24 February 2020