

OUTSTANDING MEMORIES OF THE PARISH

I've been meaning to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard since the end of June this year to share a few memories of the Parish with the club members in what I consider some of my favourite and most outstanding moments that have left an impression with me for nearly 50 years.

I never saw Stan (Cas) Cleator win the first walk in 1960 though my first proper memory of the Parish goes way back to the mid 1960's when Henry and Jimmy Harvey and Leece Kneale were the fast boys. Those were the days when the race started outside the Villa Marina on a Saturday around teatime, usually in May and many competitors used to walk in ordinary shoes and trousers and there were no recognised feeding stations enroute.

One of my earlier memories was in 1967 when my then mentor/coach in race walking Albert Johnson was the first walker to break the 16 hour barrier recording 15hrs 54mins 51seconds and after going off course slightly around the Bride area. Albert had only lived in the IOM (from Sheffield) for a couple of years and he didn't know that part of the Island well. Mind you quite a few Manx people don't know that area of the Island well either. Another talking point in the early 1960's was the retirement of Herbie Cannell (Rosie Crellin's father) at Lonan. A popular athlete who later became a publican at the Hawthorne. I'm afraid Herbie took a lot of stick about that and was never allowed to forget it but it was all taken in good humour. Ironically Herbie attracted more attention and fuss through not finishing than he would have done had he finished.

I remember watching the 1968 Parish as Leece Kneale was winning the race by a country mile and had a 'blinder' crossing the line in 16hrs 05.52 not too far adrift of Albert Johnson's record set the previous year. However, this was to be a controversial walk as Leece never belonged to an athletics club, a rule which was well known to the competitors, so he was disqualified and second place finisher Ian Turnbull was credited with the victory. Ian's time was a modest 18.50.44 by comparison to Leece's effort. Ian always acknowledged that Leece won the race, but rules are rules, was how he described it.

It was also about this time that I became interested myself in race walking as every year there was a Parish Walk relay that was held. I think this was over six legs and I was going to write an article about this event which was held more or less throughout the 1960's and finished around 1971. May be one day.

Cyril Evans from Coventry (big friends of the late Johnny Quine) was another character who came on the scene in 1969 and finished several Parishes the last being in 1981. I believe he was in his early 70's then which at the time made him the oldest competitor to complete the distance. In the 1970 Parish there was a funny story which involved Dudley Seddon from the Midlands, who when arriving in Maughold decided to take a rest on a nearby bench and then fell asleep. Denis Lace or Kevin Madigan had to waken him up. Amazingly Dudley went on to win that race from Stan Sille and Derek Harrison. Stan's fine second was without doubt down to the fact that I walked alongside him (but not paced) for about 15 miles around the Maughold mark. Of course I jest and I often remind Stan of this in a joking manner. Obviously I wouldn't be allowed to do that these days.

I have to say though, the 1971 Parish for me still remains the outstanding race of all the 50 or so held since 1960. An extraordinary battle took place between Derek Harrison, who was fairly new to the sport, but supremely fit and strong, up against the diminutive figure of the long distance walker Graham Young, who unlike Derek was well established in the sport. For miles they were hardly separated by more than about a minute in fact right until the end. As a comparison I always saw this

as the Carl Fogarty v Steve Hislop of the TT i.e. an epic contest. No quarter was given and with Graham leading for most of the second half. Derek refused to let Graham out of his sight and tried everything humanly possible to get on terms with him. Graham was able to keep him at bay and finished in a new record of 15hrs 43mins 12secs and Derek was only just 54 seconds behind. Both men were absolutely spent at the end, as they had given their all.

Another Parish that stands out for me was John Cannell's first win in 1976 when he won in 17.28.12. John had overcome a serious illness only several years earlier so you can imagine how popular that win was. Murray Lambden, at still only 19, was also a popular second in 18.53.25. The following year in 1977 amazingly saw just one finisher, namely Steve Gardner who was the only walker to master the extremely hot conditions. Incidentally Steve was the first walker to walk consecutive 10 Parishes. A year later (1978) Murray Lambden became the youngest competitor to win the parish at the age of 21 years when he clocked an impressive 16.19.37. However, I might add that Graham Young I think on the first Parish (or was it the second?) completed the full distance at the age of about 15. Because of his age he did not appear in the results.

And of course one of the best walks ever was Derek's win in 1979 when he recorded 15 hrs 20 mins 51secs. This record was to stand for 27 years. If I can just add to that in 1977 Derek walked a 24 hours track walk in Rouen, France. He walked 136 miles or so which at the time was a world record. I don't think that distance has been bettered by many walkers since and many decent ultra distance runners have not run that far. Factor in Derek's speed over the 24 hour walk was about the same as his Parish Walk speed and that's with a further 50 miles to walk. That beggars belief. I think we can say that Derek had peaked around 1977 in long distance walking and it does raise the question had he had someone to push him in the Parish around the mid 70's like Graham Young for instance what time they could have done.

During the early 1980's, John Cannell was the man and created history by becoming the first person to record a hatrick of consecutive wins. In fact the second time John won it in 1980 Irene Corlett was second in 17.41.40 which hailed a real breakthrough for women in the Parish. Shortly after that Willie Corkill achieved the same feat as John when he recorded three consecutive wins.

In 1988 was a Parish I remember fondly as Martin Lambden (Murray's brother) won the race for the first time. It was about the only Parish I've really missed in the last 30 years, though I did manage to see one or two walkers around Colby as I was on my way down to the airport to go on holiday to Italy. Amazingly when Linda and I were in Venice we both bumped into Murray and Marie in Venice. Murray was proud to tell me that Martin had contacted the hotel where he was staying to say he had won – probably a surprise to a few that win. Of course Martin's win created Parish history as Murray had won it in 1978, as they are the only brothers to have won it.

It would be around that time when another interesting talking point happened. A nurse packed in at Onchan only because she had to go back to work at the hospital. Had she finished, and the story goes she could have done, she would have been late for her shift and possibly would have been sacked.

Around the late 80's, early 90's Charlie Weston came on the scene and won on two occasions. I well remember seeing Charlie around 1995 coming into Peel and lying down on the bench, totally exhausted. A drink and a banana later and within five minutes he was up and away heading towards Kirk Michael. And you've guessed it he went on to finish and in 3rd place. How many times have I seen that? I also remember Roy Corlett struggling one year around that period coming up the Sloc

(23 miles) and suffering from severe cramp and was thinking of calling it a day but after a quick leg massage, miraculously went on against all odds to complete the 85 miles.

Graham Young's return to the Parish in 1992 was an impressive feat as he had been out of action from race walking from several years but still won it in 16hrs 28.37. A year or two after that the Parish did not go to Peel for the first time ever as the event clashed with the Karts which were held round the streets there, so the Peel Town Hall was for that year in effect St Johns. I also think it was that year (1994?) that Peter Speers managed to get to St Johns with his father. A distance of around 32 miles and Peter suffers from muscular problems.

Robbie Callister's period of the late 90's and early 00's stand out as one of the most consistent and dominant displays we've seen by a competitor in this event, only broken up by Peter Kaneen's two wins in 2000 and 2003. Peter's fine effort in 2003 of 15.26.07 at the time was the second fastest ever recorded, only Derek Harrison recording faster. Incidentally Robbie recorded five wins around this period.

Then in 2006 along came Sean Hands to smash Derek Harrison's record to smithereens. That record had stood for 27 years and Sean broke it by 33 minutes to record an incredible 14hrs 47mins 36secs. That year Robbie Callister also broke Derek's record by becoming the second fastest with 15hrs 16mins 3 secs. That performance was perhaps overlooked because of Sean's fantastic effort.

Dru Hamm finishing at Santon (11 miles) was another amazing feat that I well recall in 2009. The previous year Dru got as far as Marown (4 miles). An amazing achievement as she suffered from cerebral palsy all her life. A truly courageous character who raised thousands for charity. Sadly Dru is no longer with us due to tragic circumstances but left a mark on the event and with everyone who met her in her much too short life. She defied doctors to manage this feat and remains an inspiration to everyone.

Of course the wettest and windiest year that most people can remember was in 2008 when it poured down relentlessly for hours and even hailed going up the Sloc. Just to finish that year was an achievement. Jock Waddington won the race in a very creditable time of 15hrs 44mins when you consider the conditions. Sue Biggart coming 5th that year and Janice Quirk, a virtual unknown to race walking finishing in a very impressive 10th place, which flagged up a warning to not only Sue for the following year but to all the top male walkers.

And so it was that Janice Quirk produced an incredible performance in 2009 when she finished second to Jock Waddington in an outstanding time of 15hrs 58mins 35 secs. Arguably this may be the best ever performance yet pound for pound, male or female. Incredible when you think she had only been involved in walking or indeed athletics for three years prior to that. Her time knocked 18 minutes off Sandra Brown's previous female record which was set in 1998. A time that the ever consistent Sue Biggart had threatened to break herself until Janice came along.

Naturally it would be remiss of me not to mention Bethany Clague as in that wet Parish of 2008 she not only completed the 85 miles but went on to do another lap. Bethany raised thousands for charity and for the Hyperbaric Chamber.

In 2010 Jock became only the 3rd person to win three Parish Walks in consecutive years. In so doing he joined John Cannell and Willie Corkill. Jock's time of 15hrs 18mins 6 secs is now the 4th fastest ever. Personally, I think with this year being one of the hottest on record, that performance by Jock is definitely worth sub 15 hours and when you think that he was on record time schedule for about

half of the distance, it does make you wonder had it not been so warm and the fact that no one was really challenging him, what time he would have recorded. Who knows!

I feel that Jock may rule the roost for several years now and could be the man to break John Cannell's record of 6 wins. If I am right and he goes on to break Sean's record, which I believe he will and given good conditions (whether he's on his own or not) then in my opinion he will earn the title of the best Parish Walker we have seen - King of the Parish. Time will tell.

You can go on for ever recalling stories for ever and here are a list many performances that have impressed me.

Dudley Butt's brave and heroic (and mad) effort to finish with a bad back from Lonan and to have the worst feet I have ever seen after a walk, blood everywhere in his shoes and blisters on blisters stands out as one of the gutsiest efforts I've seen. David Callister's amazing streak of 27 finishes just ahead of Ray Hughes and Tony Kneale is worthy of mention. Noel Cringle never actually finished the Parish but completed over 30 walks to Peel with never actually finishing the full 85 miles. Dave Fereday who entered the first walk back in 1960 (but didn't finish) and returned this year to finish the 85 miles at the age of 73. He wants to be the oldest and fastest competitor, but he's got Mike Gray to contend with yet, who is the oldest competitor to finish the Parish and also competed and finished in the 1960 event. Also we have had one or two competitors who have walked round the course in the reverse way – all for charity. Keith Wilkinson is certainly one of them. Keith has completed the event 5 times and is a centurion like a lot of other Parish Walk finishers.

Lee Cain always impressed me and finished five times during the 90's finishing second on three occasions and actually won the event in 1996. Although Lee's times were nothing special by today's standards, the fact that he hardly did any training for the event and was really a footballer makes you wonder what he could have achieved with serious training behind him.

Angie Aire to name one of several walkers has quite recently raised a lot of money for charity for Breast Cancer which is admirable indeed. Also the sight of a group of Army walkers walking all the way to Peel in their uniform during the 1990's and more recently and singing most of the way brings back great memories.

Dougie Allan's return to race walking in 1998 was a great sight as he hadn't done any serious walking for decades and was one of the fastest walkers around over the shorter distances in the mid 1960's to early 1970's. A few years after his comeback in 2000 and 2002 he finished 2nd which was very creditable.

Other notable performances have been from Rose Crellin who managed a streak of 10 consecutive finishers i.e. 2000 to 2009 inclusive and Irene Taggart has walked the distance over 10 times also.

I also took great delight in witnessing last year's (2009) finisher Ed Shillabeer, a super fit quadathlon competitor and centurion, at the age of 69 recorded a time of 17hrs 51 mins for 17th place. That is some going for a man of his age. The Parish was always an event Ed had wanted a crack at.

Another talking point for me this year was 3rd place finisher Michael George who was sick very early on in the race, possibly due to the heat or something that he had eaten, but still managed to grind it out and finish in an impressive time. Of course there have been other instances where walkers have

pushed themselves to the limit and against all odds have arrived on the Douglas promenade the following day.

I recall there are even stories, particularly in the early days of competitors receiving lifts from attendants and friends during the period of darkness, and even running in some cases just trying to gain an advantage over their rivals. How true this was, I'm not sure.

One thing is for certain every year there is talking point and in 2011 there no doubt will be more memories and who knows there may be another record of entrants, perhaps 1800. The event goes from strength to strength, though given the number of walkers these days and the increase in traffic, it is becoming a logistical nightmare, what with health and safety and having enough marshals available etc, has meant that the event has rather become a victim of its own success. But as long as the organisation carries on in the same efficient manner under the leadership of Liz Corran and Ray Cox and with a strong committee, then hopefully the event will avoid any serious incidents.

The coverage of the press, radio and the fantastic Parish Walk website set up by Murray Lambden just adds to the event now and it is wonderful to think that you can follow the event by staying at home and going online checking for a particular competitor's progress. A far cry from the old days when dear old Arthur Jones and his band of helpers used to stay up all night recording times and then writing out certificates (with no sleep) the next day, in time for the prize presentation on the Sunday evening. How things have changed – and for the better.

Roll on 2011. I really must get round to finishing this event one year myself, before I'm too old.

Robbie Lambie

PS Apologies if my facts aren't totally spot on – but I've misplaced Dermot O'Toole's book of the Parish. I must thank Murray Lambden though for his fantastic database on the Parish, without that I would not have been able to include times, years and positions in this article.