

Book Review by Peter Lovesey

“Richard Manks & the Pedestrians”, by P.S. Marshall, published by the author and available free as an eBook from his website www.kingofthepeds.com

Paul Marshall is the author of two door-stopping books (more than 700 A4 pages each) on nineteenth century ultra-running and ultra-walking, *King of the Peds* (2008) and “*Weston, Weston, Rah-Rah-Rah!*” (2012), that chronicle in copious detail the story of six-day events pioneered by the American walker, E.P. Weston, and taken up with huge enthusiasm in Britain, America and Australia. Marshall also co-authored in hardback form a fascinating biography of Weston, *A Man in a Hurry: the extraordinary life and times of Edward Payson Weston* (2012). But it is misleading to think of these books as wholly about Weston. They range widely, covering the careers and performances of scores of other pedestrians (the term used at the time for professional runners and walkers).

Similarly, Marshall’s new book is more ambitious in scope than a biography of Manks, who was a versatile record-breaking athlete. There are chapters on a number of long distance specialists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of whom Captain Barclay, Foster Powell, George Wilson, John Phipps Townsend and Josiah Eaton are the best known (to a small group of specialists, admittedly).

Evaluating performances by using statistics is a reliable way of studying modern track and field but historians may have placed too much emphasis on rating pedestrians by the same method. Richard Manks is known for the times he set over 10 and 20 miles, but little has been written before about his other talents. By the early nineteenth century, pedestrians like Manks were engaging regularly in a number of events that have vanished from athletics, like stone-picking and long-distance hurdling. The favourite challenge was the “thou in a thou”, 1000 miles to be walked in 1000 consecutive hours. This amounted to six weeks of trying not to fall asleep for more than 90 minutes at a time and was famously first achieved in 1809 by Robert Barclay Allardice, known as Captain Barclay. His story was definitively immortalised in *The Celebrated Captain Barclay* (2001), by NUTS President Peter Radford.

The “Barclay challenge” caught the imagination and for the next century numerous attempts were made to emulate it. As recently as 2003 Radford’s book inspired another attempt. Five intrepid souls, two of them women, did their 1000 miles and then completed the London Marathon as an extra. In 2009 Richard Dunwoody, the former champion jockey, achieved the feat in a charity event at Newmarket, where Barclay started it all 200 years before.

Bell’s Life claimed for years that no one had legitimately matched Barclay’s effort, and although some may have cheated it was clear that many did not, and a number of these are listed in Paul Marshall’s book. For Richard Manks it became quite an obsession. In 1850 at a ground outside the Barrack Tavern, Sheffield, he first completed the distance and added 44 miles. The following year at the same ground he completed 1000 quarter-miles in 1000 quarter-hours, followed by 1000 half-miles in 1000 half-hours, followed by the original Barclay feat of 1000 miles in 1000 hours, taking over ten weeks in the process. Within days he travelled to London to perform the Barclay feat at the Oval. His first attempt was stopped after 129 miles through illness, but the next month he started afresh and won the challenge.

The story of Manks’s numerous other challenges, such as racing over 200 sheep hurdles; wheeling a barrow with five hundredweight of stones for 503 yards; and picking up 300 stones in a course of 51 miles; are reproduced from the original press reports in this highly original, beautifully illustrated and entertaining book. Publishing electronically opens new possibilities for those of us who enjoy discovering more about the quirky sports of our ancestors.