

The History of the Interior Running Association

By Bill Stephens

It seems a long time ago, 1983, but that was the year a group of runners from around the Okanagan got together at the Royal Anne Hotel in Kelowna to discuss the possibility of an Interior running series.

The running boom was just getting started then. In the early 80's there had been only a couple of races to be found in the entire area. For years, Kelowna's only running event was the Radio 1130 half marathon, which was labeled a fun race and was less than half marathon distance. Penticton had the Penticton to Naramata run. (Now the slightly shorter and reverse direction Penticton 10 Miler) and Kamloops had a marathon. By 1982 -83 there were several more serious races popping up throughout the interior. Kamloops, which, at that time was the running center of the interior, held both a spring half marathon and a fall full marathon. Penticton had its popular Lake to Lake 7K, Kelowna held the inaugural Regatta 10K in '82 and the first Apple Half Marathon in '83, and Princeton, in '82, hosted the Coalmont to Princeton run. Additionally the Kelowna Goats ran their first Kelowna to Naramata run. The first Jasper - Banff relay was held, and contested by a team made up of runners from Kelowna and Kamloops. 1983 also saw the first Apple Half Marathon, and the Revelstoke 10K.

It had become time, some of us thought, to organize these races into a solid entity. Doug Smith, of Kamloops, a top runner at the time, was the person who organized the Royal Anne meeting. I don't recall all who attended this organizational get together, but some of the main players were Doug Smith, Neville Flanagan and Winnie McKay Smith of Kamloops, my wife Judy, myself, Mike Whitaker, and Paul Henry from Kelowna, Dave Adams of Salmon Arm, Steve King and Al Johnson of Penticton and, Ernie Bru and Bill Delaney from Vernon. At that time the Interior Running Association was formed and the schedule for 1984's races was decided. The executive was; President-Doug Smith, V.P.- Paul Henry, Secretary-Judy Stephens, Treasurer-Bill Delaney.

There were 14 road races, sponsored by Asics, in our ambitious first year schedule and five cross country races - Vernon Winter Carnival 10K, Kamloops Spring Run-Off 10K, Apple Classic Half

Marathon, Barriere 10K (a killer!), Armstrong Big Cheese 10K, Peachland Jubilee 10K, Penticton to Naramata 16.65K, Kamloops Labatt's Half Marathon, Oliver's Fairview Days 12K, Coalmont to Princeton, Kelowna's Pre-Regatta 10K, Peak to Peak, Summerland Septoberfest 10K, and the Kamloops Marathon. The X-C races were- Overlander Cross Country(Kamloops), Larry Nicholas Memorial Cross Country, Cosens Bay X-Country(Vernon)and the infamous Campbell Mountain Trail run. Our first "Runners of the Year" were Peter Findlay (Kamloops) and Heidi Muckle (Vernon).

The list of member running clubs has changed over the years. The original clubs were - Penticton Pounders, Kamloops Ridge Runners, Kelowna Running Club, Vernon Pacers, Barriere Striders, Armstrong Argonauts, Salmon Arm Runners, Oliver Running Club and the Princeton Running Club. Some of these clubs are no longer in existence, others have died and been revived under new names, and some have amalgamated with the larger clubs in their area.

1986 saw the Peachland Beach Run 10K replace the Jubilee Run, the Penticton To Naramata Run reverse it's direction and become the Penticton 10 Miler, the initial Blackwell Dairy **20K**(yes it was even tougher then), the Summerland run become the Sumac Ridge 10K, and the Kamloops Marathon dropped from our schedule. In 1987 we added the Revelstoke Alpine City 10K and the Okanagan Falls Sun Dew 15K. The Oliver race and Coalmont To Princeton were dropped. 1988 saw Coalmont To Princeton back on board, the Okanagan Falls run changed to a 5K, and the demise of the Armstrong race. By 1998 the schedule had become pretty well what we have today. Coalmont To Princeton was back and Barriere was gone. In 1990 the Kamloops marathon was again added, but it was decided, after that year, that a Marathon did not really fit into our series. The Okanagan Falls 5K was changed to the Penticton 5K in 1995.

One of the major challenges we faced during those formative years was the timing for the races, and the season ending scoring. I had, a couple of years earlier, been chairman of competition for the B.C Cross Country Ski Association. During my tenure there I developed the B.C. Cup series, and, in doing so, had checked into several running and skiing series around the world to find out how they awarded points for their series. Although several different points systems were used, the most popular one was the 30-25-23 etc. points system. That is what we used for the B.C. Cup and it's what

we instituted for the IRRS. Lap top computers were relatively new then, and computer race scoring programs, that fit our needs, were non-existent. Doug Laird, of Kelowna, wrote a computer program, called Racemate, for us that was well ahead of it's time. It worked very well for us for many years. In about 2000 we had a new, supposedly better, program written for us by a commercial programming firm. Since then many commercially available programs have become available. Jean King, who has been indispensable for all the volunteer work she has done on timing, still believes that Racemate was as good as any program available since. I am proud of the fact that our little series was one of the first, anywhere, to have a working computer scoring program.

When the series first began we had very few age categories. There was Junior (under 20), Open (20-40), Master (40-50) and Seniors (50+). Gradually we began implementing 10 year age classes, and, eventually, as our numbers increased, we went to 5 year age groupings.

Some of the people who were on the executive should be mentioned here. Dave Ellis became treasurer in 1990 and stayed on for 14 years. We have had several Presidents over the years, I took the job in 1986 and was either president or VP for the next 16 years. I resigned from the executive in 2005. Linda Stenseth(now Bergstrom) (Summerland) was president in 1990, Pat Rowles (Penticton) for 1991 & 1992 and Terry Dowhaniuk (Kamloops) from 1995-1998. In 2003 Rick Jenkner (Oliver) took over, and from 2004 - 2006 it was Pauline Hill (Vernon). Jarrett Spannier (Revelstoke) became president in 2007.

One of the toughest thing that must be done in order to have a successful race series is to obtain good sponsorship. In 1985-86 we had Asics help us in a quite small way. In 1987 the company I worked for, Canada Trust Realtors, was our sponsor. In 1988, thanks to my friend Keith Gostlin, the Canadian Tire owner in Kelowna, we obtained the Canadian Tire sponsorship that has supported us for the last 20 years. B.C. Athletics has also contributed, in a big way, to our financial well being since 1998.

In writing this history I have gone back and looked at the series results over the 24 years that the series has run. Many of the people who qualified for series awards back then are nowhere to be found today. On the other hand there are the stalwarts who, although older,

slower, and greyer are still pounding the roads and trails today.

There are 15 people who have qualified for series awards (by running at least 5 races) for 10 years or more. This list is headed by the late, great, Willis Greenaway who won every race he entered in our series over 17 different seasons. Laurelee Welder and Karen Willies also have qualified 17 times. Others are Cindy Rhodes (16), Frank Reimer (15), Chris Charbonneau (14), Bill Stephens (13), Mike Braid (13), Alan Kerr (12), Judy Stephens (12), Alan McLeod (12), Donna Nicholas (11), Andre Tse, Rory Switzer and Bill Faulkner with 10 each.

The Peak To Peak Run, (now The Peak To Beak) was always first in my heart as I had the idea of holding a race from the top of one peak in Kelowna, to the top of another about 20K apart. I was race director of it for 15 years and to my knowledge, only one person has run in every Peak To Peak over it's 25 year history. So a special tip of the hat to Rudy Swab.

One more person must be mentioned in this history, although he is still adding new chapters to his incredible story every year, and that person is Mel Doherty. Mel has not missed a series road race in 15 years. That is an unbelievable 190 Races in a row. Most years he has run all the cross country series too! Mel began running in 1991, he missed the first race of the '92 IRRS season only because he didn't know about it. Since then he has not missed a single road race, and the only X-C races he has missed was when there was a conflict with the Victoria marathon! To keep his streak intact he walked the first couple of races of the 2000 season only weeks after having heart surgery.

In the last few years three new awards have been presented. The male and female age-graded trophies and the Heinrich Spiller Award Of Courage. The age-graded trophies are named after two of our greatest master runners, Willis Greenaway and Heidi Muckle-Gader.

Willis ran his first series races in 1985, and won them all. He continued running, and winning for the next 20 years. Willis was in the 60+ category in 1985, and in the 80+ category when he won his class for the last time in 2005. Willis also held several national age class records. In 1992 Willis was given the first, and so far only, "Lifetime Achievement Award" by the Interior Running Association.

Heidi ran our series for the first time in 1985 in the 50+ age

class. Like Willis, over a period of 10 years she never lost a race in her age class. During this time she did not run the series every year, as marathons were always her first priority. Heidi continued to run marathons well into her 70s, and, in 2004 her time of 4:41:11 at the Kelowna International Marathon, made her the top ranked 70-74 year old female marathoner in Canada.

Heinrich Spiller won the men's 55-59 age class in 1995, and the 60+ class in 1996, '97 and '98. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2000 but continued to run, even winning his class in the 2000 cross country series. Heinrich had an incredibly positive attitude. He raced until the cancer made it impossible. Heinrich was a valued, long time employee at the Canadian Tire store in Vernon, and they put up the trophy in his name. As an aside, his son, Robert, is a very good runner, and an even better, national class, cross country skier.

The Interior Running Association, and the running series, have had a successful 24 years, and I am sure they will enjoy many more. I feel privileged to have been a part of it's growth.