

Ask anyone to name their most memorable run and they will invariably expand on a particular race. I may be alone or amongst a very small percentage of runners who would list a training run as the most significant of their lives.

by KEVIN CASSIDY

A CHANGING DAY IN MY LIFE

THINKING that distance running may be my forte, I took my teenage self down to the Coburg Athletic Club in 1976. Getting through numerous track sessions in those early weeks, John Peres (Junior Coach) sidled up to me with some appropriate advice. "You need to go to the hills with the boys" he stated flatly.

A brief glance at my old diary revealed the 17th of October 1976 as the day I squashed myself into the back seat of the Tatt family's newly acquired HX Holden Kingswood. With Mr Tatt (one of the clubs long suffering Dads) at the wheel and a collection of "potential champion" teenagers occupying the sweaty vinyl seats, we set sail for the Dandenong Ranges some 35 kilometres east of Melbourne.

"We'll show you some HILLS today" taunted my new club mates, "Your legs will be burning by the time you finish", they continued. Growing increasingly apprehensive with the continual vocal speculation about my ability to survive, I could never have dreamt that what was about to unfold would be what television psychologist, "Doctor Phil",

would so patronisingly describes as "A Changing Day in My Life".

Alighting at Grants Picnic Ground in Kallista, we headed south on what I now know is Coles Ridge Road and soon descended deep into the Sherbrooke Forest and onto the Welch Track as the trail steepened. Feeling anxious that so much downhill had to result in a corresponding ascent, we twisted our way through a narrow track that bottomed out at the base of Paddy Road to be confronted with the course's most arduous climb. Aeroplane Hill provided a lung busting haul of about 800m to the Neuman Road T intersection then on past the "Potato Patch", Brendon's Corner and Grantulla Road where we picked up the Hall Track through to Cooks Corner. Another descent down to Hardys Creek led to the final climb up the Lyrebird Walk to the finish. The run captivated me beyond imagination.

Deciding that one loop was sufficient, I stopped as the others headed off for a second. Spellbound and enthralled, I knew immediately that I had uncovered

something that would become a life long passion. Travelling back home on the Burwood Highway, so engrossed was I that I gave scant regard to the tartan clad teenage girls outside a corner milk bar, clearly revelling in the success of the Scottish band, The Bay City Rollers. Nor could news on the car radio of John Trevorrow's win in the Sun Tour cycling race and the death of Hawthorn footballer, Peter Crimmins, attract my interest. I spent the entire trip home reliving the run and enthusing over the prospect of returning the next week. My diary entry that day descriptively recorded a "Six mile very, very, very hilly run". Further diary checks reveal that I was soon running two or three loops consistently and had reduced my times to around 38 to 39 minutes per loop. Despite the running community's wide ranging feeling that it was six miles, I strongly suspected (and still do) that it was a smidgen short.

As a teenager, the thrill of running a trail that was a part of Ron Clarke's celebrated 21 mile course was indescribable. Being amongst the hills on a Sunday morning and crossing paths with many

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Looking down the Hall Track from Grantulla Road

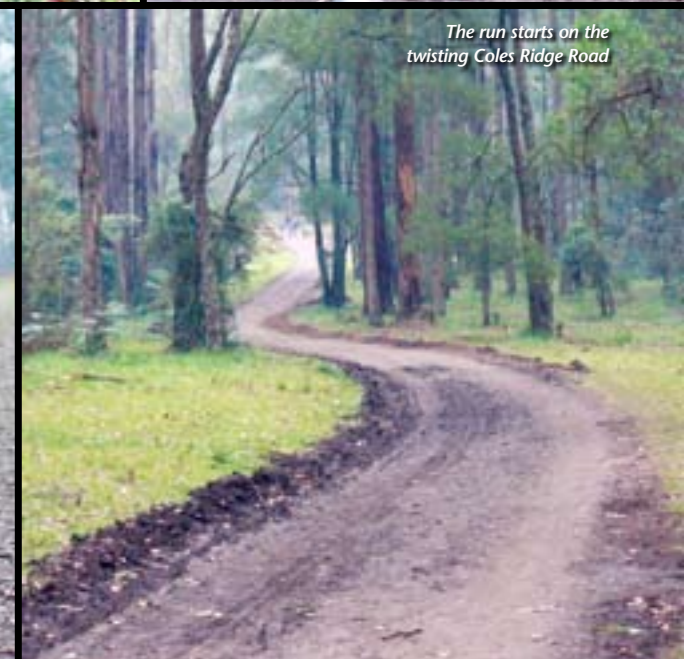
Running past the hardy Gully Nature Walk



Brendon's Corner

Dragging the old body up the 800 metre climb that is Aeroplane Hill

The run starts on the twisting Coles Ridge Road



well known faces provided a level of excitement I had never experienced. One promising junior seen regularly was a long haired, bearded, university student. The name "Deek" went on to gain national recognition.

Entranced with my new found passion, I spent my entire Form 4 (I think they call it year 10 now) maths exam carefully trying to draw a map of the course. At exams end, I had produced an oddly shaped diagram that bore no resemblance to the course at all! Due to my obsession I hadn't answered a single question on my exam paper. My cheerless, sour faced teacher ripped up my papers in disgust, giving me an earful of advice with "You're a useless waste of space" being amongst the more emphatic of his barrage of stinging rebukes. To this day, I have no idea what algebra means and am none the wiser as to the origins of "square roots", a term that conjures a variety of odd and vivid imaginations!

By years end, the running group had ventured in different directions. Over the next couple of years, pestering my long suffering father was my only

option. Not being the most active of individuals, he simply sat in the old family FB Holden puffing his roll your own cigarettes while I ran.

Turning 18, I made many trips in my freshly acquired 1962 Volkswagon Kombi to what I affectionately called my "Hill Loop".

The years since have encompassed over 100 marathons and ultras. Training saw my horizons expand to include many of the hundreds of kilometres of trails that criss-cross the heavily wooded ranges. Venturing further east, the rugged trails of the Yarra Ranges became a common haunt, but no matter where or when I ran, the gravitation back to my original course was frequent, very much as the moon regularly tugs on the ocean tides.

With my best running days well and truly gone, the trophies are gathering copious amounts of dust and the T-shirts rapidly fading. Those early ultras seem a lifetime away and my days of pursuing American 100 milers are rapidly becoming a distant memory. Throughout, there has been one constant. The resonance I feel for my old "Hill Loop" burns

strong and I've run many miles there in recent years, albeit substantially slower. The peculiarity of negotiating the course under torch light had me seeing in the New Year in 2003 on the ascent up Aeroplane Hill!

In a world of constant changes, not all of which are good, the trail remains precisely as it was in 1976, although the picnic ground has gained some additional creature comforts!

I guess that's the real attraction, it's one part of my life where time truly stands still and those sanctimonious bureaucrats who so insist on infesting our lives "For our own good" become totally inconsequential. Each time I run my hill loop, I remain that wide eyed, impressionable teenager that I was in the seventies.

On the 17th of October, in arguably a feeble attempt at maintaining contact with my waning youth, I shall be venturing up to Grants Picnic Ground for a 30th anniversary run. Given that it's a Tuesday, it will be a late afternoon start, but everyone is welcome to join me. ☺



The Hall Track is a runner friendly zone

Despite all the drug controversy that is surrounding the world of sport at the moment, the past two months has featured plenty of action on the track and road.

**37TH PEACHTREE ROAD RACE
4TH JULY, USA**

KENYANS were again the dominant force in the 37th edition of the Peachtree Road Race. Kenyan Martin Lel blew away the field to record his second victory in the point to point 10km event.

The Independence Day race, one of the world's largest races with 55,000 official entrants, was held in typically hot and humid conditions, but that did not prevent Lel from recording the second fastest winning time in the history of the race, 27.20 - second only to Joseph Kimani's course record of 27.04 set in 1996.

Lel finished well head of fellow Kenyans Wilson Kiprotich (27.49) and William Chebon Chebor (27.54).

The race featured the homecoming of Australia's Andrew Letherby, who attended university at Georgia State. Letherby was amongst the leaders early, but eventually finished 10th in 29:10. It was Letherby's third consecutive top 10 finish, but his finishing time was 25 seconds slower than his 2005 performance when he finished 6th.

In the women's event, Kenyan born Dutchwomen, Lornah Kiplagat achieved her fifth win (31:13) in the event finishing only 2 seconds in front of Kenyan Jemima Jelegat. The reigning European cross country champion had to overcome some serious challenges from Jelegat to become only the second woman to win the event five times, tying with American Gayle Barron who won five of the first six editions.

Ethiopian three time Olympic medalist Gete Wami held off Kenyan Susan Chepkemei to finish third.

**ROME GOLDEN GALA
14TH JULY, ITALY**

WITH Ethiopia's Tirunesh Dibaba still in line for the \$1 Million Golden League Jackpot, she set about setting the tone in the Women's 5000m. The race might have featured Olympic champion Meseret Defar, but Dibaba dictated the tactics of the race which led to another splendid last lap sprint between the two petite Ethiopians in the women's 5000m.

Dibaba never allowed the World record holder to get her nose in front. With the bell sounding as 13:55 ticked over on the clock, Defar's pursuit of

Dibaba began, as both women kicked. However, Defar never came closer than about 5 metres of her compatriot, with Dibaba showing a fleet turn of speed to close with a 58 second final lap and finish with 14:52.37. Defar was second in 14:53.51. The top eight broke 15 minutes.

In the men's 1500m, World champion Rashid Ramzi made a brave attempt to set a new World record. Ramzi had won the two previous Golden League 1500m races on the track.

But the overly fast pace, which saw the pace maker running 1:48 for 800m, eventually took its toll on the field which by 1200m was back to 2:46, still roughly two seconds inside the required record pace.

However, as expected, the lactic began to kick into the legs of the 1500m field with

Ramzi slightly more affected than his late pursuer and eventual victor, Kenyan Daniel Komen. Komen passed the Bahraini just before the line, winning in 3:29.02, a World season's lead. The time also established the Kenyan as the seventh fastest man of all-time, with Ramzi finishing second in 3:29.14, an Asian record, beating his own 3:30.30 (8th all-time fastest athlete) with which he won last year's race.

World Silver medalist Adil Kaouch of Morocco was third in 3:31.10. The top-10 finishers all came home in under 3:33.

In the men's 800m, Moroccan Aminie Laalou upset the more favoured athletes. The field was left adrift with too much work to do in the final stages. In winning, Laalou set a new Moroccan record of 1:43.25, another world's season leading time. The top three was rolled out with American Khadevis Robinson in second 1:43.86 and Saudi Mohammed Al-Salhi in third (1:43.99 - NR)

Laalou's previous personal best was a 1:43.68 (2004). It was a dramatic improvement for the 24-year-old who has been a World and Olympic semi-finalist but had a fastest of only 1:45.65 previous to this summer.

The big surprise of the night was Olympic champion Yuriy Borzakovskiy. The Russian had looked out of sorts finishing fifth in 1:45.28.

The women's 800m was taken by World champion Zulia Calatayud of Cuba in 1:59.35, followed home by America's Hazel Clark (1:59.83) and Kenyan record holder and World season's leader Janeth Jepkosgei (1:59.86).



Daniel Komen (left) and Rashid Ramzi (right) fight it out to the final metres of the men's 1500m in Rome. Getty Images

Ten men went under 13 minutes in the 5000m - the first time in history that has happened in one race - outlining the quality of the field. But really the race was a three-way battle for middle distance running supremacy between World Recorder Holder Kenenisa Bekele, World Steeplechase champion Saif Saaeed Shaheen of Bahrain and Kenyan Isaac Songok.

It was Bekele who came out on top in 12:51.44, the second fastest time of the summer. Bekele had set the World leading mark in Paris the week before (12:51.32).

It was another blistering burst of speed that set up the Ethiopian's win, comfortably showing a clean set of heels to Shaheen and Songok and easily holding them off. Shaheen set an Asian record to take second, 12:51.98, with Songok third in 12:52.39.

The men's 3000m steeplechase featured an impressive solo effort. Following the heels of the designated pacemakers, Olympic bronze medalist Paul Koech of Kenya clocked a sub 8 minute performance. His time of 7:59.94, is second on the rankings list only to World champion and recorder Shaheen's 7:56.32 set in Athens on July 3rd. Koech was followed home by the third, fourth and fifth quickest times of the summer from fellow Kenyans Richard Matelong (8:07.50) and Olympic silver medalist Brimin Kipruto (8:08.32) and Morocco's Abdelkader Hachlaf (8:08.78 PB). In 5th, America's Daniel Lincoln set an American record. His time of 8:08.82 improved on Henry Marsh's ancient mark of 8:09.17 established back in August 1985.

**WETKLASSE ZURICH GOLDEN LEAGUE MEET
18TH AUGUST, SWITZERLAND**

FOLLOWING the mid season break in competition for the European Championships, action on the track heated back up again with the Zurich Golden League meet. The highlight would have to have been Jamaican sprinter Asafa Powell's World Equaling run of 9.77 for 100m, but the distance events still provided plenty of action.

In the women's 5000m, Tirunesh Dibaba continued to keep her \$1 Million Golden League Jackpot chances alive with a clear victory. While her Ethiopian compatriot Mestawat Tufa reached the bell first, behind her Dibaba simply did what she does best: shift gears and begin her extended kick to the finish. Berhane Adere gave pursuit down the back straight, but the race was all but secure for Dibaba as she reached the front stretch, eventually crossing the line in 14:45.73. Some 70m from the finish, Kenyan record holder Edith Masai passed Adere to take second (14:48.22),

nearly a second ahead of Adere (14:49.03).

The men's 5000m set up another dual between Kenyan Isaac Songok and World Record holder Kenenisa Bekele. With about 200m remaining it looked like the Oslo finish would be repeated, where Songok ran down Bekele. With Bekele leading, Songok seemed to be biding his time, waiting to pounce in the final straight.

But it never happened. The Kenyan couldn't find the closing speed he had two months earlier and Bekele again reigned supreme, reaching the finish in 12:48.25, a world leading performance. In finishing second, Songok lowered his personal best to 12:48.66.

Eliud Kipchoge, who ran with the duo until the final lap, faded over the final 300m to finish third in 12:57.69. The rest of the field was well back throughout the race, with Jonas Cheruiyot leading the pack in fourth (13:04.91).

The men's 3000m steeplechase began with an assault by Qatari athlete Saif Saaeed Shaheen on his own world record. Despite continuing to show his absolute dominance of the event, his

attempt fell a little short.

Reaching the bell with 6:54 on the clock, Shaheen was already more than a full straight of the track ahead of the chase pack, but more than two seconds behind the world record pace. He powered on to the finish to record a meet record, 7:56.54.

Frenchman Bob Tahri won the race for second, ahead of Kenyan Wesley Korir and European champion Jukka Keskisalo, all some 20 odd seconds in arrears.

In the men's 800m Kenyan Wilfred Bungei appear to have his third straight Zurich title locked up with 40m to go. However, South African Mbulaeni Mulaudzi had other ideas, charging past to take the win in a fast 1:43.38

Dutchman Bram Som, showing uplifted spirits following his European Championships victory, also stormed past the fading Bungei over the final few meters to finish second in 1:43.45, a Dutch national record. Bungei held on for third (1:43.67) with world leader Amine Lalou of Morocco fourth (1:43.91). Olympic champion >>>



Eloise Wellings (far right) looking very comfortable competing against the likes of Tirunesh Dibaba (#4).. Getty Images