

# CLUB RUNS

## Good Packing is good harrierism.

Calliope Harrier Club adopted the true values of a traditional harrier club from day one, and the above comment made in 1933 is as true today as it was then. There is no such thing as a harrier club which does not have proper pack runs.

It must be remembered that in 1930 Birkenhead was a peaceful suburb, set in timbered rolling countryside. As Len Lanigan who joined the club in 1932 observed "The district was very sparsely housed". Calliope's harriers could virtually go wherever they liked. Peter Clow recalls that initially the club ran mostly in the area of McKenzies Farm (now Speedy Crescent), Clows Farm and Hazlewoods Farm on Pupuke Road, an area prone to flooding in adverse weather. In the early years paper chases were common. The trail layers would be away through the country and the starter would send the various packs, slow to fast, off at appropriate intervals. Each pack had to co-operatively work together, packing to each other's mutual benefit. Individualism was frowned upon. If the timing was right, if a good course was laid, and if the packing was efficient, the whole process was most enjoyable. This occurred for example in 1954 when a trail was laid by colts A Darroch and G Clayton who started fifteen minutes ahead of the colts pack who in turn were followed at five minute intervals by the juniors and seniors.

The process was of course an inexact one which often went amiss, but that added to the fun of it. A paper chase held in July 1938 is reported in full as it epitomizes the whole spirit of the activity: "D Sharpe and W Charman selected the course and laid the trail. Five packs took part. Number one junior pack, led by G Ambler, ran very evenly, Baillie, F Nicholson and the freshman Leahy performing splendidly. Number one seniors followed, three minutes later, under L J Lanigan. H Hunt and W R Drummond kept the pace steady, and Power and Shaw appeared to be very fit. Number two seniors followed after three minutes. Hardman and Fagan sent the pack along to catch the juniors at Coronation Road. Number two juniors, two minutes later, under B Short, were unfortunate in linking up with the racing pack and thus missing a large loop of country. However these lads did some smart road work and gained unexpectedly on the trail layers. R Burgess and R Dixon were the backbone of this pack. Giving four



*Away they go! Into Birkenhead Avenue*

minutes to their predecessors probably helped the racing pack to "get lost". The pack was led by N R Shorter and N Ambler kept his team going at hurricane speed. J A Darroch retained a very fresh and swinging style throughout, while L Dixon turned on his three-mile style. The trophies of the chase, however, went to the trail-layers, who crammed the trail bag with large mushrooms on their way home!"

In June 1947, things went wrong on a hares and hounds day. B Stuart and J A Darroch laid a paper trail over the Birkenhead-Birkdale area but the packs failed to pick up the start in Glenfield Road, and so had to run their own courses. In August 1953 a paper trail was laid for the Calliope junior championship. Obviously this was not a packing occasion, and the trail was laid some time before the event. Someone from another club laid a paper trail for its men, and this had become mixed with the Calliope trail. The race had to be re-run with the following result: P Penlington 1, T Cowley 2, T Corbett 3. Unbelievably the previous year the same thing had occurred: the result then P Penlington 1, R Wareham 2, T Cowley 3. In 1962 it was reported that veteran Calliope men J A Darroch and R Crowe set off with two large bags of paper to give the youngsters (the colts) a "good old-fashioned paper chase". Several miles later, after traversing road, farmland, fences, ditches, swamps, streams, and hidden bush tracks, not to mention blackberries, gorse and "bush lawyers", the trail returned to the clubrooms, where everyone voted the run "a jolly good show".

Paper chases gradually become fewer and fewer in the 1950s and do not occur at all now in the club. A large part of the reason is the increasing density of population

## CLUB RUNS *cont.*

on the North Shore. In the 1940s Birkenhead Borough had only 1.2 persons per acre. Calliope runners virtually had free rein as to where they could go. The vastly increased population density has created pressures that did not exist before. In the 1970s the Takapuna Club had the initiative to organize a hares and hounds event and got severely chastised by the City Council after complaints were laid about the litter they had created! As late as 1991 Calliope received a letter of complaint from the North Shore City parks officer. It appeared that harrier groups were using shredded paper as course indicators through bush reserves in Le Roys Bush, Kauri Park and Onepoto Basin, and that this was blatant littering that breached two Acts and the By-laws. Flour, sugar or rice was suggested as more environmentally sensitive. Calliope was not guilty, but if it wants a traditional chase in future, it will have to be either a flour chase, a sugar chase or a rice chase. Any one of these could prove a world first for the club.

In the 1930s a regular feature of the club runs was the handicap run-in after the packing exercise. The harriers would cover their five to seven mile courses which were usually a mix of road and country. All would then participate in a handicap run-in. These ranged in distance from 75 yards to 880 yards, with 220 yard and 440 yard distances being very popular. A regular winner in 1930 and 1931 was John Silvester, who was particularly quick over short distances, but by April 1932 the handicapper had his measure. In the 150 yard run-in Silvester off scratch could manage only 5th equal. The winner L Lanigan was off 25 yards, L Murphy was

second off 22 yards and G Ireland third off 20 yards. It is not surprising that Silvester won the first run-in over 440 yards on the official opening day in 1930. No-one then knew his ability. It wasn't until May 1931 that the run-ins were put on a handicap basis, obviously to try to stop Silvester who had won every run-in to that date. He still continued to win most, for instance in September 1931 when in a 220 yard run-in he flashed past G Davidson off 28 yards and H Harte off 20 yards. From 1940 on the run-ins became more over the conventional distances that we know today.

There have been periods in the history of Calliope when pack running tended to get forgotten, with runs turning into virtual races from the start. Arthur Lydiard, who earlier had often run with Calliope on its weekly runs, would not have allowed it. Chairman Keith Stone in 1971 pointed out that the days of the pack run seemed to have gone and that the harriers should be encouraged to come along to enjoy the runs without concentrating so much on racing. Wise words. The racing was only a temporary phase and pack runs again take place on Wednesday nights, Saturday afternoons, and Sunday mornings, with informal run-ins occurring.

The Sunday morning runs are not a patch on what they used to be in the 1970s and 1980s. The compiler has personal experience of staggering the half-mile from his house to the start at High Road, Glenfield, often shattered from a hard race the day before. He then was subjected to a pack run at an unrelenting pace over a long course which took in Lonely Track Road. Roger Weatherley and Bill Fell were often the pack leaders. It



Some of the harriers coming in from a run.