

## C 1170 John Borgars

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Club: Loughton A.C.



### Becoming Centurion

Like many others I was excited by the idea when I first heard of the 100 mile race, but I started late. As a kid I had heard of Race Walking when Don Thompson won an Olympic Gold Medal in Rome but I didn't encounter it – I don't think I even heard of it again for over thirty years – until I was drafted into our club Vets team to fill in a gap, running 3000 metres, when I was 51. Watching the exertions of our hammer-and-discus-thrower walking 2000 metres (with several people behind him) I said "I could do better than that": a comment that was enthusiastically welcomed and I was given the chance to show just I wrong I was at the very next Vets league match! I finished one place, and not too long, behind our No. 1 walker, Adrian Newman who then became my mentor for my early Walking years.

We, Hertford & Ware, did not have a walking section so at the end of the season Adrian suggested, since I had some potential as a Race Walker, that I should join Loughton A.C. who had a good coach, Pauline Wilson (I later learned that her training squad included the Hon. General Secretary of the RWA\*) to walk in the Essex League. My first Essex league race, after that couple of 2km races in the Eastern Vets League, was a 10 mile race that doubled up as both the Essex and Hertfordshire 10 mile championship: the guy who should have won the Hertfordshire championship decided to walk a tactical race, carefully tracking Adrian as his principal rival, ignoring me completely: we were both shocked when the officials announced that I had won the Hertfordshire championship! Three months later I tackled my first 50K, finishing in a far from brilliant, albeit acceptable for a V50 novice, 5hr 47m and decided that I probably needed to do some serious training before I tackled the 100.

Eighteen years I have finally, belatedly, managed it. *Some* people can combine a full-time job with serious training, but I lack *that much* discipline – so when I was working full time I didn't. Dave Ainsworth talked me into the centennial 100 at Lingfield Park, assuring that it didn't matter if I dropped out; after entering I learned there was an important family party at lunchtime on the Sunday, meaning I had to quit after 21 hours. So I couldn't realistically expect to finish although, at one point, caught up in Richard and Sandra Brown's slipstream after the first time they lapped me, I was on schedule to finish before I had to leave – but that only lasted two or three hours as my lack of fitness took its toll and when my lift was due I was still 9 miles short. The next day I needed to use a golf umbrella as a walking stick but I was even more convinced that I could do the 100.

However two failures made me less-than-certain that I actually would do it. Colchester was, for me, a disaster – in one unlit section the path in the park was scattered with potholes so after sunset I had to feel my way with my feet (the two local youngsters sensibly wore head torches after sunset), which slower me down so much that my calf muscles started to seize up from the cold and I just quit. In 2014, having done some fairly serious training, my legs were fine but going round and round the track at Southend with eight sharp left-hand bends per mile I developed a bad lean and when I started to fall over sideways after 84 miles I decided I wasn't safe.

Redcar looked to be my last chance. I was born and (mostly) grew up in Stockton, only a dozen miles from Redcar, and I am more than semi-retired so I made it my priority for this year: from the belated arrival of spring, one or, preferably and more usually, two days every week were more or less taken

over by a long walk, working up gradually and progressively from two hours to over sixteen hours, with shorted walks on most other days. A few races, partly as a check on progress: a really disappointing 20K in April was followed by the Yorkshire 50K at Kirby Fleetham in May that included my best 20K and 30K for years but I slowed down badly after 40K; Hertfordshire again used the BMAF 20K & 30K championship for its Long Distance walking Championship and the three regular competitors came home with four BMAF gold medals (there wasn't a V80 30K) despite my being slower than at Kirby Fleetham. I didn't reach the distance that Pauline had (achieved and) recommended because I discovered that while my socks protected feet from blisters up to 28°C they cannot cope at over 30°C for twelve hours so I had to take a two-week break for the mega-blisters to heal.

I have one tip for would-be Centurions – have two or three spare pairs of socks and if it's 30°C, or near, change your socks every six hours or so.

The race was along Redcar's promenade which was not closed to holidaymakers: the vast majority were most co-operative (e.g. around midnight a moderately inebriated group realised that they were the wrong side of the cones marking the course, knocked some over – unsurprisingly – in getting off track, *and carefully put them all back in the right place*), but a small minority thoughtlessly obstructed the walkers. When the race started it was sunny but not too hot (one good reason for choosing Redcar for an August race is that it is hardly ever too hot); as a former local I was naturally acclimatized so didn't need to don the extra layers that I, like everyone else, had brought in case it was a cold night. Unlike most promenades, Redcar's undulates because the height of the cliff varies: another advantage because I got a chance to relax some leg muscles as I alternated between up- and down-hill. However the wind was occasionally fierce and at times a serious handicap, making any progress a struggle – and one gust of side-wind was so fierce it blew me into an iron bollard: on subsequent laps I steered myself into the centre of the gap between bollards.

With more than fifty starters the first lap was bound to be slow but I was a bit concerned that I was 8% slower than my planned 5 mph and although the next three laps 2 were progressively faster I never got up to 5 mph. So, in view of my tendency to slow down towards the end of a race, I was worried for most of the race about the risk of running out of time.

That may explain why my reaction when I finished was overwhelmingly one of relief rather than of jubilation. The feeling was probably shared at mid-day by the various helpers who worked throughout the night to help contestants. Other, however, showed more enthusiasm: Adrian wrote a piece for the local paper and our Club's website that, we hope, may encourage some youngsters to try race Walking, and Ron Wallwork C893 wrote a nice piece in the Enfield Walker.

*John AL Borgars*