

# **A HISTORY OF TRAIL RUNNING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

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## **TRAIL RUNNING SA IS CELEBRATING TEN YEARS IN 2024**

2024 marks a decade since legends, Doug Smart and David Close led the charge to form a dedicated trail running club in South Australia. Their vision was to create a not-for-profit, volunteer led club that would encourage people to get out and enjoy the trails. And boy did they succeed! It has been 10 years of social runs and events all over the trails of SA, supported by a superb community of enthusiastic and selfless people who have all contributed to make TRSA the unique and much-loved organisation that it is.

Please enjoy reading this history of trail running in SA that led to the development of Trail Running SA, and the first ten years of TRSA.

# 1. The early days

## 1.1 Trail running in SA prior to 2007

The advent of the Yurrebilla Trail run in 2007 was the catalyst for a dramatic surge in trail running in South Australia.

Before then organised trail running in SA had a long history from at least as early as the 1980s. In 1993 Peter Almand formed the Offroad Division of the South Australian Road Runners Club (SARRC). With help at first from Sally Piccinato, this group covered the 1200 kms of the Heysen Trail in sections, starting from Cape Jervis in 1993 and finishing in Blinman in 1999. Graeme Page produced excellent maps of each section. In 2005 the Offroad Division covered the Yurrebilla Trail, again in sections.



*The Offroad Division of SARRC on completion of the Heysen Trail in Blinman 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1999. Peter Almand is fifth from left.*

Prior to 2007 the trail running scene in Adelaide was relatively quiet. Athletics SA held several events during the winter months some of which were largely off-road, but these were limited to members of the various athletic clubs. The first ultra distance trail run was a 50 km with a 30 km option mainly along the logging trails in Mt Crawford forest back in the 1980s. There had been quite a few "Fun Runs", but these were mainly in urban areas with only a few in the hills with some off-road content.

The only formal trail running events seem to have been the Black Hill Challenge organised by the Rostrevor Lions Club from 2002 (15 km with about 150 entrants each year) and the Trailblazer (with varying distances up to 100 km). Both these events are still being held and raise money for charities.

SARRC was by far the largest running club and organised two casual (or "social") events each year that went partly or wholly along trails: the Easter Bun Run (10 km) and Belair National Park (12 km), while the Tuesday and Friday weekly running groups ran in the hills in summer months.

Contrast this with the situation 10 years later in 2017. By then there were at least 18 formal trail events around Adelaide, many with entries of over 500. There was in addition the weekly parkrun in Cleland National Park, the first of several parkruns on trails. The proliferation of informal runs by groups or individuals during that period had been just as great.

## **1.2 The Yurrebilla Ultra Marathon**

"I know, the Yurrebilla Trail" said Terry Cleary with a visionary gleam in his eyes. The occasion was John Glowik's 60th birthday party in Sally Buckett's home, in mid-2007. This was the conception of the Yurrebilla Trail 56 km Ultra Marathon (YUM), and, as it turned out, the start of a revival of trail running in SA. A few minutes later, further discussion was cut short when the candles on John's birthday cake triggered the smoke alarm. Perhaps this was an omen of some sort.

After this evening, Terry spent much time exploring the Yurrebilla Trail, which then was poorly marked. Terry said that he was influenced by one of the most famous trail running events in Australia at the time, the "Six Foot Track" in New South Wales. On 25 November 2007, he led 23 members of SARRC for a memorable day's run along the whole 56 kms of the trail. Having promised his wife Gab - who organised the catering on a lavish scale - that this was a one-off affair, he then left Adelaide to work in Alice Springs.

## **1.3 YUM becomes official**

In February 2008, with John Glowik's strong support and in Terry's absence, David Close moved successfully in a SARRC Board meeting that YUM should become a regular SARRC event, with himself as race director, for which he remained for the next three years. At that time an ultramarathon trail rail event seemed novel and experimental in SA.

After David retired as race director, successive directors were Sonya Conrad, Sadie Cranston, Doug Smart, and then for three years Barry and Bev McBride. After that the event was organised from the SARRC office. These directors built the event to gain national status.



*Start of the first official Yurrebilla Ultra Marathon in September 2008. Some especially keen supporters of trail running are pictured: second from left, Stan Trepacz, third Kathy Moylan (blue top), sixth from left Sally Bucket (red and white top) then on her left Sonja Benn and Kym Williams. From the right, second is Sarah Murphy (red top), then David Close (kneeling), then Sue Tyson (yellow top), sixth is Paul Rugless (head just visible – aka The Rocker), next is Doug Smart (white cap and top).*





*Legends of trail running in South Australia. Terry Cleary, David Close, and Doug Smart in 2012.*

## **1.4 The growth of trail running in SA**

The second YUM proved highly successful and was followed by an explosion of trail running activity. Terry Cleary was at the centre of it all after returning from Alice Springs in early July 2008. In November 2008, he began to organise a monthly series of runs in over 30 different parts of the Mount Lofty Ranges, which continued during the next four years. Although voluntary and informal, the runs were very popular (with typical attendance of 50-100) and were carefully organised, with maps, directions, and sign on/signoff sheets to check that no one got lost. The runs introduced participants to many of the national parks in the Mount Lofty Ranges. Apart from those close to Adelaide, they included Waitpinga, Deep Creek, Onkaparinga, Kaiserstuhl, Para Wirra, Warren and Hale Conservation Parks.

In 2011-2012, Terry emailed out a regular newsletter, a trail e-news. This was superseded by two Facebook groups: SA Trail Running and the Trail Running Lounge, which became the Trail Running SA page and the Trail Running SA Lounge, respectively. Both are still in operation in 2024.



*The start of the third Yurrebilla event in 2009. David Close running second.*



*One of Terry's more memorable monthly runs was in Deep Creek Conservation Park.*

Soon several people organised other trail running events, with Doug Smart and David Close being especially prominent. Other early directors of formal trail events were Greg Jenkins, Sadie Cranston, and Dej Jamieson. The number of timed events increased over the following years. From 2009 there was an annual trail running championship race, The Cleland Trail



Championship, over a gruelling 24 km course devised by Doug, around Cleland National Park including the infamous Doug's Hill. While exploring the route, Terry argued unsuccessfully for a more "humane" alternative.

During the years 2009-2013, Terry organised hybrid road-trail race events, each with several hundred participants, from Seacliff to Mount Lofty Summit and in reverse and along the historical Pioneer Women's Trail with the Hahndorf branch of the National Trust. Every Australia Day from 2009, we romped along the 16 km and 1,438 steps of the Marion Coastal Walking Trail.



*The sea parting for Moses Cleary for the start of the Sea to Summit (S2S).*





*Racing along the Wine Shanty Track part of the Cleland Trail Championship, which continued for 11 years. This photo captures the spirit of trail running.*

In these and later years, many splendid informal runs were organised on their own initiative by participants in Belair National Park and Ironbank (by Sarah and Andrew Murphy); in Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park (by Dej Jamieson); and from Birdwood to Montacute Conservation Park on the Mawson Trail ("The Awesome Mawson", by Nina Zeidan and Darryl Hill). To celebrate her birthday, in 2011, Lynne Smythe organised a delightful running weekend based on the Mylor Scout Hut, with runs along "Lynn's Loop" which she marked out.

Some runners provided lavish refreshments at their homes: Mike and Sue Coad in Kersbrook; Stirling and Jenny Greeneklee in their beautiful, wooded property in Cherry Gardens (where Stirling had created his own highly technical course), Louise Thompson in her scenic property near Eagle on the Hill; and in recent years, Erin and Nick Colebatch in Belair National Park.

From around 2011 an informal committee met monthly to plan activities. At about the same time, David Close started to organise social trail runs every Sunday when there was no other event.



*The Heysen Trail, near Newland Head, one of the most popular routes of David's Sunday series.*

Not surprisingly there were some memorable mishaps in all this activity. During a run along the Heysen Trail near the Echunga goldfields, the whole region was blanketed in thick fog and a sign was missing. Consequently runners were reduced to running blind, and after much exploration reached a sign which they had passed nearly an hour before! At this point many wanted to go home, but they had no idea which way to go. Salvation came when someone remembered the correct route from past experience, so that they eventually found their way to a much-needed breakfast in Mylor.

During a race event in a rainy period in 2017, in Mount Crawford forest, participants had to splash or wade through large parts of the partially flooded course, and a gale with torrential rain - which reduced visibility to almost zero - hit the organisers just after they had packed up and started to drive home. All tremendous fun! Thereafter, any rain at an event was compared to 'that' Mt Crawford (that was until Mt Misery in 2022).

At the conclusion of one of the Yurrebilla events, the race director Sadie Cranston, mic in hand, was suddenly surrounded and marched off the scene by three stern police officers who, towering over her, complained about the cars parked along Gorge Road. As she departed, she cheerfully announced through her mic that she was being arrested.

While directing one of the Cleland Championship events, race director Doug Smart was afflicted by phone calls from volunteers reporting an extraordinary succession of injuries including two ambulance cases.



During the Five Peaks event in 2018, a huge tree limb dropped on the finish site in Belair National Park, miraculously missing people and parked vehicles. Fortunately, no runners had finished, so there were not many people around.



*From 2014 on, events were regularly held in the Mt Misery area.*

Despite the occasional mishaps, the running events have always been characterised by high spirits. These were expressed from November 2008 onwards, in the verse by The Rocker (Paul Rugless), who for a long time kept us all guessing about his identity while frequently circulating fresh verse. Here is his description of the general reaction.

*We've got to find this Rocker,  
Who is making such a fuss  
The poems are a crock o'  
Sh\*t, and that reflects on us.*

Here The Rocker describes the start of the first Sea to Summit run, referring to Kym Williams who was short in stature:

*In the morning breeze, 'spite heartfelt pleas  
Like lambs before the slaughter,  
We stand in seas  
Way past our knees,  
While Kym is treading water!*

Commenting on Terry's decision to run uphill, from sea to summit, The Rocker wrote

*For why this clown  
Goes up not down  
Is anybody's guess.*

Perhaps Paul's best poem was a comic version of the heroic tale of the pioneer women who trudged barefoot from Hahndorf to Adelaide carrying produce for sale and returned carrying bricks to build a church. It was told from the point of view of one of the women, whose husband Hans, too mean to buy her shoes, was boozing at a Schuetzenfest.

*Loaded with the knacks and knicks  
She'd had to truck and purchase  
And "A LOAD OF BRICKS, JUST SO THOSE P\*\*\*KS  
CAN BUILD THEIR F\*\*\*IN' CHURCHES!"  
She trudged along on grass and clod,  
Her husband she could throttle,  
Back at home, Hans, the sod  
Knocked off another bottle.*

These are brief extracts from a large body of verse which kept trail runners entertained.



*Paul Rugless (The Rocker), with David Close on his left.*



## **2.0 TRAIL RUNNING SOUTH AUSTRALIA (TRSA)**

### **2.1 The beginnings**

In the years up to 2014, the trail running community took on a life of its own and became increasingly independent of SARRC. By this time the preferred medium of communication was Facebook, which hosted a lively forum of trail running activities. Nation-wide polls showed that, during the years covered by these historical notes (2007-2024), there has been a national boom in popularity of running generally, and trail running in particular. Trail running activities were characterised by their fun, enthusiasm, and sense of comradeship. As experienced race directors for SARRC, Doug, David and Terry had no difficulty recruiting volunteers for trail events, in sharp contrast with the traditional road events which they also directed.

In February 2013 Terry Cleary left for a job in Darwin but the trail running committee continued to operate about four events a year, including the infamous Mt Misery, and David's Sunday runs. However, it was inevitable that the trail running committee should find it increasingly irksome to operate as a subcommittee under the supervision of the SARRC board and president. Consequently, towards the end of 2014, the trail running committee decided to act on a proposal first made by Terry, two years earlier, to form a separate organisation.

At that time the prospects of the new organisation did not seem too bright. Trail events had been high in enthusiasm but low in numbers – never exceeding 200. In consequence, the SARRC board allowed the new body to take all trail events away except the crown jewels, YUM, which was shown by a poll of this period to have become the most loved running event in South Australia: so in a sense, the trail running organisers had done their work too well.



*Several prominent figures on Mt Kaiserstuhl in 2014: fifth from the left in blue-and-white top Greg Jenkins; sixth from the left in light blue top, Luis Nevares; eighth from the left in red top Claire Sims; first on the right seated Doug Smart; standing behind him upright in grey top Paul Rugless and bending over, David Close; standing with arms outstretched Dej Jamieson.*

## **2.2 The formation of TRSA**

While on the brink of forming TRSA, after one of David's Sunday social runs, he and Doug met Claire Sims, who was to take a major role in shaping the new organisation. Claire told them a cautionary tale of her university tramping club in New Zealand which had historically conducted all its finances without accounts and from a shoebox - an arrangement which ended disastrously when the treasurer disappeared with the shoebox suspected to contain several thousand dollars. Thus warned, and with the knowledge Claire changed this way of operating when she became treasurer of that club, David, and Doug promptly accepted Claire's offer to be treasurer, registered a constitution, and opened a bank account in the name of the newly incorporated organisation – Trail Runners South Australia Incorporated.

David and Doug funded the beginnings of TRSA including the insurance premiums, registration fees and other start-up costs, with high hopes but no guarantee of being reimbursed. It soon became apparent that being part of the road running club had been cramping our growth. TRSA flourished beyond their expectations. Several keen runners immediately joined David, Doug, and Claire on the committee, bringing valuable talents and experience.



Murray Waters, with professional expertise in information technology, soon created an excellent website, and managed the Facebook pages. Maurice Maffei, then head chef at the Adelaide Festival Centre, arranged a sumptuous spread of refreshments at events. Dej Jamieson, a builder of agricultural sheds, supervised the design and construction of a custom enclosed trailer for a rapidly growing stock of equipment. Robyn Hansen, who brought enthusiasm, as well as accounting expertise from her job managed our online entry system. Steve Burdett, took on the mantle of the club's early forays into merchandise and successfully organised production and sale of merchandise, including the infamous TRSA hoodies, and initiated the SA Five 50 Ultra series. These people laid the foundations for what has become a very successful club.



*Claire Sims helped shape the growing organisation, Murray Waters managed the media and designed race bibs and banners, and Chef Maurice Maffei's brownies became essential at events.*



*Robyn Hansen, Dej Jamieson, and Steve Burdett*

Although not on the committee Marilyn and Malcolm Macmillan did all the catering at our social runs.



*Marilyn and Malcolm generously provided refreshments after many runs.*

There were many other committee members over the years who have played important roles in the continuing success of the club. A sign of the maturity of the organisation was the practice, from 2019, of annual elections for the committee members.

### **2.3 TRSA's event calendar**

TRSA's first fee-paying event was the Cleland Trail Championship in April 2015 in partnership with SARRC. The first solely TRSA event was The Running Company Classic in Belair National Park, also in April 2015. Hoping for 150 entrants, the organisers were blown away by over 350. Clearly, we were fulfilling an unexpected demand, and clearly too we needed professional support in timing our events, which we obtained from Malcolm Robertson of Event Strategies. Malcolm provides up-to-the-second results of our finishers much to the pleasure of all.

From 2016 TRSA organised five or more events a year, with an average participation of over 500, but in some cases more like 1,000. The event calendar in 2016-2017 focused on Cleland Conservation Park, Sturt Gorge, Mt Misery, Mt Crawford, Mt Hayfield and Kuitpo forest, with Kuitpo proving especially popular. The original motive for choosing Kuitpo was to meet the interest in a trail half marathon, and entry numbers confirmed this demand, exploding to over 1,300. There were over 600 runners in the 10 km event alone! Mt Misery is well known for the emu which decided to lead some runners downhill. The scene was captured on video, and it is why an image of an emu has been adopted as the logo for Mt Misery. New committee members brought enthusiasm for the trails and parks north of Adelaide in 2018 and saw the introduction of The Devil's Nose event in Para Wirra Conservation Park. characterised by



abundant technical single track and native vegetation. The 2019 events calendar saw the introduction of the free kids' runs with the Grommets run at the Devil's Nose.

By 2017 the club could no longer ignore calls for an ultra-marathon and so Five Peaks was born, TRSA's answer to Yurrebilla. The challenging course linked five notable peaks and eight national parks between Black Hill and Belair. Optional shorter courses were also offered, making this a proper trail running festival. The inaugural event in 2018 was on a particularly stormy day, and many volunteers stood for hours in pouring rain to direct runners. The fallen tree limb was a near-disaster. But by all accounts, the runners had a ball, and the day was considered a huge success. As a former director of YUM, David Close and Doug Smart can testify that Five Peaks has proved fully its equal in organisation and enthusiasm.

The arrival of the COVID epidemic early in 2020, and the general shutdown of social activities in response, caused the cancellation of organised activity until September of that year when the club organised a much smaller and no frills Kuitpo. This was followed by similar sized events at the Devils Nose and Sturt Gorge. The absence of formal events for much of the year saw the creation of the hugely successful Virtual (V4) Series, the brainchild of two committee members Justin Parise and Cherie Rothery. Eight courses were created in four national parks, with a long (21 km) and short (10 km) course created in each. Points were awarded for completion and speed. Over 500 runners participated and stayed engaged while the community had to largely run solely or in small groups. Meanwhile monthly challenges helped to create a virtual community and included Trail Bingo, Vert Challenge and other amusing challenges.

In 2021 the Cobbler Creek event was introduced; and the Cleland Trail Championships celebrated 10 years with a custom-made medal.

In 2022 the committee explored new opportunities in the recently opened SA Water reservoirs; and the Mt Crawford event made use of a new start line allowing for Warren Reservoir to be incorporated in all courses. That year also saw Mt Misery knock Mt Crawford off its 'wettest event' pedestal and the first ever non-Cleland trail championships at Cobbler Creek.



*Mt Misery, noted for its challenging terrain, majestic scenery, and some grim wet weather*

## **2.4 TRSA initiatives**

TRSA cemented its identity as a club by offering membership at very nominal price of \$10. Its financial reserves provide for a buffer for increases in overhead costs such as insurance as well as providing funds for new equipment.

The club has offered a range of merchandise over the years; the most popular being hoodies and hats (trucker caps and more recently, Fractel hats).

The club from its inception was always environmentally aware and one of the early initiatives of the committee was to go cup-free at events (the first running group to do so).

Other initiatives were the custom designed race bibs for each event, the provision of the infamous TRSA brownies for post-race refreshments, free professional event photography and videos (both available within hours of the event finishing), and in the early days, beautiful ceramic medals made by local trail runners and artists, Jen and Stirling Greeneklee.

TRSA has also built up a significant library of trail running routes on the website available for download.

## **2.5 TRSA volunteers**

The foundation of TRSA as a not-for-profit trail running club has always been its volunteers. Volunteer roles range from being on the dedicated committee for several years to the one hundred plus volunteers required to deliver Five Peaks each year, and everything in between. The trail running community has never failed to deliver when the call has gone out and many volunteers stick their hands up time and time again. TRSA has always prided itself on ensuring volunteers are well looked after and recognised, something that has been appreciated over the years.

## **2.6 Social activities**

Informal (or "social") runs, open to anyone were becoming increasingly popular. The Facebook page proved vital in providing a noticeboard and forum for social activities.

David Close organised trail runs every Sunday from about 2010 until about 2017. Weekly runs in Cleland National Park became very popular, badged 'TRSA Tuesday', with the final Tuesday of each month ending at a pub.

These runs expanded to include groups at Belair and Cobbler Creek in later years with all characterised by committed and sometimes quite large groups of runners. Five Peaks training runs have been held annually since 2018, with specific sessions devoted to downhill running, uphill running, and pole use. Organised Sunday runs became more sporadic as the trail calendar grew but the annual Marion Coastal Trail run on Australia Day has continued without interruption. The Sunday runs have recently been resumed as a trail run every second Sunday of the month when no other club event is on.

David Close organised running weekends, based on Willow Springs Station in the central Flinders Ranges, in 2012 and 2013. Murray Waters, with help from Claire Sims, repeated the experiment on a larger scale in 2017, 2018 and 2019 with weekends based in Melrose and running chiefly in the Mt Remarkable National Park with brief excursions into other locations such as Wirrabara Forest and Spring Valley Conservation Park to finish off wonderful weekends of running and socialising. These weekend events based on Melrose attracted about 30 people each time and benefited greatly from the contributions of local runners Al Clarke and Quentin van der Werf.

Since 2016, TRSA has finished each year with a social gathering providing food, awards and recognition of volunteers. This has been combined with the AGM for the last few years.



*Left: Edeowie Gorge, Flinders Ranges, in 2012, during a weekend away. Right: TRSA Melrose running weekend, 2019.*

## **2.7 The growth of trail running**

By 2017, the committee was organising events with professional reliability. One difficult problem of event management – course marking - was resolved by large-scale teamwork producing abundant specially designed signage. Another problem was, paradoxically, that trail running events were becoming too popular. At some events, there was scarcely enough space for all the cars, and it was becoming difficult to manage the crowds.

By 2020, the number of trail running organisations and events began catching up with demand with the establishment of several privately owned trail running businesses, including the Adelaide Trail Runners. Now in 2024 there are four weekly parkruns mainly or entirely on trails and a TRSA programme of weekly or monthly social runs. In one of the parkruns (Belair National Park) sponsored by TRSA the average weekly participation is over 140.

But among the organisations offering formal race events other than parkruns, TRSA remains distinguished by being based entirely on volunteers.



## 2.8 TRSA and the running community

TRSA soon found itself performing an important role in the running community. It was recognised by various government agencies as a major contributor to the advancement of trail usage in South Australia. Already in 2013 David and Doug had attended a strategy planning meeting for The Adelaide Hills Council for the development of new trails to link up existing trails. In 2018 TRSA was invited by Recreation SA to contribute to the SA Recreation, Park and Leisure Conference. Doug presented an address titled Trail Running and the Community in which he spoke about the origins of TRSA and its involvement with the community by making donations to clubs who supported our events as volunteers. He also spoke about our “no cups” environmental policy and the rapid growth in female participation.

It was about this time that the government was under pressure to open its reservoirs for recreational use. TRSA was invited by SA Water to organise a community fun run for the opening of the Myponga Reservoir on 14 April 2019, and then for the opening of the South Para Reservoir on 7 December 2019. TRSA also hosted the Australian Masters Games trail races in October 2019.

In 2017 TRSA successfully organised the Australian Mountain Running Championships for that year. These were held in the Black Hill Conservation Park with an unusually large (300) number of participants well supported by our club members as participants and volunteers. The rules required an elevation of 400m in a distance of 12 kms. Two laps of our Black Hill course including Ambers Ridge ensured that the requirements were met!



*The Australian Mountain Running Championships in 2017 on Black Hill brought together a talented body of runners from other States.*



TRSA has also contributed to bush conservation. The club has made donations totalling thousands of dollars to "Friends of Parks" groups for the purchase of equipment by those groups for their parks. Through the efforts of Michelle Brigham, TRSA TrailCare has adopted a patch of Morialta Conservation Park with a concerted effort for several years now to remove weeds large and small and planting native saplings. TRSA has also contributed valuable start-up funds to four trail-focused parkruns: Cleland, The Avenues (Kuitpo), Anstey Hill and Belair.

## **2.9 Concluding comments**

The final test for TRSA was to provide for new leadership as its founding members retired from its committee with Claire Sims being the last of them to retire in 2022.

Looking back on the history of organised trail running right up to the present, as a club, we must be grateful for the enthusiasm of members providing a ready supply of volunteers to help with events, hosting social gatherings and taking a role with the organising of events.

Also impressive have been the resourcefulness and expertise of successive organisers over the years in devising new types of activity. All this gives hope for the future of this highly successful club.

We look forward to adding to this document with the stories, memories, and photos shared as we celebrate ten years of TRSA.