

## C148 Cliff Royle

Yorkshire W.C. Track Race (Bradford) (24 hour) 1949; 21.41.23

Club: Lancashire Walking Club

Sometime in the mid 1930's, quite by chance, I happened to be on the old road which went from Liverpool to Manchester when some race walkers went past in the Liverpool to Manchester event. The two at the front were Harold Whitlock (Olympic Gold Medalist) and Joe Hopkins of the Lancashire Walking Club. I stood there in awe, and made a vow that when I started work I would join the Lancashire Walking Club.

I watched the race each year, being amazed at the conditions they walked under, from heavy rain to sweltering sun which melted the tar on the roads.

I started work in January 1939, and in April I joined the Lancashire Walking Club, of which I am still a member. The other members were much older than me but I managed to train with them on the roads of Salford which then, of course, were traffic free.

My first race was to be at Southport in September of that year, but it was cancelled due to the advent of World War 2. However, after a few months we started doing a bit of training again, interspersed with one or two short races. Members gradually got called up into the Forces but luckily those that were not joined in with the activities of other clubs who were not too far distant. One thing that helped was when the Government promoted "Stay at Home Holidays". Many such events we took part in were organised, especially in Yorkshire.



Marshalling and judging were difficult due to petrol restrictions, but everyone did their best. On one occasion in Yorkshire about 90% of the field got lost. I wrote a poem about this called "It's Turned Out Nice Again" and sent it to the organiser. He took it all in good part, and sold many copies of it for his Club funds. Luckily I still have a copy.

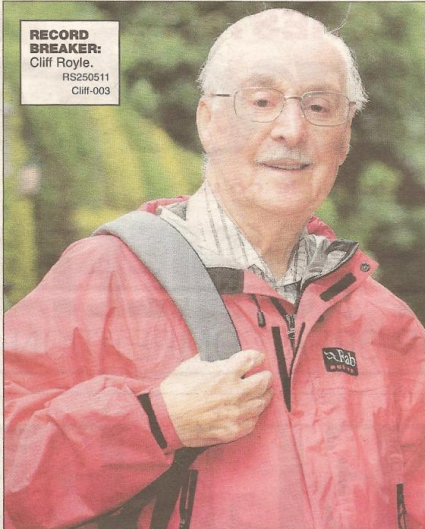
Right from the start I found I suffered terribly with shin soreness, for which nobody could suggest a cure. When going off fast it would start after ten minutes or so and last for about an hour, then it was OK. Although suggestions were made to alleviate this problem I never found a cure. For me the solution was to go steadily for about an hour then get going. The result was my interest in the 'Long Ones'.

My main assistance with training came from three Centurions; Jim O'Neill (C102), Dick Smith (C261) and Frank O'Neill (C136). Many happy hours were spent training with Jim since we were both in reserved occupations during the war, while Dick and Frank were in the Forces.

After the war my first long race was a 50K at Eastleigh, then came the Liverpool to Manchester events, the race that originally led to my interest in race walking. The long walks always intrigued me; Bradford, Manchester to Blackpool and London to Brighton.

Having heard so much about the Centurions from my three Lancashire friends, when the Bradford 24 hour race was coming up in 1949 I decided it was the event for me. I trained hard. Clothing and footwear were still not easy to obtain so when long distance training was involved secondhand ex-army boots came in handy. For some months in 1949 I used to train by walking 50 miles in a day, going over the Pennines with little more than a bottle of water, a few butties and wearing a gabardine raincoat. Yet I survived.

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**RECORD BREAKER:**  
Cliff Royle.  
RS250511  
Cliff-003

## Walker Cliff takes a step into history

**Frodsham news**

AN 88-YEAR-OLD veteran athlete from Frodsham has raced his way into the history books as the oldest surviving member of an exclusive club for amateur long-distance walkers.

Cliff Royle has worn out countless pairs of walking boots clocking up 150,000 miles since taking up the sport as a teenager.

And last week he was a guest of honour at a celebratory dinner at the House of Commons to mark the centenary of the Centurions Club of amateur athletes who have officially walked 100 miles in 24 hours in the UK.

Cliff was accompanied by his wife, Margaret, and he said: "It was a very special and exciting event for me, with old friends there and some race walkers from past Olympic and Commonwealth events.

"As the longest-serving member of the club still alive, my duty was to give the Loyal Toast to the Queen."

Cliff was admitted to the club 63 years ago after completing his 100 mile walk in Bradford in 2hrs 41mins and 23secs to become Centurion No 148. He was racing with Lancashire Walking Club, which he joined in 1939, and remains a member.

"I just love walking, it's the challenge and feeling of achievement you get from it - and it's helped to keep me fit and healthy," said the retired engineer, who is also an accomplished Ultra Marathon runner, 24hr Time Trial Cyclist and long-distance fell walker.

He has produced the popular 100 Challenge Walks book in conjunction with Frodsham Town Council.

"I've always enjoyed long-distance and arduous challenges but I've never set any records or anything like that - I'm just a good plodder.

"I'm not able to do as much nowadays, but last year I set myself a target of rambling 1,000 miles, which I accomplished."

After passing the 101 miles mark in the Centurion at Bradford I wanted to carry on, but my Father (who had seen the sorry state of those who had packed up), said I should finish. He was concerned about getting me over the 50 mile journey home, but it was no problem. I was really fit. That event was a real highlight of my athletic career. Strange as though it may seem, two months before becoming a Centurion I met my wife Margaret. It is our 60th Wedding Anniversary this year.

I was well and truly involved with the Lancashire Walking Club until I moved to the Lake District in 1960, then I got involved in numerous 50 mile in 24 hour fell walks. The hardest of them all was the Fellsman Hike in Yorkshire; we encountered a heavy snowfall on the hills during the night which caused half the field to pack up. On that occasion I walked for over thirty hours.

I came to live in Cheshire in 1970 determined to do a marathon. In training I damaged my foot, and the physiotherapist I consulted said I would never be able to do any athletic activity. Not accepting this, I started riding my son's bike and found I could cope quite well, so I vowed that when I could do 100 miles in a day I would join a cycling club. I did the hundred alone one winter in freezing conditions and arrived home shattered. Two months later I joined a cycling club, and a few years later did two 24 hour time trials covering about 350 miles each time.

My next goal was the marathon. In all I completed over thirty marathons (personal best 3 hours 38 minutes), a couple of ultra-marathons (including Grantham to Lincoln and Back; 100K took me almost 12 hours), and I ran 100 miles of the Cheshire Canal Ring in one weekend.

In the past few years I have been doing plenty of walking in the hills. Last year my aim was to do 1,000 miles in the country, counting only walks of 5 miles or more.

How long I can keep going I do not know, but I do know that the time I first saw that race from Liverpool to Manchester was the start of a healthy and enjoyable sporting life, not as a super-athlete but as a tryer. I will always remember the motto of the Lancashire walking Club (of which I am still a member) - "Health, the First Wealth". How true!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cliff Ryle". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small flourish at the end.