

The following article was written many years ago and is now reprinted in its entirety.

" THE PHARLAP OF THE BUSHWALKERS.

An Interview with Gordon Smith

by Judex.

"How old were you when you took up walking?" I asked by way of commencing the interview.

"About 12 months, I expect", was the laconic reply and Gordon started to edge away but the corner was rather congested and he did not succeed; so after the usual preliminary modesty (to which interviewers become accustomed) he gave in and sat down again.

Gordon was not born and bred to the bush; indeed had it not been for the S.B.W. he might never have found out the charm of bushwalking. His early walking activities were entirely in the racing direction. Someone from the N.S.W. Walking Club picked him out from a number of his school mates as something out of the ordinary and suggested he should join the Club. He did so in 1921 and in 1922 he proved the discernment of his nominator by winning the 20 miles championship. Since then he has won about 20 championships both Club and State. At present he holds the State 32 to 50 miles track-walking and the Australian record for 24 hours. He also held for some while the Australian 50 miles championship but a Victorian subsequently made better time on the same test.

During the last 12 years he has averaged 4500 miles a year, or about 88 miles a week - it makes one gasp - 88 miles in a long weekend perhaps but 88 miles every week!

Large mileages are Gordon's strongest point. He told me that in walks under 15 miles he is by no means a record-holder, a matter which may be a surprise to many who have been out with him and thought he flew over the ground, rough and smooth alike.

His now great love of bushwalking through the rough as well as along tracks is all the more interesting because racing walks are always along roads or at best good tracks. Long distance races, in which Gordon holds the record, are always along roads because it is only possible by this means to get the mileage calculated. The shorter walks are sometimes along tracks but none of them are remotely like bushwalking.

"Therefore how did you come to join the S.B.W.?" Gordon thought a good while but could not exactly remember. He was a foundation member of the Club and even before it was formed he recalls one purely pleasure walk of 500 miles which took him from Sydney through Nowra, Mossvale, Thirlmere, Burragorang, Jenolan, Bell Richmond and Parramatta in 16 days. So apparently the germ of bushwalking came into existence unawares.

"And which do you prefer now, racing or bushwalking?"

"Both are pleasurable... Racing is hard work and has a certain fascination but it can't go on for ever. Each year I decide to knock it off and then someone comes along and I go in for it for one year more. At best I can hardly do it for another 10 years. But bushwalking will go on for ever, I hope. It is the combination of walking and scenery that gives charm to bushwalking, not so much the wildflowers which do not appeal to me much, but the wider landscape. Then, of course, there is good companionship, swimming - and eating ;"

Scenery being one of the main attractions of bushwalking it may seem strange to some that Gordon has taken only two important walks afield, one to Barrington Tops and one to Tumut and Kosciusko. The explanation is that what he has seen of other parts only makes him love the southern Blue Mountains more. However, this year he is off to New Zealand and a taste of mountaineering, and it will be interesting to hear whether this type of scenery attracts him as much as his beloved Cox and Kowmung.

This year is the first year bushwalkers have taken part in race-walking and, as we all know, they topped the lists coming second, third and fourth after Gordon in each event. I was very interested, therefore, to hear Gordon's comments on the possibility of racing walkers being drawn from the bushwalking movement. It was this :

"In a long race nine-tenths of the N.S.W. Walking Club fail because they lack the necessary stamina. This is where the bushwalkers score. They have carried heavy packs up steep hills and the whole of the bush-walking activities builds up that requisite stamina. Those who went in for the walking races this year had none of the racing technique or style, and yet they succeeded. If they would acquire these things, then, the younger especially should be very successful. I hope they will take it up;

The N.S.W. Walking Club, of which Gordon is such a distinguished member, numbers about 60. But members are not all very active. It is interesting to learn that some years ago they had it in mind to establish a club like the S.B.W. but the latter established itself while they were cogitating over the idea. Gordon thought this a pity since the method would have put the N.S.W. Walking Club on a sounder basis financially and better able to send teams to other States and such like. However, perhaps it was a wise fate which kept the bushwalking separate from the racing, and its separation does not prevent the N.S.W. Walking Club from drawing recruits from our ranks."