

## Chapter 2

### Keeping on course

*“Jog on, jog on the foot-path...”*

-- William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Act 4 Scene 2

The Joggers have always met on Sunday mornings. The meeting place is in a pleasant leafy reserve at the southern end of Balmoral, a picturesque harbourside beach suburb on the lower North Shore of Sydney. The reserve adjoins Balmoral Oval. Choosing Balmoral as the venue was apparently Bill Kerr's idea. Bill was living at Neutral Bay at the time and knew Balmoral well as a scenic area with lots of space and not much traffic.

Ever since the very first meeting in 1967, the Joggers have stashed their non-valuables on the same bench. This well-worn bench is also used for post-run slumping, post-race picnics, and as a soapbox for important announcements.

In those days, Balmoral was a lot sleepier than it is today. There are trendy cafes now, where there used to be local shops such as greengrocers or chemists. Upmarket apartments and townhouses have replaced many older beachside homes. The amount of traffic, both human and vehicles, has also increased enormously. But, despite these changes, Balmoral still retains much of its natural charm, with a sweeping promenade bordering the beach on one side, shady parks on the other side, and a magnificent view of the Sydney Heads.

#### Development of runs

Bill Kerr remembers the very first meeting of the Joggers as a very low-key affair. He recalls Warren and Louise Smith, and Lorraine Spradbrow being there. As the weeks went by, more and more people turned up.

The emphasis in those early days was on jogging – as distinct from running or racing. The general idea was that everyone should start and finish at about the same time. To accommodate the inevitable differences in speed, the faster joggers would simply start further back. After the run, there was often some stretching and callisthenics for the keen ones (this proved to be a relatively short-lived tradition).

The weekly run originally started at 9am and consisted of a two-mile course, consisting of five or six laps round the Balmoral Oval area. Alan Farrell vividly remembers the after-effects of the first time he ran: “That afternoon I went to watch the Bears play a game, and when I went to stand up to go home I could hardly walk!”

By the end of the year, the warmer weather prompted the start time to be put back to 8.30 then 8am, and after a number of temporary variations, this ultimately became

standard all year round. Since then it has been suggested from time to time that the start time be even earlier. Rob Nolan recalls that at an annual general meeting some years ago, it was agreed, after much debate, that summer runs would start at 7.30. Of course, says Rob, the next Sunday everyone turned up late and complained that the run was too early. The 7.30 time was quietly dropped.

As time went by, some joggers started supplementing their Sunday runs with a five mile run on Thursday afternoons round Cammeray, Cremorne and Mosman. There were also some joint runs organised with other running clubs such as Wakehurst Joggers.

In June 1969 it was decided to introduce a change to the format of the weekly run. Instead of running a set number of laps, everyone ran against the clock. As Jogger jargon reported: "We are helped in this way by Doug Ford and a very close friend of his, Eunice. For the record, and not to mislead Doug's wife Betty, Eunice is the brand name of his stopwatch." Also at about this time, it was decided to vary the normal routine by running to the end of the Balmoral promenade and also including a few hills in the run. Gradually, new routes started being added.

As fitness levels increased, so did the distance of the weekly runs. In 1969, Jogger Jargon noted that "when the Joggers club started a few years back, our Sunday jaunt only covered 2- 3 miles, and this was considered plenty. Now the old hands would laugh if we mentioned a run of such small proportions. Instead, 7- 8 miles is the order of the day".

By 1971, Jogger Jargon was reporting that one Sunday morning run now consisted of a 10-mile jog through Balmoral and neighbouring districts, including Milson's Point. The stimulus for this was no doubt the inaugural "City to Surf" fun-run that was due to be held in September 1971. (For more on our great City to Surf heritage, see chapter 3.)

During the 1970s there were quite a few routes to take -- the Bush Track (including a precipitous climb up the cliff at Clifton Gardens), Carter Street, Beauty Point, Cremorne out-and-back, Crows Nest, Chinamans Beach and Milsons Point. In 1979, more running routes were added -- the Cremorne Point/ Spit Junction, Neutral Bay, Manly, Fairlight Pool, Tania Park (named after Australia's 1962 Miss International, Tania Verstak), Cammeray Golf Course, Clontarf, Castle Rock, plus additional variations to the Beauty Point and Bush Track runs. As Rob Nolan comments, this development ensured that we were more likely to get lost than bored.

Who decided what route to take? What tended to happen was that people would state their preferences and occasionally argue about it (no doubt to the annoyance of the neighbours) until someone would just take off and the rest would follow or not, according to their mood. In 1983, when Alan Power became secretary, the first thing he did was to write "This Weeks Run" on our noticeboard. Everyone was amazed at this brilliant innovation. What a great idea! No more arguments! Why didn't we think of that one before!

These routes form the basis of our current run schedule, though some new routes have been added (such as Chowder Bay) and variations added. Today, our running routes each have a detailed coloured map, which is displayed on the Club Blackboard that is propped up against a tree at our Balmoral gathering place. We are considering applying to have this blackboard heritage-listed on account of its extreme age. It has become so thin that it sometimes blows away in high winds.

The choosing of each week's run, the preparation of the blackboard and the job of remembering to bring it down each week is – understandably -- a privilege that members almost fight each other to obtain. Rob Nolan had the honour for longer than he cares to remember, but then unselfishly bestowed it on Phil McCouat, who immediately started claiming that he should be now referred to as the “Chairman of the Board”. After about five years, Phil very reluctantly passed it on to Shelley Kirkwood, who now treasures this honour.

The routes are all designed to take advantage of Sydney's picturesque North Shore and Middle Harbour - covering territory from Milson's Point to Cammeray to Manly. Some of the pleasures have been described by Rob Nolan:

“One of the delights of Sunday morning running is to traverse the harbour foreshore bush tracks, taking in the majestic views of the sparkling water, the serene feeling of isolation from the crowded metropolis, the fresh early morning atmosphere (even if occasionally disturbed by animal odours near Taronga Park Zoo), the colour of the native flowers in spring and autumn, the sighting of frill necked lizards, the numerous birds including the elusive whipbird who we often hear but never see, the clever spiders who spin their webs across the path but just above head height (how do they know?), the multi-coloured rock formations and the cool dense remnants of rain forest....”

In the summer months, many runners also enjoyed a swim at Balmoral after the run, a tradition that continues to this day. In the early days, two of the most enthusiastic participants were John Anderson and Dennis Garland, who continued to venture into the water during winter even though, as Reg Conway would say, it was “colder than the hairs on a polar bear's nose (or whatever).” Jogger Jargon commented that “for those who think it is too cold, ask Dennis and John, that is when their teeth stop chattering”. (You can read more about these amazing characters in Chapter 5.)

## **The 1,000 miles club, and beyond**

As the Joggers became fitter, they started eyeing more ambitious targets. “One night in 1968”, recalls Reg Conway, “after a workout at the gym, we were having a beer and it was discussed whether it was possible to run 1,000 miles (1,600 km) in a year”. The challenge, dubbed “Joggerthon '69”, was set for the following year, and created considerable interest throughout the Club, with many feeling it was simply not achievable.

By December 1969, however, Jogger Jargon was able to make the momentous announcement: “Doug Ford has achieved the goal that a lot of people thought was

impossible – jogging a thousand miles in a year. Actually Doug has achieved the feat in approximately eleven months. A really fine effort.”

That same year, Reg Conway also came close, notching up more than 800 miles, and Arch Punch passed 700. Reg recalls presenting Doug with a miniature Cup to commemorate the achievement.

Achieving the goal was, in its own way, a bit like breaking the four-minute mile. Once one person had done it, it seemed to become easier for others to join the “1,000 mile club”. In 1970, five runners succeeded – Doug Ford again, Reg Conway, Warren Smith, Arch Punch and Bert Harrison. In fact, Bert covered over 2,000 miles. All received an engraved trophy from the Leagues Club in recognition of their achievement. Reg, incidentally, was to go on and achieve the mark for the next 23 years.

Over the years, annual distances have continued to climb. In 1973 Norm Rifkin achieved a phenomenal 3,000 miles, and in 1980 Jogger Jargon was able to report that no fewer than 18 members had exceeded the 1,000 mile barrier. In 2003 Gerry Arthur and Big Dave Vlotman each clocked well over 3,000 km. According to Jogger Jargon’s calculations, “this was the equivalent of running continuously, 24 hours a day, every working day for the whole year, at an admittedly comfortable average speed of ½ a km an hour. Of course they had rests now and again.”