

## ÉMILE ANTHOINE, THE FATHER OF FRENCH WALKING

Fifty years ago, on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1969, Émile Anthoine, one of the greatest sports leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the father of French racewalking, died.

Here is his story :

Émile Anthoine was born on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1882 in Paris. In 1891, he competed in his first competition. In 1896, at 14 years of age, he became secretary of the UA Batignolles, a sports association of his district.

Rarely has there been a more versatile and talented athlete than Anthoine. Consider some of these milestones from his career.

- In 1903, he finished second in the first footrace from Bordeaux to Paris, 611km in 5 days and 3 hours. <sup>1</sup>
- In 1904, he ran from Paris to Troyes, a distance of 170km, in 15 hours. En route, he passed the 50km mark in 3:14 and the 100km mark in a new world record mark of 7:25.
- He was just as adept in mountain running, circumnavigating the Mont Blanc massif, a distance of 170km in 32 hours.
- As if that was not enough, he won French championships in a number of different disciplines, including the 1500m run (4'07), the shot put (12m), the long jump (6.16) and the half mile run (1:57).
- He is listed as setting 3 French distance records <sup>2</sup>

10,000m	32:57.0	Emile Anthoine	1903	Armantiers
3000m	8:59.9	Emile Anthoine	1908	Braisne
800m	1:58.8	Emile Anthoine	1910	

and as holding the World Record for 800 yards (1:46.8).



*Left: 1911 - Emile Anthoine 1500m French champion*

*Right: 1913 - mile Anthoine running on a velodrome*

Having achieved so much on the running front, he turned his talents to racewalking, with an amazing two month period in 1913 rewriting the record books.

- On 6<sup>th</sup> July 1913 in Paris, he covered the 50km walk in 4:30:34. This could not be promoted as a world record as the 50km walk was not yet officially recognised by the IAAF and was not included in the Olympics until 1932. On this occasion, he prolonged his effort until the 100km mark which he reached in 10:15.

<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Giffard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Giffard)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://thegreatdistancerunners.de/france.html>

- A week later, on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1913, he walked an even faster 50km, with 4:22:47. Done on a grass track on the Longchamp racecourse in Paris, his interim 20km split of 1:37:57 was recognised as a World Record.
- Five weeks later, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1913, he won the 50km “world championship” in Ghent, Belgium, in 4:32:14. On this occasion, he continued to the 5 Hour mark, recording a final distance of 54.312km. <sup>3</sup>

To put his 20km walk time into perspective, consider the official IAAF 20km walk record progression, which dates from 1911 <sup>4</sup>. His time of 1:37:57 broke Hermann Müller’s time by nearly 2 minutes and would last for 20 years until eventually bettered by Václav Balšán in 1933.

1:38:43	Hermann Müller (GER)	1911-10-04	Berlin, Germany
1:37:57	Émile Anthoine (FRA)	1913-07-13	Paris, France
1:34:15	Václav Balšán (TCH)	1933-08-13	Ceský Brod, Czechoslovakia

His 50km times of 4:30:34, 4:22:47 and 4:32:14 were also well ahead of his rivals and would last for many years. The official IAAF 50km world record progression, initiated in 1921 <sup>5</sup>, shows that his best time of 4:22:47 would not be bettered until 1952!

4:40:15	Hermann Müller (GER)	1921-09-07	Munich, Germany
4:36:22	Karl Hähnel (GER)	1924-09-24	Berlin, Germany
4:34:03	Paul Sievert (GER)	1924-10-05	Munich, Germany
4:30:22	Romano Vecchiotti (ITA)	1928-09-16	Rome, Italy
4:26:41	Edgar Bruun (NOR)	1936-06-28	Oslo, Norway
4:24:47	Viggo Ingvorsen (DEN)	1941-08-17	Odense, Denmark
4:23:40	Josef Doležal (TCH)	1946-08-04	Podebrady, Czechoslovakia
4:23:14	Josef Doležal (TCH)	1952-08-24	Podebrady, Czechoslovakia
4:20:30	Vladimir Ukhov (URS)	1952-08-29	Leningrad, Soviet Union

Alas, the First World War in 1914 ended Anthoine’s sporting ambitions, but his love for sport survived the conflict and he returned from the front to become an influential post-war leader of the French Athletics Federation.

He returned to walking, although now regarded as past his prime, and was still competitive. In 1929, he recorded 12:00 for 100km and in 1932, aged 50, he recorded 5:12 for the 50km walk.



*Left: 1921 – Émile Anthoine training at the Longchamp racecourse  
Right: 19<sup>th</sup> October 1924 - Émile Anthoine finishes a 100km walk in 12h39 at Vésinet*

<sup>3</sup> See <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4626346p/f5.item> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4626344v/f1.item>

<sup>4</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men%27s\\_20\\_kilometres\\_walk\\_world\\_record\\_progression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men%27s_20_kilometres_walk_world_record_progression)

<sup>5</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men%27s\\_50\\_kilometres\\_walk\\_world\\_record\\_progression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men%27s_50_kilometres_walk_world_record_progression)

In June 1925, deep differences on how to organize racewalking saw him excluded from the French Athletics Federation. 15 days later, he created the French Federation of Racewalking (FFM). The new Federation grew quickly and, by the end of 1925, had gathered about 1000 racewalkers.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1926, Anthoine created the International Walking Federation. Initially it included the French, Swiss, Belgian, Luxembourg, Dutch and Italian Federations, and it grew from there. Anthoine was elected president of this Federation, where he organized many championships and international matches.

In 1926, the FFM organized 156 events throughout France. Among them was the longest walk competition in the world, from Paris to Strasbourg (504km) <sup>6</sup>, which was the brainchild of Anthoine. The event was an immediate success, exceeding all his expectations. Like the Tour de France cycling race, the event attracted large crowds, with tens of thousands of spectators crowd lining the roads to watch the competitors pass.

In 1929, the FFM became the French Union of Racewalking (UFM). By 1939, the UFM had 2584 clubs and had organized more than 10000 events since its inception in 1926. Anthoine remained as President until 1965.

Controversies in the 1924 Olympic Games had spelt an end to Olympic track walking and indeed nearly spelt the end of walking itself, with all walks ruled out of the 1928 Amsterdam Games. Anthoine was one of those who campaigned strongly for a 50km event to be held at the 1932 Los Angeles Games in place of the usual short track walks. The push was successful and racewalking was saved.

In 1944, Anthoine returned to competition and, aged 62, he walked the 5000m walk in 28:44 and the 10km in 58:32. These are impressive times even today.

In 1954, he created the National Youth Day, which gathered young French walkers, from 8 to 22 years of age, to compete in tests of 1Hour, 30 Minutes, etc. This competition is still held today.



*Émile Anthoine (wearing beret) with competitors Henri Caron and Maurice Chassaing at the finish of the French Championship at Audun-le-tiche*

In 1958, he is designated as "First Sportsman of France"

On April 2, 1965, the French Union of Racewalking (UFM) returned to the French Athletics Federation, 40 years after leaving it. Anthoine signed the merger agreement which dissolved the UFM, then stepped down as President, having held that role for the full 40 years of its existence.

Émile Anthoine died on December 14, 1969, in his 88<sup>th</sup> year, in his house in Colombes. He is buried in the Batignolles cemetery, close to where he was born.

In total, he had competed in more than 1000 competitions (for 800 wins), organised over 1000 events and helped to create more than 600 sporting clubs.

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6 See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris-Colmar>

A sports center with a track and a swimming pool, on the Champ de Mars, in the Eiffel Tower district in Paris, bears his name. <sup>7</sup>



*Left: Émile Anthoine at home in 1967*

*Right: Émile Anthoine in 1920 on a 100km walk – this was his favourite picture*

A selection of his Personal Bests indicate what a talented multi-discipline athlete he was.

100m run	11" 3/5	1914
200m run	23" 2/5	1912
400m run	52" 1/5	1908
800m run	1'57" 1/5	1910
1500m run	4'07" 2/5	1909
3000m run	8:59	1908
5000m run	15:29	1907
10000m run	32:57	1903
1hour run	17.320 km	1905
20000m run	1:08:44	1906
Long jump	6m16	
High Jump	1m65	
Shot put	11m84	
Discus	35m12	
10km walk	48:32	
20km walk	1:37:57	
30km walk	2:30:26	
50km walk	4:22:47	
100km walk	10:15	
200km walk	27:50	

Interestingly, Anthoine argued in favor of the introduction of a 100km walk at the Olympic Games. He had travelled to the 1936 Olympic Berlin and was not impressed with the racewalking techniques on show. He wrote (excusing the poor Google translation!)

*The Olympic walk is doomed. Yes, it is well doomed ... if we do not transform it into a 100 km race, with, if we want a classification by nation on two men per time, a maximum of four entered per nation.*

*In 1924, after the Games, I predicted the demise of the 10 kilometer track event, after the trotting walkers and pseudo-referees scandal. I recommended 50 or 100 kilometers on the road. They took up my idea in 1929 to add a 50 kilometer road walk to the 1932 Games. But that it is no longer sufficient. And besides, in running, there is the Marathon over 42 kilometers which is about the same distance, but takes all the interest.*

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.paris.fr/equipements/centre-sportif-emile-anthoine-3056>

*So let's go to 100 kilometers.... Or nothing at all! The failure of Berlin should make those around the world take care of walking.*

This idea never came to fruition, but the Paris-Colmar Classic continues to this day, as a fitting memorial to his vision.

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