

I missed this at the time, so this obituary catches up with the passing of **Colin Raymond “Col” Bailey**, who was born in South Australia in 1937 and who died in Tasmania in February 2022.

Col was a well known naturalist and author who moved to Tasmania in 1990, convinced that the elusive Tasmanian Tiger was still to be found in the wilds of that island. He became a world expert on the thylacine and published 3 books on the subject

- Tiger Tales (2001)
- Shadow of the Thylacine (2010)
- Lure of the Thylacine (2013)



Col in Tasmania in later life (photo <https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au>)

I was lucky enough to meet Col in 2008 and have his book *Lure of the Thylacine* at home. His life is of interest to us as, in his younger days, he was a top flight long distance walker who first came to prominence in 1962, with the inaugural staging of the 53.2 miles walking race from Adelaide to Murray Bridge.

Unlike the flat NSW or Victorian courses, this race saw walkers climb out of Adelaide and then negotiate the many long rolling hills as they made their way east. It was not a course for the faint hearted. The race officially started from the Adelaide Town Hall and finished at the Murray Bridge Town Hall. Six walkers fronted the start for the 53.2 mile event at 5:35AM on 2nd July 1962 but, of the starters, only Col Bailey and Jim Forrest completed the course, the other 4 dropping out at various points along the way. Final results were

1.	Col Bailey	9:13:24
2.	Jim Forrest	9:45:55
	Peter Whitham	Retired at 40 miles
	John Corrie	Retired at 30 miles
	M Parrott	Retired at 25 miles
	B Carter	Retired at 10 miles

Col broke several road bests along the way:

- A new South Australian 25 mile best of 4 hours 1 minutes (beating the current record by 9 minutes)
- A new South Australian 50 km best of 5 hours 7 minutes (beating the current record by 9 minutes)
- **A new Australian 50 mile best of 8:37:40**, beating the 1932 record of 8:38:32, held by Victorian Joe O'Farrell.

Col's personal comments from his diary add some flavour to what would otherwise be a dry report.

It was a fine, mild mid-winter's morning and warmed considerably as the day wore on. We all stuck together as a bunch until Glen Osmond and, as we headed up into the hills, the less fitter walkers began to drop back. Jim

Forrest, Peter Whitham and I stuck together until reaching 'the Devils Elbow' and the steep climb began to take its toll. Whitham dropped off and Forrest stuck with me until Crafers where I slowly moved away. (Please keep in mind that this race was entirely on the old road, most of which has now been superseded by the freeway) By the time I reached Stirling I was feeling superb and was by then, well out in front. It was about there I had my last drink until I reached the 40 mile mark in the afternoon, and this very nearly brought me undone. I had moved so far away from the others that the grub waggon had forgotten all about me and concentrated on those remaining, who were up to thirty minutes behind at that stage. As I came out of the hills past Kanmantoo and began walking through the flatter country of Monarto, the heat really built up and, with my face caked with salt, my mouth parched and my body screaming out for water, I was in big trouble. When the chief Judge, Claude Knight, came along I told him I would have to pull out if I didn't soon get water, and within 10 minutes I had my water, right at the 40 mile peg. It was then I learnt of my actual time because up to then I had no idea how fast I was going. I realised that I had blown my pre-arranged schedule to bits and my time was almost an hour faster than I had expected at that stage. I was now in unknown territory, never having walked that far before. I must admit, I was feeling really stuffed by then, I had well and truly hit that fabled wall, but fortunately the water and a few salt tablets got me going again and my mile rate began to pick up. I didn't eat anything because I feared it would upset my stomach. When they told me I was in sight of a 50 mile record I really got stuck into it again. I had no idea what the record actually was, or even who held it, that was never in my mind, but it gave me the incentive I needed to finish strongly. I learnt many valuable lessons from that walk, namely to keep walking through adversity and never give in, and to think positively, not to mention continually reminding yourself of all the darned hard training you put in over many months. The fact that I walked so much of the race alone didn't seem to worry me until the last 10 miles when I began looking over my shoulder, because I had no idea how far Forrest was behind me, but I needn't have worried. I went into the race weighing 122 lbs and finished weighing 114 lbs. Fortunately it wasn't a windy day because good burst of wind and they would never have seen me again.

Reminiscing in 2008. Col added some additional details

At the time I was living out in the country, 23 miles from Adelaide at a little place called Kangarilla and I did all my training alone on rough, unlit bush roads. I would arrive home from work just before dark and hit the road training - regardless of the weather - in the dark: 10 mile Tuesday, 20 mile Wednesday, 10 mile Thursday, race on the Saturday and a good long walk Sunday. Every third Sunday. I would do a 35-40 mile country circuit, up hill and down dale which took me anything up to seven hours. It was time on my feet that counted and back then you could train reasonably safely on the roads, unlike today. I had an old 1939 Chev sedan at the time and measured all my walk routes thoroughly to know exactly how far I was walking. I did three months of solid, relentless training for that walk; my wife called herself a 'walking widow', because I thought about little else for the whole three months, but in the end it was worth it.



Col in walking mode in South Australia, circa 1962

Col's new Australian 50 Mile best did not last long. The Victorian 50 Mile walk, held 3 months later in Melbourne, saw Jim Gleeson improve his best time by 27 minutes to set a new Australian best time of **8:15:19**. It would take 13 years before another Australian would better that time. Col made the trip to Victoria for the race but was forced to retire after a persistent hip problem sent him lame around the half way mark.

Col eventually retired from the sport of racewalking and moved onto other things, raising a family and earning a living. But he harboured a life long fascination with the thylacine which had been declared probably extinct after the last known one died in captivity in 1936.

When Col retired in 1990, he and his wife moved to Tasmania and settled in New Norfolk. The new environment ideally suited his passion for bushwalking, fishing, hunting, canoeing and other outdoor pursuits. It also allowed him to fully explore his decades-long passion for the thylacine and he developed a reputation as an expert on the subject. "I wanted to find out for myself whether it still existed in Tasmania. Up to that point I'd only read about it."

Col spent years tracking down and interviewing bushies, especially fur hunters, to hear first-hand their experiences of dealing with live thylacines. He was certain that the Tasmanian tiger was not extinct and he spent much time searching in the South-West wilderness. His *Tiger Tales* column in the Derwent Valley Gazette led to a book publishing deal, and the world's media beat a path to his door in Maydena.

I finish with some links, published at the time of Col's passing

- <https://newnorfolknews.com/2022/03/farewell-col-bailey-thylacine-true-believer/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Col_Bailey
- <https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/country-living/col-bailey-has-dedicated-his-life-to-the-mystery-of-the-tasmanian-tiger/news-story/c9d94d5d4657af3486e30f33a1102fe9>
- <http://www.cryptozoonews.com/bailey-obit/>

By way of postscript, potential thylacine sightings have become fewer and fewer in recent years and it is now likely that, even if they did still exist in the wild 30 years ago, time has now caught up with them.

Tim Erickson
14th July 2023