

Lake City Athletic Club Inc

A History by Pam Kenny

Three clubs joined together in April 1991, to form the current Lake City Athletic Club Inc. A short history of the earlier clubs is shown first.

Rotorua Amateur Athletic & Cycling Club / Rotorua Athletic Club 1931-1991

On the 13 November 1931 a meeting was convened at Brent's Bathgate House to establish an athletic and cycling club in Rotorua. Thirty people were in attendance and the Rotorua Amateur Athletic and Cycling Club was formed, with the club achieving incorporated society status in 1938.



Val Robinson winning an early ladies' athletics meeting in the late 1940's

Blue and gold were the club colours - blue singlet/blouse and shorts with gold "R" on the top. Weekly competitions were held at the Rotorua Boys High on a Friday evening, with the customary track and field events for the runners, with cyclists contesting both track and road races.



Harriers in the late 1940's - L to R; John Wild, Alex Millar, Keith French, Harry Findon

The club went into recess during the Second World War, with activities resuming October 1944.

Venues utilized between 1944 and 1960 were Kuirau Park, the old A&P Showgrounds near Uta Street, Arawa Park, Pererika Street, and again Kuirau Park. 1961 saw the Club at Smallbone Park,

its home until the 1983/84 season, when a move was made to the new International Stadium, though the inadequacy of the track led to a return to Smallbone Park for a season. 1986 it was back to the Stadium until sand carpeting of the ground prevented permanent lane markings and children being able to run barefooted. There followed a move to what is known as the No 2 Ground adjacent to the Stadium, this being the ground currently used.



Kay Taylor, founder of Rotorua Harriers, with the Club's chaperone Mrs Edwards

In 1947 Mr. Kay Taylor began the winter harrier section of the Club, with the first run starting from the Scout Hall in Pererika Street.. At this stage the club was renamed the Rotorua Amateur Athletic, Cycling and Harrier Club Inc, this being its name until 1963 when the word cycling was dropped. In 1981 the name was amended again to **Rotorua Athletic Club Inc.**

Round the Lake Relay

The Round the Lake Rotorua relay for teams of 6 was a club-only event first held in 1949. In 1953 the event became an open race which over the years attracted teams from throughout the North Island. With traffic congestion, teams were reduced to five persons and the event was last held in 1977.

The Rotorua Marathon

The first recorded group run around Lake Rotorua was in 1961 when 8 Rotorua runners attempted the circuit – only two finished the 26 mile 385 yards distance. Three official Club marathons followed. Not till 1965 did a sponsored event begin, supported until 1999 by Fletchers (35 years), hence the name Fletcher Marathon. Until 1977 the race was run anti-clockwise around the lake, the fastest time being Jack Fosters 2:17:51.



Setting up for Rotorua Marathon late 1970's



Derek Wilson & Dennis Kenny at Cross country in the good old days

Track and Field

Over the years the Club has organized and hosted a number of track and field meeting - International meets at Smallbone Park in the early 60s when some 18,000 attended to watch Peter Snell compete; a number of Waikato championships for both senior and children; the children's Easter Interprovincial competition - no computers in those days to calculate the points.

Cross-country

During the late 1960s a number of Waikato cross-country championships were hosted by the Club. 1968 saw the

New Zealand cross-country champs held in Rotorua. These were on a course in the Westbrook, - Matipo Heights area. The Lake City Athletic club has hosted the road championships on courses in Fenton Park and on Waipa State Mill Road.

During the 70s and 80s open walk events were also held, initially in the region of Fenton Park and latterly the Long Mile, Scion area.

Club Rooms

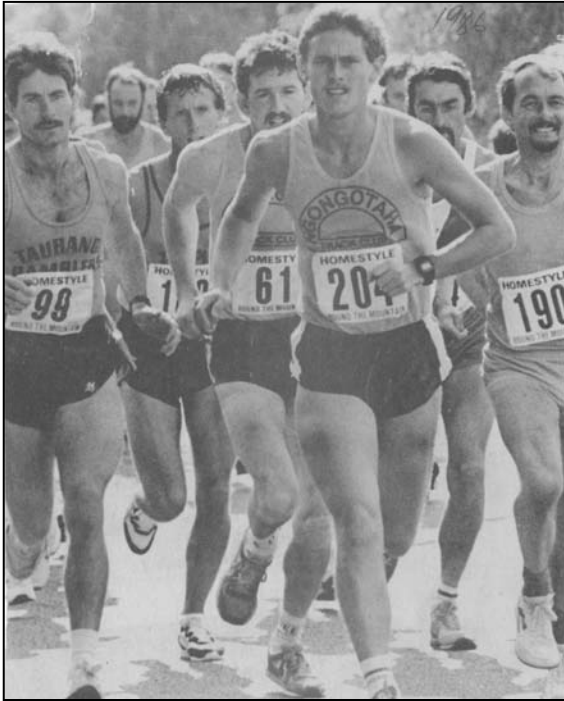


In the early 1980s the lease of land at Neil Hunt Park cul du sac was negotiated with the Council and plans were drawn up for clubrooms, which were constructed via working bees by the members, as well as input from the professional building sector.



Ngongotaha Club 1976-1991

1976 saw the formation of the **Ngongotaha Track Club**, originally for children's summer athletics, but in due course athletes of all ages were catered for. The club uniform consisted of maroon shorts and gold singlet with the words "Ngongotaha Track Club" in maroon letters on front. The track was originally at the Ngongotaha School, but in 1977 moved to the Ngongotaha Soccer grounds in Stembridge Road, where a 300-metre track could be accommodated. Other venues used by the Club were the Ngongotaha Domain, the Agrodome, and Western Heights High School. In the later years the senior track and field nights were combined with the Rotorua Club, while the children's nights were held at Western Heights High



Tony Grant running the 1986 Half Marathon around Mt Ngongotaha

Half Marathon

In 1980 the club held a road race as a club fundraiser. The course, starting in Stembridge Road, Ngongotaha, went clockwise around Mt Ngongotaha – distance 24 km. In 1986 the start / finish of the event moved to Western Heights High School in Old Quarry Road, as State Highway 5 at Ngongotaha was getting too dangerous to cross, with the event distance being changed to 21.1 km. The 20th anniversary event was acknowledged in 2005 by the

new Lake City Athletic Club, with a special medal being minted.



Colin Smyth running in Ngongotaha Track Club colours 1989

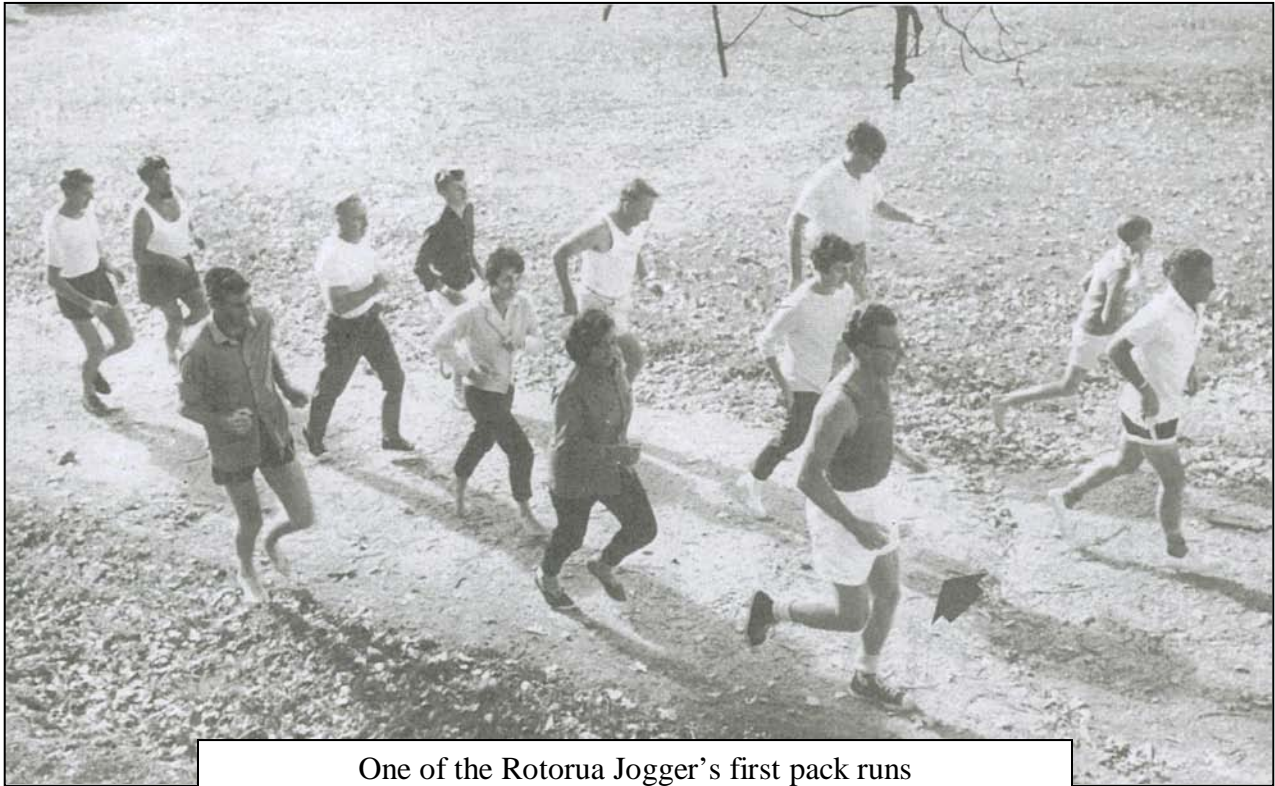
Whakarewarewa Forest (Red Stag) Relay

The first event of this popular relay was held in 1979 under the banner of the Statecraft Relay. Headquarters were the Waipa Hall on the Waipa State Mill Road, with the course starting and finishing in the Wapia Sawmill compound, and taking in Hill and Nice Roads: each lap was 6 km. 1984 saw 149 teams taking part, and was the first year the results were computerized. 1993 saw the event moved across the Forest to the course currently used in the Redwood Grove – Scion Nursery area.



Sue Waru & Kathy Howard club cross country champs 1989

Rotorua Joggers 1968-1991



The **Rotorua Joggers Club** was formed in 1968, with around 30 people aged between 30-60 in attendance. Long time jogger Ted Sheppard reports that they used a shed at the racecourse for their headquarters in the very early days, moving to the Rotorua Gymnasium rooms until 1969. They went on to become associate members of St Michael's Rugby club in Te Ngae Road, and in the later years the club was based at Rotorua Old Boys Rugby Club. Exercise rather than competition was the aim of the organisation, with the Club becoming a starting point for many that went on to run competitively.

Fun Run

The Joggers organized for many years a community fun run using Whakarewarewa School as headquarters, and Fenton Park streets for the course. This event was extremely popular, introducing many Rotorua citizens to a fitness regime.

1st April 1991 saw the above three clubs join together to become the only athletic club in Rotorua - The Lake City Athletic Club Inc.

Lake City Athletic Club 1991-present

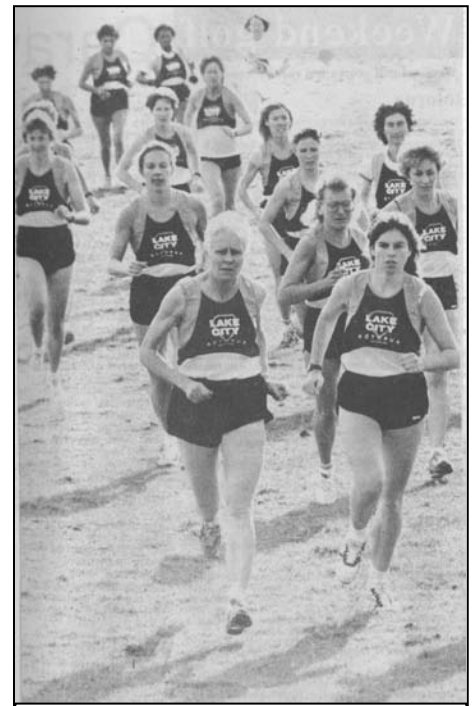
The 2007/2008 year saw an upgrade of the clubrooms, which included re painting, new carpet, and modernization of the ablution areas. We continue to have an upmarket, clean, enjoyable clubrooms with excellent shower facilities and even a small gym upstairs. One of the key reasons our club room is still in such great shape after many years, is that it is reserved for Club events only (we do not rent out for parties or private functions).

Cross Country

The winter season has continued to have a strong Cross Country field over the years, which is a sport for the whole family and a great place for beginners to start. Walkers and joggers including children and adults can easily complete the varied off-road rambles together. Many start out simply for the outdoor exercise, but once the running bug bites, many have often gone on to events and distance running like the Half and full Marathons clinics.



Max Bragg & John Marten and other Lake City runners at Cross Country Champs A&P grounds 1994



Pam Kenny leading the field at Club cross country champs at the Ngongotaha A&P grounds 1991

Most of the cross country jaunts have been on weekends, due to shortened daylight hours in winter. Sprinkled across the winter schedule, are a variety of off-road race events, where other clubs around the bay take part for a healthy bit of inter-club competition.

Rotorua Marathon

The 25th event in 1989 attracted 6,364 entrants with 5,867 completing the event. These numbers still stand as the largest single marathon in New Zealand.

Paul Ballinger (New Plymouth) holds the clockwise record (2:16:05 set in 1998), with Nyla Carroll (Auckland) setting the women's fastest time of 2:37:37 in 1994.



Delis Hartley & daughter at an early Marathon Desk



1999 saw, 10 minutes before the 10.00am start time, the event cancelled due to a deluge over the Rotorua basin that created washouts, slips and flooding on the course, especially in the Hamurana Hills. All those that had uplifted their race numbers were forwarded their finishers tee shirt suitable overprinted "rained out", together with their 35th commemorative medal stamped "rained out".

As many of the marathon committee members were wishing to lighten their load, in 2000 Athletics New Zealand was approached and they agreed to take over the ownership of the event with enduring royalties to the club. The event continues today in great form with a significant amount of support from club members, including those who run the event. In 2011 a new Half Marathon was

added, to cater for those who are only starting out on their marathon journeys.

Marathon Clinic

One of the Club's most popular training events is the Annual Marathon Clinic for both walkers and runners, which was initially founded by Ray Malcolmson. Participants from the surrounding Bay areas come to Rotorua to take part in the long Sunday training runs, in the 4 months leading up to the Rotorua Marathon.



Karyn McReady with Ray Malcolmson, founder of the Marathon Clinic

Colin Smyth is one of the great marathon runners of 'the olden days', still very active with the club as a marathon walker as of 2011. Colin led the marathon clinic for many years, being described as 'quite a task master'. In more recent times he has taken up the popular walking clinic with his wife Pat, who both walk the entire marathon each year. To date Colin has showed up to the start line for every marathon since the beginning, currently having completed 45 marathons.



Colin & Pat Smyth walking the marathon together in 2003, finishing in 6hrs 35mins

In 2011 the Club's Exec Committee engaged the volunteer services of several new members, including website developers and a marketer to modernize and promote the club more actively. The result was an immediate surge in Marathon Clinic members, with over 60 runners and 30 walkers attending some or all of the 3 clinic outings each week.

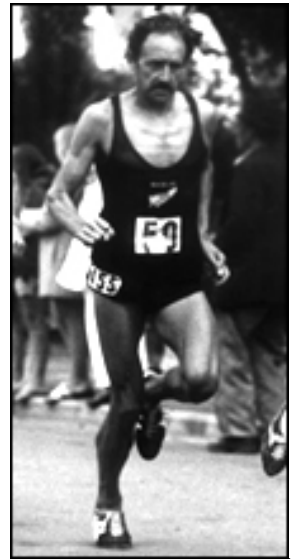
Off-Road Half Marathon

With the advent of traffic management requirements for road based events, it was decided in 2006 to move the annual "half around the Mountain" to an off road venue in Whakarewarewa Forest. For 2 years the Lake City Athletic Club organized the Forest based event, but like the marathon, event principals wished to lighten their load and the Club contacted an event manager to organize and promote the event, with the Club retaining ownership of the event.

New Zealand Representation

Over the years there have been a number of members who have reached New Zealand representation, with the most outstanding being Jack Foster. Jack was a 2-time Olympian in the marathon (1972 Munich 8th 2:16:51, 1976 Montreal 17th 2:17:53), dual Commonwealth Games representative in the marathon (1970 Edinburgh 4th 2:14:44, 1974 Christchurch 2nd 2:11:19), winner of marathons in Japan, United States, Canada, and Australia plus many top places in other international marathons. He was also a member of three New Zealand teams to the World cross-country championships – 1975 Morocco, 1977 Dusseldorf, and 1979 Limerick. Domestically over the years he won New Zealand championship titles and top three places in the marathon, cross-country and road events, plus numerous Waikato titles on the track, the road and cross-country.

For an on-line history of his achievements, this article gives some further insights to Jack's life; <http://runningtimes.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=4647>



Jack Foster heading for Commonwealth Games silver in 1974. Picture from NZ Herald