



Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching

If there is one achievement during the last twenty five years which deserves a chapter to itself it is the “Walk Around Australia”.

Not only was the project imaginative in its conception, it was superb in its execution. The scheme required the highest degree of co-ordination involving hundreds of Apexians and yet the difficulties which were encountered were overcome so smoothly that every goal set by the organisers was accomplished within the scheduled time.

The target was set at \$100,000 and Apex resolved to devote the proceeds to form a national trust for research into Autism and for the education and rehabilitation of autistic children.

Autism

Autism is a mysterious affliction which almost defies definition. Children so affected often have no outward appearance of retardation but are locked in a world of their own. They are unable to communicate with parents or peers, they sleep little and are subject to frightening tantrums which can last for intolerably long periods.

This lack of response to normal love or, indeed, threats makes the treatment of these unfortunate children incredibly difficult. Yet the condition is not uncommon and devoted medical scientists and teachers are struggling to alleviate the effects of the illness. At present a complete cure is rare and much must be done to determine the cause and perfect the methods of treatment by the dedicated workers in the fight against this terrifying ailment.

Roger Allen, headmaster of the Autistic Children's Association School at Belrose, Sydney, threw light on the educational problems of autism:

“The Association has recognised that the greatest hope rests in a special kind of educational programme, conducted by kindly, understanding teachers with the ability to effect warm relationships with these children, whose main common characteristic is that they do not form attachments or properly communicate with anyone. Right now, with three teachers and a panel of voluntary helpers we are able to offer effective schooling only to five autistic children.

We feel that if we can come to terms with the basic impairment of emotional relationships we shall have the key to learning and eventual involvement in normal society.

I am concerned for the many other children – I wonder exactly how many – who have strong autistic tendencies and are not at present getting an appropriate educational programme. Without help of a specific kind while they are still young, the younger the better, they may be doomed to a sort of twilight existence which besides distressing their families, also renders them, unnecessarily, useless burdens upon society as a whole”.

This then was the challenge to Apex.



Waltzing Matilda

Apex has found that the peripatetic walkathon is an excellent method of raising funds. The Adelaide Club conducted such a walk annually. Blackwood member Gerry Greenway was joined by John Jackson on one of the laps of the 1967 walkathon. Ten paces later Gerry asked, "Why doesn't Apex walk around Australia?" and went on to elaborate his plan.

Members of the Blackwood Club walked thirty miles from Blackwood to Gawler to arrive at the Zone Convention in time to hear the motion passed approving The Walk. This was followed by endorsement at the Association Convention, Easter 1968.

The route suggest was from Adelaide to Adelaide via Perth – Darwin – Townsville – Cairns – Brisbane – Sydney – Melbourne – Hobart which was approximately Highway One. All clubs along the way were to be asked to participate by providing relay walkers. Cars and caravan would accompany the walkers. Funds would be raised through a competition to estimate the total mileage that would be covered, the sponsorship of walkers by business firms and interested citizens, and collections along the route.

There was really no argument. The necessary jobs were allocated to suitable Apexians and planning commenced. GMH provided two fully-equipped Holden station sedans and every item necessary for camping was assembled. Coca-Cola paid for the printing of one million 20 cent tickets for the competition to gauge the distance which would actually be covered. The first prize was a holiday in India for two with stop-overs in Singapore and Malaysia plus \$1,000 Bank of NSW travellers' cheques and there were numerous valuable prizes for the runners-up. Other companies responded to the challenge of the Long Walk, BP supplied the petrol for the vehicles, Nestles gave a Brabham Torana as a major prize in each State. Sponsors came forward in droves.

One of the most significant factors contributing to the success of the project was the offer made by Barry Ford. Barry was a bachelor member of Victoria Park (WA) and resigned from his job to accompany the convoy for the entire eight months. This ensured continuity and experience gained as the walk progressed was invaluable as each group of hikers took over. Above all, Barry was the link with headquarters in Adelaide.

Circulars and letters had acquainted each with their part in the trek. Publicity was the name of the game and, as each town and city was reached, as much enthusiasm as possible was to be engendered by receptions, newspapers, radio and TV coverage and just plain "stunts". Adelaide performed nobly in arranging a spectacular start.

The Lord Mayor, R.E. Porter, tendered a civic reception in the Town Hall to the executives of sponsor and donor firms, the Autistic Association and Apex officials, the Walk Committee and first walkers, Adelaide Apexians, Peter Lunnis and Kevin Handreck.

Robin Millhouse, the Attorney-General of South Australia and a great supporter of Apex, launched the walk. Association President George Sprague delivered a rousing speech and pinned "Apexians Give a Damn" badges on the lapels of the Lord Mayor and Attorney-General. Robin is a fitness fanatic but was only able to join the walk for a short



time as he was due at a Cabinet Meeting. George Sprague, however, collected \$100 sponsorship for traversing the first mile.

On the steps of the Town Hall, Mr Porter presented Barry Ford with a baton containing a sealed battery-operated Timex watch, which was to be carried by successive walkers for the whole journey.

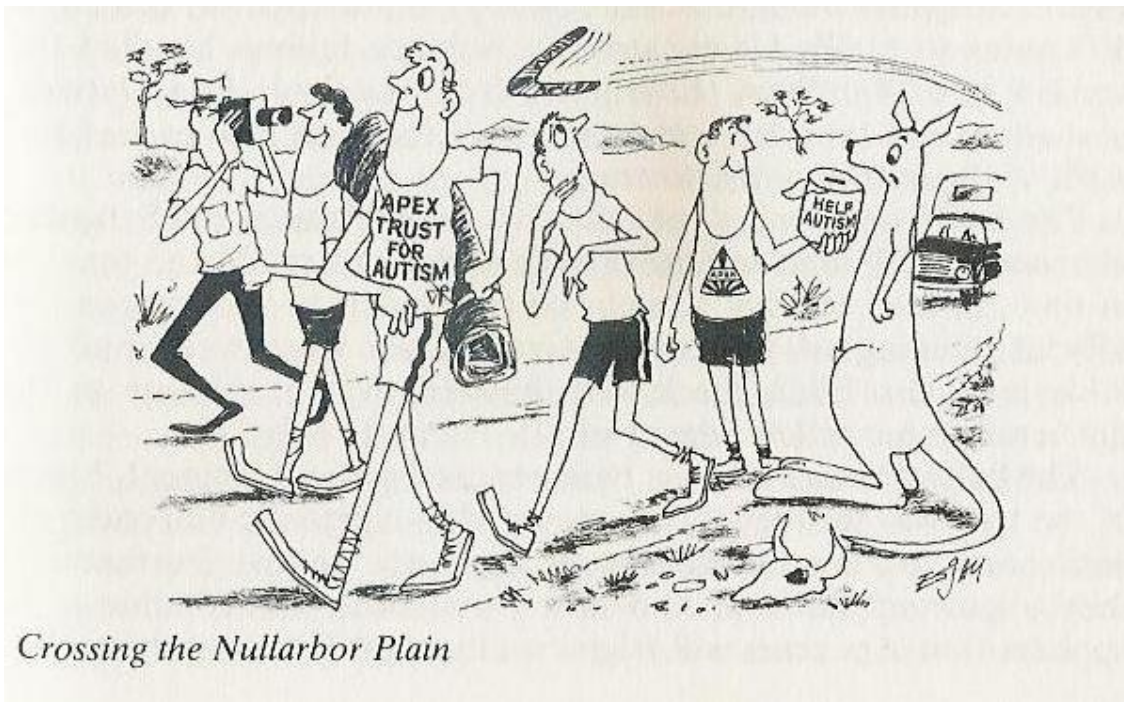
The Apexian reported “Accompanied by a police escort, the Salisbury Apex Club “Walk” float and two support vehicles, the walkers strode manfully down the main north-south thoroughfare of Adelaide. Lunch-time shoppers stopped, TV cameras whirred, watching Apexians ribbed their mates, cameras clicked, tape recorders buzzed And “The Walk” was away.

The co-ordination of the enterprise was classical. Every club along the route was ready to take their part and responded manfully. Some one hundred and fifteen Apexians had taken their share of the walking by the time Norseman (WA) was reached. Carey Ackland of Morphett Vale (SA) covered 100 miles from Cocklebidy to Norseman in five and a half days. Twenty of the twenty four members of the Esperance (WA) club travelled the one hundred and twenty miles to Norseman to walk the one hundred and twenty miles back to Kalgoorlie.

Roger Kearns of Campbelltown (SA) took his pistol with him to shoot a few rabbits on the Nullarbor Plains. He was asking for a donation from a lady driver when his coat blew back revealing the gun. The startled woman thrust a \$2 note in his hand and sped off in a cloud of dust. One of the hazards of the desert was flying money. Twenty cent pieces could hurt when flying from a speeding car. Despite the long stretches of mulga, the total sum collected from sponsorship and donations from motorists stood at \$8,160 when Perth was reached.



The Start of the Walk, George Sprague, National President, Barry Ford, Gerry Greenway step out with Robin Millhouse, Attorney-General of South Australia.



Crossing the Nullarbor Plain

Crossing the Nullarbor Plain



The Sand Gropers

Western Australia has always been renowned for its hospitality but unfortunately, the convoy encountered heavy rain as it entered Perth and only small but enthusiastic crowds welcomed them. The following day the Lord Mayor, Mr (later Sir) Tom Wardle tendered a civic reception to the walkers, Apexians and other distinguished guests. Mr Wardle made a personal donation of \$500.

The Control Centre committee in Adelaide took a deep breath. On to Darwin! Ted Court of the Melville (WA) Club walked forty miles in one day towards Bindoon before being relieved by Perth Apexians who took The Walk to Walebing. Next the Moora boys amassed \$200 from roadside collections en route for Dalwallinu where local members raised \$46 doing a lap of the local oval at quarter time during the match of the day. At Donarra the team was met by Mrs Hanstrun who has an autistic son. Not only did she collect \$40 but she arranged afternoon tea on the roadside and organised billets for two of the team.

Arrival at Geraldton was heralded by hourly broadcasts over the local radio station. Six days later the Geraldton boys walked into Carnarvon, 300 miles further north, after passing through vistas of spectacular scenery. Carnarvon Apexians were met by four Perth metropolitan members who flew in to tackle the 320 miles to Port Hedland. They were accompanied by Keith Chenhall (Traralgon) who remained with Barry Ford for six weeks until Katherine was reached.

The Port Hedland club (unchartered) strolled 530 miles in 11 days! The twelve members of the Derby club successfully dealt with 300 miles to Hall's Creek and five Subiaco fellows handled the section into Wyndham. Five more from Adelaide (via Darwin) pushed on to Katherine and members of the local club carried the walk to the outskirts of Darwin.

The last sixteen miles into the city were left until the Saturday afternoon of 21 June and these were completed exactly on time ... in time, in fact, to walk straight on to the dais to take part in the official opening of the Mardi Gras. They were welcomed by Alderman Dr Ellen Stack who handed over a message to be delivered to her fellow Mayor of Mt Isa on 11 July.

The halfway mark had not been reached without incident. Much of the trek was through what amounted to a gigantic bull paddock and round any bend could appear a massive animal. Fortunately they all turned tail and fled in a cloud of ... well, bulldust. It appears that Apexians will frighten anything. Crossing the eight mile wide Fitzroy River presented problems and the walkers saw their first crocodile! One Apexian carried a tin of baby powder to treat chafing, another kept getting his beard caught in the zip of his sleeping bag and a Darwinian was wakened by the cold, wet nose of a large wild dingo nuzzling his bare feet. Barry reported that the animal retired without comment.

The kindness and overwhelming hospitality of the people of the outback made a lasting impression on the Apexians. The convoy was fed, housed and feted in the most unlikely places and the food, fuel and donations which were so willingly offered will never be forgotten.



Downhill All The Way

With \$17,000 in the kitty, Barry Ford pointed his Katherine team in the direction of Mt Isa. At Daly Waters they were relieved by a Darwin and Nightcliff roster who pressed on to Elliott. Alice Springites tramped on to Frewenna where Zone 11 came into the picture.

Back at Derby, Barry had reported: "We are now out of death-adder country. Just have to watch out for Spinifex snakes, scorpions and red-backed spiders". He had overlooked the snake country of Queensland.

John Maskal of Alice Springs caught a 5-ft long python and promptly sold it at Three-ways Roadhouse for an autistic \$2, Barry Ford killed an unidentified striped snake next day and Mt Isa Apexian John Turner disposed of a 5-ft Downs tiger snake.

Down the Queensland stretch the walkers were greeted with receptions, woolshed dances and barbeques and the money kept rolling in. This culminated in a triumphal entry to Mt Isa led by a police car, Jack Regan, the Town Clerk, and local Apexians.

It was distressing to the team to walk through drought-stricken areas where little rain had fallen for years, but those whose livelihood depended on the seasons still proved to be generous and hospitable.

Wherever Apex went they were assisted by Lions Clubs. The Lions were holding a rodeo at Hughenden but insisted that the walkers should do a lap of the arena. Barry took over the microphone to deliver his "spiel" and the resulting collection helped raise the Hughenden total to \$600.

The members of Charters Towers set a cracking pace from Prairie .. too fast for an emu which dropped off, panting, after a quarter of a mile. Helped by police escort, a band and local VIP's, \$130 was amassed on the road during the last two miles into Townsville. Ingham and Hinchinbrook fellows carried on to Tully where the first rain was encountered since leaving Perth. The local radio station assisted in raising another \$250 at Innisfail.

Babinda, Gordon Vale and Cairns clubs took the convoy to the latter town. Then, after backtracking to Townsville, progress was made to Ayr. Good walking by Proserpine enabled Barry to make a quick trip to the Barrier Reef. It rained all the time, however, and the tide was out

As had been the case throughout the journey, town shires and councils in Queensland co-operated magnificently and often did a share of the walking.

The progress halted for the first time in Jardine Valley so that the team could marvel at Neil Armstrong's greatest walk in history. The Australian walkers strode off again with a new spring in their step.

The parade into Rockhampton was a grand affair but it so happened that Gladstone was reached at night. Undeterred, the boys went on a "pub crawl" and netted \$75. Next morning, Graham Veal of Gladstone swam the Calliope River for another 2½ bucks.



Meanwhile five Theodore members had arrived after driving 250 miles just to be part of The Walk.

Appropriately, the Gin Gin lads, in high spirits, carried onto Bundaberg, the rum town. The Gympie Club was not too proud to accept donations from anyone. They touched the Rotary club for another \$70. Cooroy pushed a pram all the way to Nambour – mostly uphill. There a doctor delivered an address on autism at an official luncheon.

Maroochydore Apexians started early to maintain the tie schedule which had been adhered to all along the line thanks to the co-operation of participating clubs.

The functions in Brisbane were singularly appropriate. The team attended a seminar on autism at the university and then made their way to a special ceremony arranged by major sponsor, the Bank of NSW. The bank was erecting a new building and had reserved the last girder for Apex. The dynamic Lord Mayor, Clem Jones, and Barry Ford affixed their signatures on the girder before it was hoisted atop the structure.

Beenleigh gathered a spectacular group around them, including an elephant, and took the procession on within a mile of the Gold Coast where Southport and Burleigh Heads made a profitable sally on Surfer's Paradise.



Mr Doug Anthony, Member for the Tweed Area and an ex-Apexian, walked seventeen miles between Bangalow and Ballina

South of the Border

A small welcome ceremony was arranged at the New South Wales border. Mr Doug Anthony officiated and later walked seventeen miles between Bangalow and Ballina. The Ballina Club held a Street Fair, Maclean boosted the publicity and Grafton Apexians came up with a novelty ... three of their wives walked the whole fourteen miles with them in heavy rain.

South Grafton manned the Tick Control Gate all day and took \$150 ... none of it on tick. On to Taree where the club had made large fibreglass boots to be towed through the town, accompanied by a pipe band. At Wyong, club members started at 7.15am with 65 high school boys, and this number swelled to 500 through the town. Gosford, Woy Woy and Sydney clubs took the march to the Gordon school on the outskirts of Sydney.

Each major city had extended itself to produce a colossal welcome and the capital of New South Wales was no exception. No one was left in any doubt about the reason and value of the Walk Around Australia.

The Kiama and Berry clubs took the project a step further to Nowra through some of the most beautiful country yet encountered. Milton-Ulladulla, Bateman's Bay, Moruya and Braidwood, Bermagui-Cobargo added almost \$1,200 to the total. Two Apexians at Eden



dodged flying balls on the nine-hole course to catch golfers on the tee, the fairway, the rough and the green to contribute to the \$250 collected in this town. Further on at Cann River the lack of an Apex club was no problem. The local school children held a function and raised \$50.

Someone had the brilliant idea of subsidiary walks and these became a feature of the trek down the eastern coast. Team No 2 covered the Hume Highway while the main convoy was making its way along Highway One. These were perhaps not as glamorous as that of the official party but they contributed substantially to the overall results.

With a plethora of willing walkers the distance to Melbourne was covered in the scheduled time. The welcome was missed by Peter Matthews, of the Camberwell club who was in charge of the Melbourne organising committee. He was on the "Princess" headed for Devonport, Tasmania, while Barry took the other vehicle over on the "Trader".

Tassie

Peter was met by Deputy-Premier Lyons with a pony club, a band and marching girls. The Walk in Tasmania was characterised by some arduous going which raised a good deal of cash and very large blisters.

The route from Devonport via Latrobe led through Deloraine to Launceston. This city turned on a fire engine and a band to head the procession to a reception at the Bank of New South Wales. Onto Hobart where Barry and Peter arrived in time for the Zone 3 Convention dance and stayed for the barbeque on the next day, a Sunday.

Hobart clubs got them through to the Bronte Park turn-off and New Norfolk members took them to a point 42 miles from Queenstown. Apexians from that club were accompanied to their hometown by an intrepid character who did not belong to Apex. He had contracted to walk the entire 42 miles for a contribution close to \$300. When the relay walkers arrived in Queenstown the non-Apexian was two miles from home. His reception was bigger than that for the official party when he staggered in. Barry reported that his feet were "one thumping great blister from heel to toe". Another non-member. Irishman Pat Font, a visitor from overseas on a working holiday, walked the 108 miles from Queenstown to Burnie in 2 days, to collect a sponsorship of \$500 from his work mates at the Savage River iron mine on the Tasmanian west coast. These spontaneous gestures were greatly appreciated by Apex.

On through Tulla where thirty chaps from Rosebery and Mersey-Devonport moved on to Burnie. Climbs of up to 2500 feet were encountered but the tremendous scenery was sufficient compensation.

Barry Ford returned to the mainland to find walkers on their way to Geelong. Numerous clubs continued the journey to Port Fairy where a big fireworks display was held. The Walk paused for a few minutes to listen to the broadcast of Adelaide's Rain Lover sinning his second Melbourne Cup. Portland assisted locals to cross the border into Mount Gambier. Club relieved club on the trek across the 90-mile desert to Keith and thence on to Mount Barker. There were never less than six men on the road.



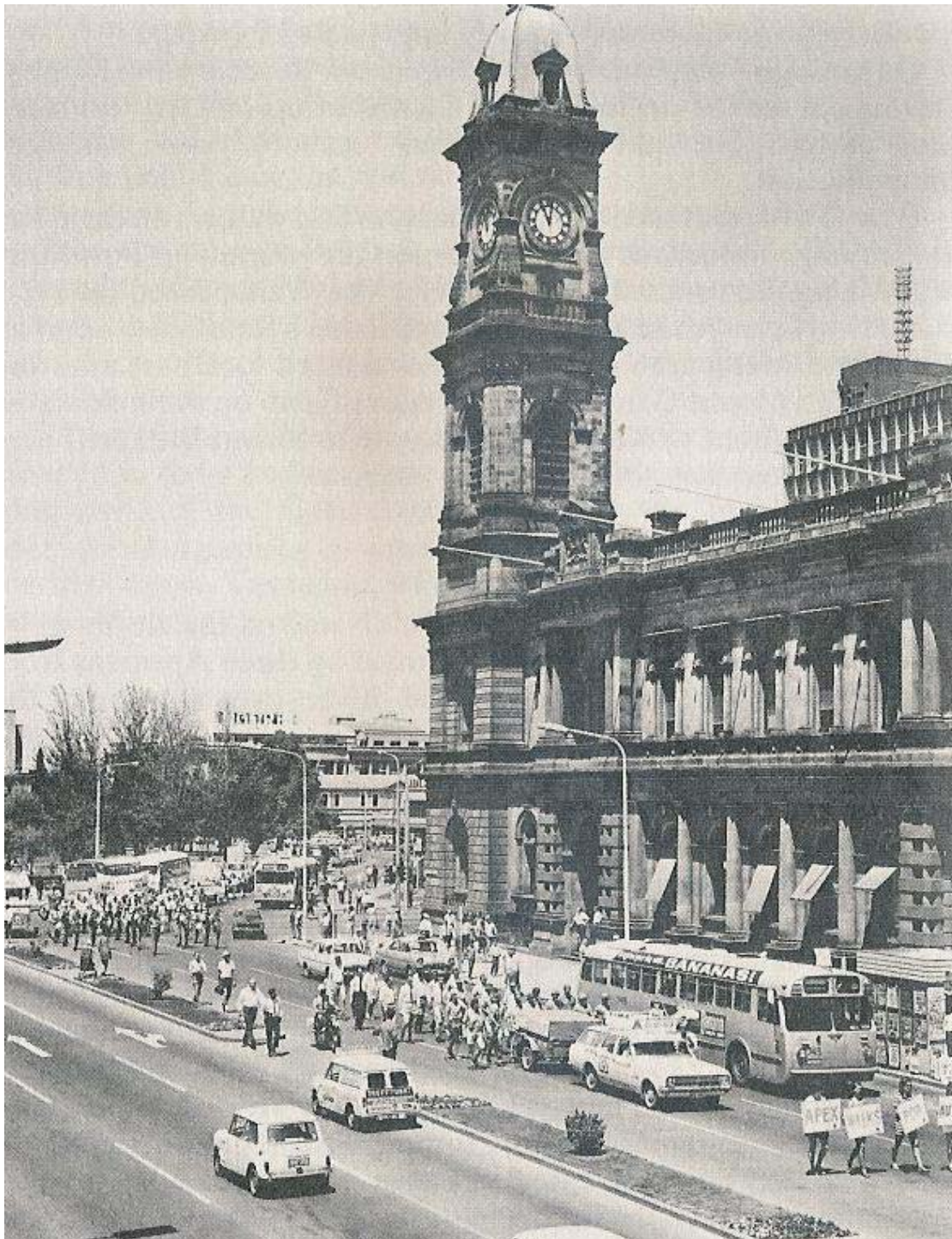
The Home Stretch

On Friday afternoon the Blackwood club walked the eleven miles from Mt Barker to Stirling accompanied by three Apexians from the Esperance (WA) Club who had driven over to be in at the finish.

Association President Pete Mayo joined Apexians at Stirling Hotel at 7am on Saturday 15 November, the final day of the marathon. Eleven miles to go! The convoy was swelled by floats, one complete with a jazz band, as they descended the Adelaide hills. Members from the subsidiary walk from Mildura were welded in and two hundred people strode the last mile to the accompaniment of the Central Command Band.

A familiar figure stood on the steps of the Adelaide Town Hall as the band played "These Boots are Made for Walking" and the convoy arrived spot on time. The Lord Mayor Mr R.E. Porter had been in at the beginning and now was there to officiate at the end of the saga. Barry Ford presented messages from civic leaders all over the country and then the magic figure of 10,114 miles went up as the odometer was unsealed.

It was over! The large crowd dispersed and Saturday morning in Adelaide returned to normality.



On the tick of eleven by the GPO clock The Walk convoy arrived opposite the Adelaide Town Hall – right on time.



The Walk Ball

The ball which followed the conclusion of the Walk was a glittering function permeated by the heady atmosphere of conquest.

President Peter announced to the 800 who attended that almost 1300 entrants had correctly forecasted the distance travelled, the winner would be decided by a quiz contest as specified under the rules of the competition. The first prize of a two-weeks holiday with Air India, coupled with the \$1,000 travellers' cheques from the Bank of NSW, eventually went to Mrs G.W. Lee of Youngtown, Tasmania.

The Last Step

The Zone 8 Presidents' and Secretaries' meeting gave the opportunity to wind up the financial affairs of the project. Walk Chairman, Gerry Greenway and Blackwood President Graham Stoddart presented a cheque for \$120,000 to Association President Carl Bisson to hand over to the trustees of the Apex Trust for Autism. The cheque was a huge one in the appropriate shape of a boot sole.

The main sponsors who helped to make the remarkable total possible were Air India, The Bank of NSW, Miami BP (Aust), Claridge Motors, Finsbury Engineering, TAA, Tom the Cheap, Ansett-Pioneer and Coca Cola.

The Walk could not have succeeded without Barry Ford. His was a record of superb co-ordination. He had to ensure that the convoy reached its destination at the scheduled time and did so every day for 8½ months. There were no mechanical breakdowns, no accidents and no injuries. Barry himself walked 1,117 miles of the 10,114 miles total and his contribution to an epic saga should never be forgotten by Apex or the parents of autistic children.

Behind the scenes, John Jackson, Director of Public Relations, was another of the heroes of the Walk. He appreciated the crucial importance of his portfolio and took every opportunity to wring the last drop of publicity from every aspect of the undertaking. John's progress reports in *The Apexian* were a delight to read and fanned the flames of enthusiasm right around the country.

A great deal of space has been devoted to this service job for a good reason. The Walk Around Australia exemplified almost all that Apex is about. The idea was imaginative and innovative, typical of a group of keen young men. The project would not have been a success without the enthusiasm of youth. Many of the hundreds of Apexians involved had to walk long distances through tough country and this required determination, fitness and endurance. At times a touch of brashness and cheek paid dividends in collecting donations. Darwinians flagged down a train in the Northern Territory to relieve the train crew of a few dollars and when a tram was held up by the final procession, Apexians methodically moved through the vehicle to complete further extractions.

The advantage of having clubs in so many towns, some of them populated by a few hundred souls, was obvious. The benefit to the community of having Apex established Australia-wide was confirmed by the Walk. State barriers were broken down and



Queenslanders, Victorians, Tasmanians, Territorians, New South Welshmen, South Australians and West Australians became, for the good of the cause, simply Australians. Apexians were united in a common aim and were recognised as “dinkum Aussies” and not as an elite group. Perhaps the finest aspect of the project was the strengthening of the bonds of fellowship. Members were drawn together in the sheer enjoyment of carrying the scheme through to a triumphant conclusion. Young men scoffed at the difficulties and had immense fun in overcoming them. Shining through the long, sometimes weary, months of the adventure was the reason for the effort which captured the imagination of participants and the public – hope for the sufferers from Autism and relief to those close to them.

The long Walk will proudly stand as one of the finest achievements of Apex.



After 10,114 miles Barry Ford was welcomed back to Adelaide by Mr R.E. Porter. The Lord Mayor had sent him on his way 8½ months before.