

I was saddened this week to hear of the passing of English walking great Colin Young. I was privileged to know Colin, mainly from my time racing in England in 1980 and from the various international meets in the late seventies and early eighties where our paths crossed. He was one of those people who, once met, was never forgotten.



*Colin in 2011 at the annual Centurions AGM*

I will start off with a wonderful appreciation of Colin, written by Mel Watman for his newsletter Athletics International.

With the death on December 17 of Colin Young I have lost one of my oldest and dearest friends, and our sport has bade farewell to one of its most memorable characters. What a contribution he made to athletics: as a redoubtable long distance race walker, as a founder member of the NUTS and as the inspirational coach of world record breaker Mel Batty.

I first got to know Colin when I was a teenager and we were both founder members of the National Union of Track Statisticians (NUTS) in 1958. Born in Barking (Essex) on 20 January 1935, Colin took up race walking in 1947, aged 12, and by his early twenties was already a well regarded figure, having won the National Junior 5 miles title in 1953 and clocked under 4 hr 50 min for 50km. Competing for Essex Beagles, he would go on to post such times as 1:39:27 for 20km in 1962 and 4:35:20 for 50km in 1963, but it was in the ultra distance events that he proved such a formidable and gutsy competitor. He achieved the coveted Centurion status in 1960 by covering over 131 miles in 24 hours; two years later he walked from London to Brighton in 8 hr 7 min 42 sec and in 1966 he won an international 100km race in Lugano.

As I recounted in my book *My Life In Athletics*, the great Paul Nihill paid tribute to him in *AW* in April 1970 and wrote that Colin was preparing to attempt a fantastic endurance double: a 24 hour walk in Rouen followed less than a month later by the 512km (318 miles) Strasbourg to Paris classic. Colin didn't win either race but walked with his customary grit to finish second in Rouen and fifth in the Strasbourg to Paris, becoming the first Briton to complete that gruelling event. The latter was tough going indeed as daytime temperatures hit 90°F in the shade (only there was none), the road surface included long stretches of cobbles, and there were at least four climbs of 8-10km in length. For good measure, the heels on both pairs of his shoes collapsed, resulting in a severely wrenched calf muscle over the last 50 hours, necessitating frequent short stops for massage. The experience didn't deter him, for next year he followed up with victory in the Rouen race, covering a record 215.835km, with a close third place in the Strasbourg to Paris in 73 hr 37 min.

It was at another celebrated ultra-distance event, the Prague to Pödebrady 50km in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1968, that Colin met his future wife Eva, an orienteer, through a mutual friend, Ivo Domansky. She moved to the UK as an au pair the following year and, as Eva puts it, "the rest is history".

Colin continued to compete for several more decades, winning numerous international medals as a veteran. As he stated in *AW* in 1969 what he liked most about athletics was "the satisfaction of pushing one's body to the limit, the wonderful friendships made, the feeling of bodily fitness and the delight of winning or setting a personal best."

As well as his own exploits, Colin was THE expert on reporting the UK and world walking scene and from 1967 to 1986 was the highly respected and ever enthusiastic walking correspondent of *AW*. For over 60 years he remained a stalwart member of the NUTS committee, delighting in challenging myself in particular to remember some arcane result or other. He himself had an astonishing memory, not only for athletics trivia but also for his other passions which notably included cycling and traditional jazz.

Colin's greatest hero was Emil Zátopek and how appropriate it was that as a coach his major success was guiding Mel Batty to a world 10 miles record of 47:26.8 in 1964 – a distance at which Zátopek was a former record holder with 48:12.0 in 1951. Batty, whose time was bettered the following year by Ron Clarke no less, in turn learned from Colin's methods to coach Eamonn Martin to his 10,000m and marathon triumphs.

In recent years Colin suffered from poor eyesight and a number of physical problems, but he remained an avid fan to the last, lapping up all the latest results worldwide. No one who knew Colin will ever forget him and I offer Eva heartfelt condolences on her and our loss.



*Colin wins his 3rd Open TT Walk in 1963 with a time of 6.01.11, ahead of Albert Johnson 6.06.15 and Guy Goodair 6.06.56 (photo John Cannell)*

And now onto a few more bits and pieces from a life filled to the brim and overflowing.

Colin was part of the most famous of all English Centurion walks, held at the Walton track on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1960. On that occasion, he became English Centurion 317 with a time of 17:48:05, but that is only a small part of the story. Much of the information for this next section was taken from the 1997 edition of the Centurions History.

The 1960 English Centurion qualifying race remains on record as the most magnificent 24 hour track walk ever witnessed. For some time Centurions and other long distance specialists had wanted such a race in order to match themselves against the performances of others over the previous 50 or more years. In order to meet this request a special invitation meeting was arranged by Walton A.C. at their headquarters at Stompond Lane, Walton-on-Thames, on 14-15 October.

The records to be attacked were impressive. The British records were shared between Tom Hammond who in 1908 walked 131 m 580 yds in 24 hours, Tom Richardson who in 1936 had walked 100 miles in 17:35:04 before retiring at 18 hours and Percy Reading who in 1946 had walked 129m 749 y in 24 hours. The world record was held by Henri Caron of France who in 1950 had recorded a distance of 132m 1320 y in 24 hours.

Apart from the long distance specialists, some of the fast men were also invited to attack records up to 4 hours and 50 km. In the shorter event, Don Thompson, the recent winner of the 50 km gold medal at the Rome Olympics, broke his own National records at 20 miles, 3 hours, 25 miles, 4 hours, 30 miles and 50 km.

To return to the main event which by coincidence fell on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Caron's 1950 world record, 15 of the best long distance walkers in the country faced the starter. For the first 12 hours a thrilling race unfolded, but the record of E. C. Horton, set up in 1914, remained intact. At this point some of the competitors began to fall by the wayside. One of the first to go was Frank O'Reilly who was lying in third place at the time, having dropped back from second. He had covered 70 miles in just over 12 hours, such was the quality of this race. He was feeling very unwell but struggled on to reach 78 miles in 14 hours. In the meantime, Hew Neilson was having a terrific race at the front, with Colin Young some 2 miles adrift in second place.

At 13 hours, Hew Neilson claimed his first record of the race with 77m 30y, beating Richardson's 1936 distance of 76m 930y. His second record came at 80 miles in 13h 34m 37s. From here he broke records all the way up to 24 hours. Colin was closing slightly but it would be a few more hours before he also started to better the previous British figures. The progress of the various records is shown in the table below.

	<b>Previous Records Tom Hammond (G. W) 1908</b>	<b>World Record Henri Caron (Fra) 1950</b>	<b>British Records Tom Richardson (G. B.) 1936</b>	<b>New Records Hew Neilson (G.B) 1960</b>	<b>Colin Young (G. B.) 1960</b>
14 Hours	81 m 1100y	82m 788y	80m 950y	<b>82m 517y</b>	79m 1705y
15 Hours	Florimond Cornet	87m 566y	86m 569y	<b>87m 1040y</b>	85m 1470y
90 Miles	16h 09 50.s	15h 30m 12s	15h 40m 48s	<b>15h 28m 19s</b>	15h 53m 10s
16 Hours	89m 435y	92m 689y	91m 524y	<b>92m 1318y</b>	90M 1015y
17 Hours	94m 668y	No Record	96m 1152y	<b>98m 164y</b>	95m 1570y
100 Miles	18h 04m 10s	17h 47m 46s	17h 35m 04s	<b>17h 18m 51s</b>	17h 48 05
18 Hours.	99m 1067y	101m 429y	101m 1230y Ret.	<b>103m 615y</b>	101m 6ly
19 Hours	105m 275y	106m 1646y	105m 466y	<b>107m 1175y</b>	105m 1545y
110 Miles	19h 58m 40s	19h 33m 41s	19h 57m 16s	<b>19h 25m 48s</b>	19h 45m 54s
20 Hours	110m 203y	112m 464y	110m 410y	<b>112m 1262y</b>	111m 330y
21 Hours	115m 575y	117m 342y	Hammond	<b>117m 1150y</b>	116m 265y
120 Miles	21h 52m 58s	21h 32m 02s	Hammond	<b>21h 24m 16s</b>	21h 46m 23s
22 Hours	120m 1156y	122m 712y	Hammond	<b>122m 1432y</b>	121m 235y
125 Miles	22h 48m 21s	22h 30m 06s	Hammond	<b>22h 25m 30s</b>	22h 46m 49s
23 Hours	125m 1354y	127m 1021y	Hammond	<b>127m 1510y</b>	126m 118y
130 Miles	23h 45m 51s	23h 27m 10s	Hammond	<b>23h 25m 27s</b>	23h 47m 09S
24 Hours	131 m 580y	132m 1320y	129m 749y	<b>133m 21y</b>	131 m 327y

New Neilson had only one thing on his mind, to win the race, especially bearing in mind the quality of the opposition. He had won a road race and had completed more races of 100 miles or over than any other British walker. The only thing he had not done was to win on the track, which is where he made his debut in 1948. He was aware of the records held by Caron and Richardson, but treated the beating of them as a bonus if that was what it would take to win the race.

Colin is the only walker in the above table of figures who did not set any records, due to the presence of Neilson in the same race. His objective, like Neilson, was to win the race, but he had a more pressing task to fulfil first. That was to complete 100 miles and in so doing, qualify for Centurionship. He was the only person to qualify from this race and became one of the few Centurions in the Centurion handbook to have a race heading to himself. From a steady start he gradually gained ground on the leaders, and by 50 miles he was in front of the old figures set up by Hammond in 1908, a position he maintained throughout the race. However he remained approx. ¼ mile behind Richardson and the same 2 miles behind Neilson, whom he was gaining on slightly with each lap.

Colin, with his 100 miles safely behind him, kept his momentum and caught up 3 laps on Neilson, but he could never bridge the gap. It was only in the last 20 minutes or so that he went behind Hammond's figures to finish an annoying 253 yards short of the old record, his distance being 131 miles 327 yards. Neilson, although also slowing, maintained his lead at the front of the race and finished 461 yards ahead of Caron's world record, his final distance recorded at 133 miles 21 yards.

Colin completed two further English Centurion walks, in 1969 and 1976, to take his tally to three – and they are all impressive times!

100miles	2 <sup>nd</sup>	17:48:05	20/10/1960	Walton
100miles	1 <sup>st</sup>	17:52:32	08/08/1969	Leicester
100miles	2 <sup>nd</sup>	18:12:02	28/05/1976	Woodford

He actually improved on that 1960 24 Hour distance of 131 miles with an even longer performance in Rouen in 1971. Of course, that was a road performance so could not be counted for record purposes. The Ohio Racewalker of June 1971 reported it as follows

#### **MAGNIFICANT EFFORT BY COLIN YOUNG**

*Rouen, France, May 8-9. England's Colin Young set a new record while leaving the field far behind in a 24 hour walk. Starting in high humidity, surviving a 9-hour downpour and finishing with 7 hours in a blazing sun, Young covered 134 miles 202 yards and was over 13 miles ahead at the finish. The race was held on an accurately measured road course, consisting of 45 laps on a 1213 meter circuit, four laps of 25km 150 meters and hen back on the short circuit until the finish. Young was on a 22 km (about 137 miles) through 18 hours after taking the lead at 70 kms. This race qualified him for the Strasbourg to Paris (520 km), to be held June 10-13.*

1.	Colin Young	GBR	215 km 615 m
2.	G. Landreau	FRA	194 km 201 m
3.	E. Alomaine	BEL	191 km 615 m
4.	H. Fickinger	FRA	191 km 475 m
5.	J. Bonn	FRA	184 km 279 m
6.	H. Mainemare	FRA	179 km 435 m

(30 starters and 13 finishers)

Sadly, the Rouen 24H, although still held annually, is now better known for its short courses rather than for the quality of its walkers. It was different in those days.



*Colin Young leads Ray Hall, George Farley, Dennis Vale and Dennis Read in one of his many road races in England in the sixties  
(photo John Cannell)*

The British all-time rankings (see <http://www.gbrathletics.com/uk/mh99.htm>) show Colin prominently in all the longer distance lists, even after all these years.

#### 100 KILOMETRES ROAD WALK

9:34:25	Tony Geal (ENG)	28.07.52	1	Grand-Quevilly, FRA	02 Jun 1979
9:36:23	Graham Young (IOM)	30.05.45	1	Stoke Mandeville	26 Sep 1981
9:38:38	Murray Lambden (IOM)	14.10.56	2	Stoke Mandeville	26 Sep 1981
9:45:46	Ian Richards (ENG)	12.04.48	1	Sutton Coldfield	27 Sep 1980
9:46:36	Peter Hodgkinson (ENG)	05.11.44	1	Birmingham (M42)	29 Sep 1979
9:52:49	Tony Collins (ENG)	01.10.42	2	Birmingham (M42)	29 Sep 1979
<b>9:53:04</b>	<b>Colin Young (ENG)</b>	<b>20.01.35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Lugano, SUI</b>	<b>30 Oct 1966</b>

#### 100 MILES TRACK WALK

17:18:51+	Hew Neilson (ENG)	15.04.16	1	Walton-on-Thames	14 Oct 1960
17:35:40	Tommy Richardson (ENG)	.10/11	1	Bradford	19 Sep 1936
<b>17:48:05+</b>	<b>Colin Young (ENG)</b>	<b>20.01.35</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Walton-on-Thames</b>	<b>14 Oct 1960</b>

#### 24 HOURS TRACK WALK

214.061km	Hew Neilson (ENG)	15.04.16	1	Walton-on-Thames	15 Oct 1960
211.354km	Tommy Hammond (ENG)	18.06.78	1	London (WC)	12 Sep 1908
211.131km	Derek Harrison (IOM)	22.01.35	1	Woodford	29 May 1976
<b>211.123km</b>	<b>Colin Young (ENG)</b>	<b>20.01.35</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Walton-on-Thames</b>	<b>15 Oct 1960</b>

#### 24 HOURS ROAD WALK

219.570km	Derek Harrison (IOM)	22.01.35	1	Rouen, FRA	21 May 1978
<b>215.835km</b>	<b>Colin Young (ENG)</b>	<b>20.01.35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Rouen, FRA</b>	<b>09 May 1971</b>
215.050km	Dave Boxall (ENG)	28.10.33	1	Rouen, FRA	06 May 1973

His three Strasbourg-Paris races are shown below. He finished the entire distance in 1970 (fifth) and 1971 (third), only failing to finish in 1972.

#### 24TH EDITION STRASBOURG – PARIS 4-7 JUNE 1970 512 KM

1.	ZAUGG-SAMY	SR-DELLE	FRA	512KM	70H04m
2.	SIMON-JOSY	AA-LUXEMBOURG	LUX	512KM	70H35m
3.	LEBAQUER-LOUIS	RC-ROUBAIX	FRA	512KM	70H37m
4.	GUNY-CHARLES	AS-AULNOYE	FRA	512KM	71H42m
5.	YOUNG-COLIN	ESSEX-BEAGLES	GBR	512KM	74H24m

#### 25TH EDITION STRASBOURG – PARIS 10-13 JUNE 1971 520 KM

1.	SIMON-JOSY	AA-LUXEMBOURG	LUX	520KM	73H08m
2.	BRACQ-SERGE	CA-MONTREUIL	FRA	520KM	73H25m

3.	YOUNG-COLIN	ESSEX-BEAGLES	GBR	520KM	73H38m
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**26TH EDITION STRASBOURG – PARIS 15-18 JUNE 1972 513 KM**

1.	SIMON-JOSY	AA-LUXEMBOURG	LUX	513KM	67H03m
2.	SCHOUCKENS-ROBERT	US-BINCHE	BEL	513KM	71H40m
3.	LEBAQUER-LOUIS	RC-ROUBAIX	FRA	513KM	73H24m
4.	ANXIONNAT-ROLAND	AS-GUENANGE	FRA	513KM	73H58m
5.	QUEMENER-ROGER	AS-POLICE PARIS	FRA	513KM	75H08m
6.	TRAVARD-LOUIS	AS-NEUVILLE	FRA	513KM	75H51m
7.	YOUNG-COLIN	ESSEX-BEAGLES	GBR	494KM	71H01m

You can see some terrific coverage of the 1970 Strasbourg to Paris racewalk in a 14 minute French TV production at <http://www.ina.fr/media/entretiens/video/CPF04006252/la-plus-longue-marche.fr.html>. Number 23 is John Dowling of Sheffield and number 19 is Colin. The year was very hot, as is often the case in mid June in that part of France. Mel Watman (see above) talks of the fact that Colin's shoes collapsed and he struggled with foot issues for most of the race. This can be clearly seen around the 11 min 40 sec period of the film.

I finish with a few of the many recollections of Colin from the many that have been published over the last few days.

It is very sad indeed to read of the death of Colin Young - one of the greatest British ultra-distance walkers, who competed with distinction nationally and internationally among a fine generation. He pitted himself against the best in Europe with his Paris-Strasbourg walks and completed with distinction. He continues to be talked about with admiration by continental walkers and officials at many 24 hour races. We fondly remember him being invited by the organisers to support us and Edmund Shillabeer on the Tour du Var – where he was given a driver and the Toulon rugby coach! He enthusiastically and professionally supported us on our Paris-Colmar exploits where his insights and experience were invaluable. Colin loved a challenge; Sandra recalls Colin, Bob Dobson and herself being invited by the organiser, a long-time admirer of Colin, to participate in the Etrechy 24h track race. Though relentless wintry conditions drove many athletes off the track, Colin kept going and achieved a fine performance. Peter Selby had a hard job looking after us for 24h in the driving rain, not to mention a challenge getting the van out of the mud at the finish.

Colin's encyclopaedic knowledge of racewalking and other sports stretched across the generations, and was highly valued by athletes and fellow sports historians and statisticians alike. To meet and talk with Colin was always a source of fascination. Sandra and Colin visited the Revd David Christie-Murray, who had been a distinguished race-walker in the 1930s. Colin delighted David, then in his late 90s, by taking press cuttings and photographs of races in which David had participated, and recalling names and performances which gave David great pleasure.

For us personally, as ultra-distance race-walkers, Colin was an inspiration and an iconic figure from a golden age of our sport. As Captain of the Centurions, Colin commanded the highest regard. We shall always remember him with the greatest affection and respect.

Richard and Sandra Brown, C735, C760

It is very sad news. Colin was a great ambassador for British ultra distance race walking. Colin served on the Centurions Committee for good number of years and it was always a pleasure to hear Colin recount tales of race walkers and races of years gone by. He always asked me to send him reports of the Paris Colmar race especially as his eye sight was failing and so his wife used to read them out to him. In the race walking world, both in France and the UK, he was really a "national treasure".

Kathy Crilley

He was a great walker a true motivator and always greeted me with Pete ryan 4 hours 18 minutes 30 seconds yes he remembered times to the second he did suffer with his eyes remember going to Naumburg with him and we got him next to the big screen so he could see more of the race he was as enthusiastic about race walking

Peter Ryan

Tim Erickson  
Tuesday 24 December 2019