

SID BARBER – ADELAIDE TO MELBOURNE, 1931

Nowadays, our planning for any athletic endeavour is detailed and thorough – money is normally not an obstacle and supporters, coaches and family are ready to do what is required to ensure success. But this has not always been the case – in the midst of the Great Depression, a South Australian walker attempted what would test us even now – a solo unsupported walk of nearly 600 miles.

Sid Barber, a well known pedestrian of earlier times and widely recognised throughout South Australia for his comments on athletics under the name of 'Old Ped', set out at midnight on Monday 16 February 1931 from the Adelaide GPO in an attempt to walk from Adelaide to Melbourne in 11 days. With a total distance of 596 miles, he would need to average 52 miles a day.



Sid barber is bid farewell as he sets out from the Adelaide GPO at midnight on Monday 16 February 1931

The scheduling of his walk in what is traditionally the hottest month of summer was a gamble. All he was carrying was a small swag and a water bag, and he hoped that passing motorists would take them ahead for him and leave them at towns where he had arranged to spend nights.



Sid Barber with his swag and water bag en route to Melbourne

He covered 63 miles on his first day, stopping at Wellington on the Murray on the Tuesday evening. On the way, he had stopped for an hour by the road and had enjoyed a swim in Lake Alexandrina. He commented that he had filled his water bag 5 times and used it mainly by gargling.

After a rest in Wellington, he pushed on to Meningie (93 miles) where he arrived mid afternoon the next day. He then slept until about midnight before setting out on the lonely track through the Coorong where hot weather was expected.

Barber reached the half-way house at Salt Creek on Thursday night and left on Friday. He was then slightly behind schedule but hoping to make up time on the better roads.

At one time employed in the postal department as a letter carrier, it was while 'padding the hoof' that he got his liking for the 'heel and toe' sport. Now, aged 50 and with a career in amateur walking behind him, the President of the Plympton Athletics Club had trained for about 5 weeks for his big task, his preparation being 14-mile walks in the evening. He had previous experience of long distance walking, having covered 50 miles on an Adelaide to Darlington course in 1916 in 9½ hours. That was 12 minutes better than the official Australian record but, being a road time, not eligible for record status.

Messrs. Griffiths Brothers had offered to provide him with supply of tea and chocolate and these had been forwarded to various places.

The Melbourne newspaper recorded his arrival in Melbourne some 2 weeks later

*NEARLY 600 MILES
Veteran's Long Walk*

Sunburnt, a little tired and nursing a blistered heel, Sid Barber, 50, a South Australian athlete, walked into Melbourne on Monday and so finished his 596-mile walk from Adelaide. He was 13½ days on the road.

Barber attempted to make the journey in 11½ days but a blistered heel and strong head winds at certain stages of his walk robbed him of the chance.

Although he is disappointed at his failure to do the journey in the time he set himself, Barber believes it is possible to make the trip with favourable weather.

With the exception of four occasions, he slept under the stars, hedges being his only shelter. His staple food was a pound of chocolate a day and billies of tea.

It took 48 years before Barber's 11 day projection was realised and it was achieved by another well known South Australian walking identity, Jack Webber. Jack, then aged 64, set off from Melbourne on Wednesday 15 August 1979 and reached Adelaide on Saturday August 25. His performance set a new walk record for Melbourne to Adelaide with an epic 10 days 2 hours 30 mins. Jack regarded this as perhaps his greatest achievement and he had the privilege of being accompanied by former Olympian Marjorie Jackson over the last few hundred metres - amid a great reception - to the Adelaide Town Hall.

Presumably Sid Barber's 13 days still remains the record for a walk from Adelaide to Melbourne.