

The story of parkrun in Australia

'We're all equal at parkrun — we're all treated with respect.'

STEVE MONEGHETTI



ON EVERY
SATURDAY



DAVID CROOK

Foreword by **LISA MILLAR**

ON EVERY SATURDAY

The story of **parkrun** in Australia

DAVID CROOK



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parkrun

A timed, five-kilometre event,
held every Saturday morning
at over 400 Australian locations,
where everyone is welcome to participate –
to walk, jog, run, spectate or volunteer
– and it's absolutely free.

'parkrun' is always written with a lower case 'p', even at the start of sentences. Statistics in this book are from parkrun's websites, with supplementary data from parkrun HQ. All statistics are for parkrun's first Australian decade, i.e. to the end of March 2021, unless otherwise stated.



parkrun
RUN
DIRECTOR



Foreword

You are only a first-timer once

by Lisa Millar

There's a familiar pattern to a parkrun morning that feels like you've stepped into the embrace of an old friend.

The boisterous hellos as orange vests get tossed to volunteers, instructions issued and flags, hammered into the ground, straining against their ties in the breeze. A cluster of friends high-five each other, restlessly shifting from one foot to the other, checking watches and willing the starting time to come around.

And there is a solitary person standing under the tree, a first-timer nervously flicking through their phone, rechecking their barcode, hoping they're in the right spot but feeling slightly out of place.

They will only ever feel that way once.

That is the parkrun phenomenon.

I was that person back in 2015, encouraged to take up parkrun by my niece who'd been an enthusiastic advocate.

As a foreign correspondent for the ABC, I was darting from one country to another, barely giving myself time to process the atrocities I was reporting on – terrorist attacks and earthquakes and grief over lives lost.

In London I had the benefit of a later parkrun starting time. I would wake to photos on social media of my niece Emma and her children back in Australia having completed their parkruns, and I would urge myself out of bed.

I thought parkrun would help keep my physical health in shape. Run or walk, I would at least do five kilometres a week.

It didn't take me long to realise parkrun was so much more than that. parkrun is a family: a family that lifts up those who are less able while still encouraging the timer-focused ambitions of others.

What I hadn't anticipated was how parkrun would lift me out of the well of despondency.

There was no Saturday morning that couldn't be improved by joining in the unrestrained elation of being part of the moving mass of runners and walkers.

You are only a first-timer once. Then you are part of a parkrun family, one that can be as large or as small as you want it to be.

Like with all families, you can get busy and not have time to connect, but you know they'll be waiting for you when you return.

And return you always do, because the exhilaration of being part of a movement that continues to grow after ten years in Australia, is worth coming back for.

Lisa Millar
ABC News Breakfast Co-host





1

Introduction: on every Saturday

parkrun: a timed, five-kilometre event, held every Saturday morning, at over 400 Australian locations, where everyone is welcome to participate – to walk, jog, run, spectate or volunteer – and it’s absolutely free.

On every Saturday morning, tens of thousands of Australians come together in hundreds of locations, right across the country, to participate in the extraordinary community-based, volunteer-led phenomenon called parkrun.

From its first Australian event, on the Gold Coast in April 2011, parkrun has grown to over 400 Australian locations and over 990,000 registered participants, inside its first decade. In those first ten years, Australian parkrunners completed an astonishing 9,810,901 parkruns – walking, jogging or running – at an amazing 78,533 events.

Then, on the first Saturday of its second Australian decade, 3 April 2021, another 47,076 people walked, jogged or ran a parkrun, with more than 4000 others participating as volunteers to make these parkruns possible. Despite the interruptions of the 2020 and early 2021

COVID shutdown periods, parkrun in Australia was well and truly back in town.

This book celebrates Australia's first ten parkrun years. It outlines parkrun's history, in Australia and across the world; provides examples of Australia's amazing parkruns and the people who've created them; explains how easy it is to become involved; and describes the different forms that involvement can take.

After ten years of parkrun in Australia, it's easy to forget that it's still a relatively new phenomenon – that there wasn't anything like it in Australia just a few short years ago. As Tim Oberg, the person who brought parkrun to Australia, says, that short history means we don't yet know the long-term impact that parkrun will deliver.

'When I was growing up,' Tim says, 'there wasn't anywhere you could go for a group five-kilometre Saturday morning run. Now we see whole families coming to walk or run or volunteer. We have babies going round the course in prams who'll grow up with parkrun as a regular part of their lives. Who can guess at the long-term health benefits that will bring?'

I wrote this book because I'm grateful to all of the parkrun volunteers and HQ staff who make the Australian parkrun story possible.

My own parkrun story started when friends invited me to go along to their 'local' parkrun in Evesham in the UK. Now my local is North Sydney – and the idea that there is a fantastic timed event, organised entirely by volunteers, right at the end of my street, that is on every Saturday, and is absolutely free to participate in, is still a little hard for me to believe.

For existing Australian parkrunners, I hope this book tells you at least a few things about parkrun that you didn't already know. For parkrunners' families and friends, I hope that after reading the book, you might think your parkrunner is not quite so crazy as you'd thought. You might even think that parkrun is something you'd like to try. For people who know nothing about parkrun, or perhaps know just a little,

but have never gone along, I hope you might consider what parkrun could become for you.

And for everyone who reads it, I hope this book has emphasised that parkrun is a place where everyone is welcome – to walk, to jog, to run, to spectate or to volunteer. That it isn't just about the walk or run – and it certainly isn't about a person's finish time – it's about so much more than that.

As parkrun's founder, Paul Sinton-Hewitt, describes it, 'parkrun is a social movement for the common good'. Free, for everyone, forever.





2

What is parkrun and how did it begin?

On Saturday 2 October 2004 in Bushy Park in south-west London, thirteen runners participated in a five-kilometre time trial organised by Paul Sinton-Hewitt. At that time Paul was forty-four years old, unable to run due to an injury, and had recently become unemployed.

‘I simply invited my friends to the park because I was a bit lonely. I had no idea that other people’s lives would be affected by this little seed that I planted,’ he later said.

That is how the phenomenon called ‘parkrun’ began.

The basic parkrun principles were established early: it is a timed five-kilometre event, not a race; it is held weekly, at the same place and time; everyone is welcome to walk, jog, run, volunteer or spectate; and it is free – now and forever.

Growth was slow at first. By the end of 2005, numbers at Bushy Park had only exceeded a hundred three times. The start of 2006 saw a jump in participation, and by the end of that year participants often numbered close to three hundred. Then, as numbers started to push into the four hundreds, the community requested more locations.

In those early days, what is now called parkrun was known as the 'Bushy Park Time Trial'. In 2007 five more 'UK Time Trial' events were added. In 2008, 'parkrun' was chosen as a name for all of the events. It was initially suggested by Stuart Lodge, one of the early UK volunteers. He'd been searching for appropriate domain names for the 'UK Time Trial' events and found that 'parkrun' was available.

By 2009, there were twenty-seven parkrun locations; by 2010 there were more than fifty; and by 2011 there were over a hundred – including the first three locations in Australia.

Paul's invitation to his friends to come to the park for a timed run was already affecting far more people's lives than he would ever have imagined. And for Australia, 2011 was just the beginning.

How did parkrun come to Australia?

The Australian parkrun story began with a dog called Clarence.

It was 2010; parkrun and its predecessor, 'UK Time Trials', had been going for six years. Tim Oberg, an Australian living in London, had a dog called Clarence. A friend told Tim about parkrun, and that you could participate with your dog – so Tim decided to give it a try.

In late 2010 Tim and his family were preparing to return to live in Queensland. Tim sent a message through parkrun's website asking about taking the concept home with him, and Paul Sinton-Hewitt personally replied.

Tim arranged to meet Paul at a Costa coffee shop in Wimbledon. Then, at a second meeting with Paul and a member of his parkrun board, it was agreed that Tim could work to establish parkrun in Australia. At that stage, aside from in the UK, there had only ever been parkrun events in Zimbabwe (from 2007, but already discontinued) and in Denmark (from 2009).

In January 2011 Tim and his family returned home to the Gold Coast. He found two key allies in his work to establish parkrun – the

late Ron Clarke AO, a legendary Australian runner and multiple world record holder, who was mayor of the Gold Coast; and Samantha Hughes, Senior Active Parks Officer at Gold Coast City Council, and a previous Melbourne and Gold Coast marathon winner. Ron and Sam both loved the parkrun concept – its community focus and its creed of inclusiveness – and they each played a major part in helping Tim to get the event off the ground. With their support, Tim was ready to start to make Australia a parkrun nation.

The first Australian parkrun was held at Gold Coast's Main Beach on Saturday 2 April, 2011. There were seven volunteers and 108 finishers. Ron Clarke acted as the starter and then walked the course. It is part of parkrun legend that he did not receive a registered time, because he forgot to bring his registration barcode.

Just like those first thirteen Bushy Park participants, the first Main Beach participants never could have foreseen how many would follow in their footsteps. By the ten-year anniversary in 2021, there had been 471 parkruns at Main Beach alone, with the course completed by more than 15,000 participants a total of over 100,000 times – over half a million kilometres walked or run.

Main Beach was just the start. By the end of March 2021, there had been another 78,532 Australian parkrun events at 408 event locations across the country with 696,926 finishers and 112,493 volunteers, meaning just under ten million parkruns had been completed and almost fifty million kilometres walked or run.

Looking back at how parkrun in Australia has developed since that first event, Tim Oberg says he is amazed at just how big parkrun has become.





4

Stories from Australia's parkruns

This chapter features parkruns from each state and territory in Australia and will give you a sense of the amazing diversity of parkruns. It also shows the values and the qualities that these events all share.

Reflecting the distribution of parkruns across the country, there are profiles of five events from each of Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia, with three from Tasmania and two each from the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

With 408 parkruns in Australia to choose from, the choice of which events to include was a difficult one to make. I would love to have been able to include every parkrun in the country – but a book of that size would probably have taken till the twentieth anniversary of parkrun to produce.

Some parkruns that I've included really selected themselves – for example Australia's first event, Main Beach, Queensland, and the first parkruns to be established in each of the other states and territories. I've also included three of the four parkruns at the furthest points of the Australian 'compass' – Kingscliff, Nightcliff and Marina – as well as Zillmere, as our only 'Z'.

I've chosen others to reflect a mix of city and country and large and small events, with parkruns from regional centres, small towns and iconic outback locations – events like Timboon, Nuriootpa, Weipa, Jindabyne and Kalgoorlie-Boulder, as well as larger-city parkruns like Newy, South Bank, Torrens and Burley Griffin.

Despite the great variety in the locations and sizes of the events that I have been able to include, what I found was that the values of these parkruns are remarkably similar. And while each of the thirty-two parkruns has a great story to tell, there is no doubt this would also be the case for every parkrun in Australia – I am sorry I wasn't able to include them all.

A note on parkrun naming protocols

In the early stages of parkrun in Australia, parkruns were typically named for their city or suburb.

As the numbers of parkruns began to exponentially grow, this naming protocol became less effective, and in a few instances parkrun names were changed. For example, Risdon Brook parkrun in Tasmania was originally known as Hobart parkrun – its name was changed when additional parkruns were established in that city.

The naming protocol that was subsequently adopted now sees parkruns named for their nearest significant landmark. This might be the park or gardens they are in, the weir that they are near, a mountain, or even a prominent sports facility, like the Bill Rose Sports Complex parkrun in Scone, NSW.





Queensland

Queensland is where parkrun in Australia first began, at Main Beach on the Gold Coast, on 2 April 2011. The state was also the location of the second parkrun to be established in Australia, at New Farm in Brisbane on 17 September 2011.

Since these first two events, parkrun's growth in Queensland has been strong and continuous. By March 2021, Queensland had 114 parkrun locations, including two junior parkruns. The table below lists Queensland's parkruns as at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



Victoria

Albert Melbourne parkrun was the first Victorian event and the third in Australia, starting on 19 November 2011.

By March 2021, Victoria had ninety-two parkrun locations, including two junior parkruns. The table below lists Victoria's parkruns, as at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



New South Wales

St Peters parkrun was the first New South Wales event and the fourth in Australia, starting on 21 January 2012.

By March 2021, NSW had ninety-nine parkrun locations. The table below lists NSW's parkruns, as at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



Australian Capital Territory

Ginninderra was the first parkrun to be established in Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory, and the sixth to be established in Australia. The first Ginninderra event was held on 28 April 2012.

By March 2021, the ACT had seven parkrun locations. There is also a parkrun in the New South Wales city of Queanbeyan, just across the border from the ACT, around fifteen kilometres from the centre of Canberra.

The table below lists the ACT's parkruns, as at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



Western Australia (WA)

Claisebrook Cove parkrun was the first Western Australian event and the ninth in Australia, starting on 4 August 2012.

By March 2021, Western Australia had forty parkrun locations. The table below lists WA's parkruns, as at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



Tasmania

Launceston was Tasmania's first parkrun and the sixteenth in Australia, holding its first event on 10 November 2012.

By March 2021, Tasmania had seventeen parkrun locations, including one 'offshore' at Whitemark Wharf on Flinders Island. The table below lists Tasmania's parkruns, as at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



South Australia

Torrens was the first South Australian parkrun and the eighteenth in Australia, holding its first event on 1 December 2012.

By March 2021, South Australia had thirty-six parkrun locations, including one junior parkrun. The table below lists South Australia's parkruns, at March 2021, ordered by date of their first events.



**'parkrun is a social movement
for the common good.'**



Paul Sinton-Hewitt, parkrun founder

On every Saturday morning, tens of thousands of Australians come together in hundreds of locations, right across the country, to participate in the extraordinary community-based, volunteer-led, five-kilometre phenomenon called parkrun. Everyone is welcome to participate – to walk, jog, run, spectate or volunteer – and it's absolutely free.

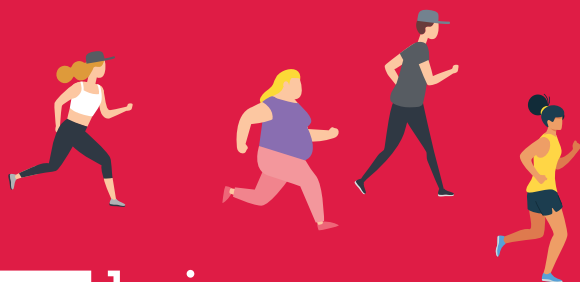
On Every Saturday celebrates Australia's first ten years of parkrun – and beyond. This beautiful, full-colour book tracks parkrun's history, in Australia and across the world. It highlights the stats and stories behind some of Australia's amazing parkruns, in every state and territory, and introduces some of the people who've helped to create them.

It's a celebration of community and the spirit of 'getting out there' which, as Peter FitzSimons wrote, 'is dinkum taking Australia by storm'.



David Crook (parkrunner #A4698538) is a self-described 'mid-life crisis runner'. His parkrun experience began at the Evesham parkrun, Worcestershire UK, in 2018. Since returning to Australia his local parkrun is North Sydney.

While David acknowledges that his running would never have enabled him to represent his country, or even his suburb, he has represented Australia as a diplomat, including in Atlanta in the United States and at the Australian High Commission in London.



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