

MABEL ROBINSON (NEE MOAD)

Australian women were finally given the chance to compete in amateur athletics in 1928, with the formation of the women's clubs in Sydney. Melbourne followed soon after with their own women's clubs. The Australian Women's Amateur Athletic Union (AWAAA) was formed in 1932 and women finally had their own environments in which to compete, both within their own State and nationally.

One of the AWAAA's first tasks was to organise inaugural Australian Women's Track and Field Championships, which were held in Melbourne in March 1933. The program was comprehensive – 100 yards, 220 yards, 440 yards, 880 yards, 90 yards hurdles, 880 yards walk, high jump, long jump, shot put, discus, javelin and 4x110 yards relay. Entries were small and the cost of travel and time from work during the Depression made it hard for athletes to participate. Nevertheless, the full program was completed, with Victoria and NSW winning five events each.

An 880 yards walk was held for the first time and was won by Victorian **Mabel Moad**, a tennis player who had joined Malvern Harriers more for fitness and who had entered a walk as a joke. However, she found she had ability at this event and started to train seriously for it.

Mabel's winning 880 yards time of 4:00.3 was granted the status of an inaugural Australian record. However, she may well have heard of young Sydney based prodigy **Lorna Carrington** who had been regularly breaking 4 minutes for the 880 yards walks over the previous few years. Lorna had won the 1933 NSW Women's T&F Championships 440 yards walk in a State record of 1:40.3 in February but did not travel to Melbourne for the inaugural Australian Women's Championships the following month.

880 YARDS WALK - Women - Saturday 25 March 1933

1	Mabel Moad	VIC	4:00.3
2	Phyllis Hicks	SA	4:04.0
3	Eddie Smith	NSW	4:07.0
4	Elsie Edwards	VIC	4:12.0
5	Emily Neville	VIC	4:12.2
6	Nora Pierce	SA	4:20.0
	Dot Donaldson	NSW	DQ
	Dot Wiltshire	SA	DQ



Mabel Moad competing in the Victorian colours in the early 1930s. She was generally regarded as a near perfect stylist (photo Paul Jenes, Fields of Green, Lanes of Gold)

Mabel had an impressive career on the local front, winning 8 Victorian Women's 880 yard walk medals (silvers in 1931, 1935 and 1937, golds in 1932, 1933, 1934 and 1936 and bronze in 1939).

Victorian Women's 880 Yards Walk Championships

1931	Hazel Scott	4.13.8	Mabel Moad	1 yd	D. Sinclair
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1932	Mabel Moad	4.11.1	Emily Neville	20 yds	B. Cooper	5 yds
1933	Mabel Moad	4.04.0	Elsie Edwards	4.15	Emily Neville	4.21
1934	Mabel Moad	4.04.1	Elsie Edwards	6 yds	Hazel Day	20 yds
1935	Elsie Edwards	4.01.6	Mabel Moad	15 yds	Betty Wilson	
1936	Mabel Moad	4.01.6	Jill Bond	15 yds	Maisie James	30 yds
1937	Maise James	3.58.4	Mabel Moad	inches	Rose Roberts	20 yds
1938	Maise James	3.48.6	Jill Bond		Elsie Capel	
1939	Maise James	3.51.1	Elsie Capel		Mabel Moad	

On the national level, Mabel followed up her inaugural gold in 1933 with silvers in the next 3 Australian Women's 880 yards championships, behind Lorna Carrington of NSW and then Maise James of Victoria. In all the races, little separated the women over such a short distance.

1933	Mabel Moad	VIC	4:00.3	Phyllis Hicks	SA	4:04.0	Edie Smith	NSW	4:07.0
1935	Lorna Carrington	NSW	3:49	Mabel Moad	VIC	3:55.4	Elsie Edwards	VIC	
1936	Lorna Carrington	NSW	3:59.2	Mabel Moad	VIC	2 ½ yds	Edith Campbell	NSW	
1937	Maise James	VIC	3:55.3	Mabel Moad	VIC		Jill Bond	VIC	

But while the young Lorna focused solely on her walking, Mabel had a much wider world view and was involved administratively in women's athletics right from the start.

In the mid 1920s, along with Dot Merrick, she started a women's section of the Victorian Amateur Walkers' Club (VAWC). It was called the Victorian Women's Walking Club and provided a means of allowing women to officially racewalk.

In 1929, Mabel was one of the women who formed the VWAAA and started women's athletics in Victoria. She was a finish judge, recorder, field judge and track and field referee, finding time to compete when she could. It was during this time that she met her future husband Alf Robinson, who was assisting with the startup. He marked the grounds each week and filled in as timekeeper, starter and equipment officer. Thus started a long partnership which eventually saw Alf and Mabel marry and work together in furthering athletics in Australia.

Mabel was Vice-President of the VWAAA from 1932 to 1948 and became President in 1952, a position she held until 1978. She was appointed a Life Member of the VWAAA in 1948. When VWAAA and VAAA finally amalgamated in 1978, she automatically became a Life Member of VAAA.

She was also a State selector between 1954 and 1958 and managed the Victorian women's team to the AWAAU National Championships in Perth 1954.

At a National level, Mabel became Vice-President of the AWAAU between 1950 and 1962 and in 1962 she became President, a position she held until 1978 when the men's and women's Unions amalgamated. She then became Vice-President of the newly amalgamated Australian Amateur Athletic Union (now Athletics Australia), a position she held until 1983.

She joined the Victorian Amateur Athletic Association office in 1955 to assist in the organisation of the 1956 Olympic Games and remained for 27 years.

She was appointed Assistant Manager of the 1958 Commonwealth Games Team (Bert Gardiner was the Manager).

In 1971 she received a Merit Award and in 1973 was awarded life membership of the AAAU. Mabel also received an MBE for services to sport in June 1975, the first person associated with the sport of racewalking to be thus honoured.

She was awarded a life membership of VAWC in 1978. At that time, she was Secretary of VAAA but still found time to work alongside Elsie Jacobson in the club on the Social Committee.



*Left: Mabel on the occasion of her MBE in June 1975 – pictured with fellow recipient George Saunders
Right: Alf and Mabel Robinson in the mid 1970's*

After she retired from the VAAA office, she was enticed to the Athletics Australia office by Ric Pannell and worked there for many years.

She eventually retired in the 1990's and died in 2000.

Her contribution to athletics spanned over 70 years, first as an outstanding athlete and then as an equally outstanding administrator.

Mabel and her husband Alf Robinson were a wonderful combination. Just as Alf was the driving force behind male athletic development in Victoria, Mabel was one of the forces behind women's Athletics in Victoria. Alf was also made a life member of the VAWC (along with many other accolades from many other organisations). His great contribution to the sport of walking is discussed separately

I have fond memories of Alf and Mabel as a young VAWC walker in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s until Alf's untimely passing in 1977. Alf had been involved with the club since its inception in 1921 and Mabel had joined the fledgling club soon after.



A VRWC 1948 camp at Why River - Alf and Mabel Robinson are on the left

The Mabel Robinson Memorial Trophy is awarded annually to the winner of the VRWC Open Women's 10km championship, contested during the winter season each year.



The Mabel Robinson Memorial Trophy, awarded each year by the VRWC

Tim Erickson
Sunday 12 April 2020