



**AUSTRALIAN RACING  
PIGEON JOURNAL**



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## ***Australian Racing Pigeon Journal***

***Jim Marafiote***  
***By John Capel***

It's no use asking Jim Marafiote how many Association races he's won, because he can't remember. He's flown from three locations, won multiple events from each and is recognised within the SAHPA's Hall of Fame. Besides his six SAHPA aggregate wins, he's quick to point out that he's finished second on six occasions too and in two of those years he was only pipped in the final race....once by Bob Marchant, and the other occasion by Andrew Muirhead, members of our sport's top shelf! So how did he get there?

It's a long story, told after forty nine consecutive years of competition, about a quest to build an exceptional loft of racing pigeons of the highest quality. It contains messages most fanciers can adopt and copy if they choose to do so.

When just twelve years old, Jim Marafiote decided he wanted to have racing pigeons. There was no family background to the sport, him being the son of parents who had emigrated from Italy and who needed to learn the customs and language of their new country.

Abe Walford, the father of Bill Walford (with whom Jim later forged a long-lasting friendship) gave him his racing stock so that he could fly with the North-West Junior Club.

At sixteen, he left school when his father purchased a Mixed Business shop, and at that young age he was put in charge of it. "I was a boy operating in an adult world," he told me. "I remember representatives from various companies coming to the shop to sell us some line of confectionery or foodstuff, and they'd ask to see the manager. They wouldn't believe it could possibly be me and would ask for my father or some other adult."

"From an early age I was getting up at 2am to go to market, leaving home at 2.30am carrying a wad of cash, purchasing the day's requirements, driving back to the shop, setting it up, and then working until 6.30pm. At that stage the pigeons had to go, and I was busy looking at birds of another kind anyway. At 20 I married Frances who was just 17".

"There's a lot you can learn from having to buy quality goods, and there's often little difference visible to the eye, however you learn to search for the top grade stuff because if you get it wrong the mistakes are very costly. Consequently I learned to grade items from an early age, something that came in handy later with pigeons".

Jim and Frances then purchased their own shop, and found that with Jim's hard work and the customers' delight in dealing with the vivacious Frances, they could

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build the business to a high level of prosperity. They thereafter bought run-down or poorly performing shops and built them up, often finding that the customers would follow them whenever they moved.

Eventually the desire for racing pigeons returned, and Jim saw an advertisement in the newspaper for squeakers for \$1 each, and stockbirds for \$5 each, and with a total outlay of \$38, he returned home with a pair of stockbirds and 28 squeakers.

Joining the Mansfield Park Club in the Port Adelaide Association with 15-20 members, he finished second from Carrieton in his first race and then won from the same racepoint the following week – a portent of what was to come. However, his greatest benefit was to have met an older club colleague named Les Jeffries, a very successful fancier with a wonderful team of essentially Gurnay pigeons. Les had a particular gift for conditioning pigeons, and mentored the young fancier. So close was the association that years later he told Jim, “May and I didn’t have any kids Jim, but I always looked on you as my son.”

Then came a move to a new house in Para Vista, and in 1975-76 he began flying in the formidable SAHPA where he would have to compete against the likes of Keith Wickham, Alan Goodger, John Pryor, Ross Wickham, Andrew Muirhead, Stan Ferguson, Bill Walford, Bill Verco, Stef Orfanos, Stuart Gregerson, Fin Fraser, Barney Horseman, Jim Cox, Merv Hatch, Harold Webber, Grant Patterson, Jim Todd and many others who would become great flyers in years to come. It was about now that he realised that a major essential to success was superior pigeons. You could fluke a champion pair who produced winners for a few seasons, but for consistent, long term success, you needed top class birds that performed at the highest level and could then pass their genes on to the next generation.

Hence the young enthusiast began visiting the top sales. He acquired the famous ‘Ralph Watson Hen’ and she commenced a line of class birds both in racing and breeding. Then he purchased Reference ‘A’ and Reference ‘C’ at Harold Webber’s sale. The youngsters from this pair became fabulous producers, and many top fanciers, including Alan Goodger, beat a path to Jim’s door seeking them. They were birds with toughness, consistency, and great class.

“One such offspring of the Webber pair was a red cock, 5110, sire of my wonderful strawberry mealy hen. I was preparing this hen for what would be a difficult 1000km race from Eucla, when Alan Goodger called and noticed her in my race loft. He encouraged me to put her straight into stock, but I was determined to send her to the chosen race. She was my second bird, and

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I finished 10th Association with my first bird and I can no longer recall if she placed. If she did it was down the list. From the moment she went to the stockloft phenomenal babies arrived. I mated her to the grandson of Alan's Lot 60, and the youngsters went whoosh! I can't recall all the placings now, but my 2nd Alice Springs (1350km) hen and my 2nd Gilgandra hen (1000km) and many others were among them."

"When Frank Dokman and Tony Hayne from Ponderosa visited Australia in 1991, they appeared at a Q&A meeting at the SAHPA building at Gepps Cross, and one of the 150 attendees asked if they had seen anything of comparable quality to European birds whilst In Australia. They nominated my strawberry mealy hen, with Dokman telling attendees that she was one of the best pigeons he had ever seen, and that if she was in Holland she would have been mated with James Bond himself."

Jim was to ask Frank Dokman one day if it was possible to breed champion long distance racebirds from the James Bond line, and he replied, "If you took your best long distance hen and mated her to James Bond, you could confidently send the offspring to Barcelona and expect to do well". Somewhat surprised by that answer, Jim was to put that advice into play and prove it correct.

In season 1977-78 Jim finished in the top 20 points winners within the SAHPA, something he would do for nineteen of the next 20 years, including winning the aggregate itself. He had also learned what proved to be a valuable lesson: to only retain race birds that were able to complete a 500 mile race in their first year of racing. The basket sorted them out just as John Pryor had insisted.

In 1982 he won the SAHPA's event from Temora (820km) with a Gurnay hen, with one parent coming from his mentor Les Jeffries, the other from Merv Hatch. Only three birds had made it home on the day. Other wins followed from Gilgandra (1000km), Boorooban (560km), Gosses (340km) and Morundah (700km).

His Gilgandra success provided him with an excellent lesson in the paradoxes of pigeon management. No birds were home when darkness fell, not surprising for a long race on a very difficult day. He went to bed early for his anticipated 2am rising for market, and at 10.15pm his young son woke him to advise that a bird was on the landing board. Having clocked the bird, he quickly went back to bed and soon after falling asleep he was awoken again with news that another bird was home, clocking just 30 minutes behind the winner.

The winner was a combination of his Webber-Goodger stock, justifying his acquisition of such quality birds. However the winner was a complete duffer in the stock pen, yet her brother 37148, was a massively prepotent stock cock leaving

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more than 20 SAHPA placings and being of such quality that he was still in the breeding loft at 19 years of age. His ring number still criss-crosses many pedigrees. Meanwhile, the hen that finished 2nd couldn't help breeding top pigeons, and her ring number similarly appears in the distant past of many Marafioti champions. Her granddaughter bred Jim's Border Village winner of 2012 and the story continues – his SAHPA Allandale winning hen of this past season (see photo) has been mated to a son of the Border Village winner of 2012.

The Boorooban winner was an excellent producer. The Gosses winner similarly produced, in that every hen she produced won an SAHPA placing, yet at three years of age she tragically went barren. The Morundah winner was also a result of the Webber-Goodger cross, and again was an exceptional producer.

Around this time Jim formed a great friendship with Jack Metcalf, who crowned his excellent performances by winning from Alice Springs. He also happened to be a customer at Jim's shop, and by this time Jim had achieved a reputation as one of the SAHPA's top fanciers. Jim wasn't intending to attend Jack's dispersal sale because he assessed that he already had pigeons of commensurate quality, however Jack asked him to at least attend. At the sale Jim's eye fell on a young cock which nobody else seemed to value, and which came home for the princely sum of \$16. It was to be the bargain of a lifetime, and the cock couldn't help breeding winner after winner and his children did the same. But then, when you realise he comprised a lot of Goodger blood and was coming to a loft filled with high quality Webber-Goodger pigeons it was probably as good a home as the young cock could have found.

Now came an enormous transition as Jim entered the next chapter when in 1993 he relocated his family to a magnificent vineyard property at Hahndorf in the Adelaide Hills. The move was purely designed for quality of life for his family, however the loft was relocated and the pigeons soon followed. There would be big lessons to be learned in the next twelve years, and he would win Association races from Emmdale, Wedderburn, Morundah, and he "thinks there might be another one or two".

The first lesson he learned was that many of the birds that had been formidable on the Adelaide Plains weren't able to cope with the environment in the Adelaide Hills, particularly the constant visitation by hawks that took an awful toll. First, it made it hard to break in the birds he'd flown at Para Vista, and many were lost in the attempt. Secondly, some birds he'd brought with him (including many within the Goodger family) found it difficult. I recall seeing a beautiful young cock that had taken a good position when the loft was located at Para Vista. He was

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that metallic bronze colour so prevalent in the Goodger family, and his neck and head were completely white. When I visited a year later he had disappeared – unable to handle the constant predation by the hawks.

Yet, another family of birds was able to handle the hawks without great difficulty, and became the upgrading factor that took the loft to a new level whereby Jim became competitive in all races rather than just excelling in the longer, harder events. Their story begins with a visit to John Hofman's Adelaide Ponderosa lofts in 1991. He told me, "I had purchased two imported grandchildren of James Bond, and went to collect them. They were to become the parents of my Emmdale Association winner. However, whilst there I noticed two Blue hens in another loft, and said to John, 'What are these!', unable to contain my excitement. They were absolutely stunning, and I learned they were direct daughters of James Bond, and had been imported for a fancier who had failed to pay for them." Jim asked to have first right to purchase them if the sale fell through, and when Ponderosa's Tony Hayne arrived in Australia soon thereafter, he negotiated an acceptable purchase price.

Thereafter began the founding of an incredible line of champion race birds, as one James Bond hen's youngsters became intertwined with those of the other hen in an inbreeding pattern most fanciers would never even attempt. And who in their right mind would base a family around two half-sisters by the same cock? Madness.

Then came an interesting trip to Roy Dangerfield's sale, held in October 1994 where Jim purchased a widely acknowledged champion race hen that didn't seem to attract the attention Jim expected she might. Many thought her to be the best pigeon ever to compete in the SAHPA, and she had been awarded the SAHPA's Bird of the Year as a two-year-old in 1990 when she put up the following performances: 5th Little Topar (480km 6,624B), 3rd Wilcannia (574km 5,467B) 4th Gilgandra (996km 1,644B). Yet here she was at six years of age with no indication she had ever bred anything of merit. Jim purchased her with his opening bid, which he recalls as being about \$500 in a sale where other birds went for much more, however he was stunned by the comments of various attendees who insisted on making the point to him that she hadn't bred anything worthwhile. He told me:

"My reasoning was that she was a champion racehen without peer, and I knew her mother had two interesting placings – 3rd in a short distance race, and 7th SAHPA Young, a 900km smash race. That all added up to a top class pigeon in my eyes and I took her home after just a single bid. I wasn't looking for racing champions from her, and paired her with my best Webber-Goodger blood. Soon I had a young blue son and a grizzle daughter who were each turning out winner

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after winner. That young hen bred 22 SAHPA positions on her own, including my Temora winner, and her granddaughter bred my Allandale Association winner this year. Then I looked at pairing her into my inbred James Bond birds and the successes became even greater, and are still occurring. Any grizzle in my loft – and there are quite a few – inherited their colour from her. Just as the James Bond responded immediately to my inbreeding programme, the grizzle hen's offspring did likewise, and I believe they're even better today than when I started with them. My Allandale winner this year has her on both sides of her pedigree." Marafiot birds are willing workers around the loft. A loft fly will usually last up to two hours when fit, and they work hard. I've visited the loft on the day after a hard race, and been unable to see the clocked birds of yesterday because they're up working with the team. They seem to be somewhat indefatigable! They are raced sparingly, and Jim gave as an example his Border Village winner of 2012 (965km 1328mpm) having had only one race as a yearling and two races as a two-year-old.

Training is done as he feels required, and he uses his own unit. There may be one long and one short toss each week, but that isn't set in concrete. It's a learned process of examination and assessment based on wisdom learned from others and what his eyes tell him at any given time.

Feeding is an acknowledged requisite for major success, and he has learned to recognise and select the best grains available. The boy who ran the family's Mixed Business shop when just 16 years of age, had to learn selection when buying fresh produce, and learn it very quickly. Subsequently, he studied how to select top class pigeons, how to mate the right pigeons that would form top pairs, how to select top class feed, and how to train pigeons effectively. He maintains he spent a lot of time learning, and did so largely through watching top fanciers and taking advice, weighing it, and putting it into practice. Plenty of mistakes were made along the way, but lessons were eventually learned.

In fact this 'selection' came into play when he visited the Ponderosa's Holland establishment with Bill Walford in early 1996. He told me, "Bill and I had met champion fancier Wim Muller at a function shortly before we were heading towards Ponderosa, but Wim didn't seem particularly interested in a visit by two Australians he knew nothing about. This was somewhat understandable, because Wim, who with his sons won 1st National Barcelona just two years ago was already famous in his own country at that time and with his close association with the Eijerkamp family would have personally known all the great continental fanciers of the period. We were nobodies! It was a somewhat

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**SA-19-482 BBPH**



Photo: D. Gao  
0424386561

**03/10/2020**

**Allendale 3**

**Bill Botton Cup**

**384 Km**

**68 Lofts 1251 Birds**

**Distance: 393 Km**

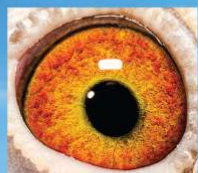
**Fly Time: 7h 26 min 56 Sec**

**Velocity: 886.761 mpm**

**Gained:**

**1st SAHPA**

**Bred/Raced By: MARAFIOTE J**



**SA-19-566 BGRZPH**



Photo: D. Gao  
0424386561

**03/10/2020**

**Allendale 3**

**Bill Botton Cup**

**384 Km**

**68 Lofts 1251 Birds**

**Distance: 393 Km**

**Fly Time: 7h 27 min 11 Sec**

**Velocity: 886.335 mpm**

**Gained:**

**2nd SAHPA**

**Bred/Raced By: MARAFIOTE J**



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awkward meeting, so I cheekily said I was looking forward to the visit and I thought I could pick out his best birds. He heard what I had said but made no reply, and when we visited his lofts the next day I selected several birds within his top class loft that I thought were the best. He didn't really acknowledge whether I was right or wrong, but when we visited Ponderosa the following day I saw him indicating towards me when he was talking with Hans Eijerkamp, the Ponderosa founder. Hans came over and asked to speak to me separately, and took me to a loft at the back of the display lofts."

"It was like entering pigeon heaven! I had never before seen so many great pigeons in one pen – these were the golden breeders. He asked for my opinion as to what I thought should be mated with what, and I gave him what I believed my best advice. I didn't have an eye glass with me that day and had to use his. He was every bit as interested in eyesign as I was."

"When I eventually rejoined the other attendees I was met with the comment, "Jim must be really opening his cheque book if he gets to see Hans by himself." In fact I didn't buy anything, knowing that I already had two James Bond daughters at home that I believed would take me where I intended to go. However, it indicated that I must have been pretty close to the mark in selecting Wim's top birds."

It remains interesting that Wim still holds to the claim that inbreeding is the only way to create a superior strain, and even more interesting is the fact that a major influence in his family was a hen heavily inbred to the famous Zilvervosje that was going to be culled by its owner! So the two men had something in common – they both thought along similar lines.

Selection can be done - I've seen David Wetering do it with uncanny accuracy. He went into Peter Veenstra's loft in Holland and asked to buy a youngster off Peter's top stock cock, but not when mated to the hen with him – David wanted the cock mated to the hen's sister. You have to be audacious to do that. The offspring duly arrived in Australia and became David's top stock cock, Da Vinci. Similarly, he went to Grenville Evans' Sydney sale and purchased just one bird – Braveheart – and the great cock filled his loft with top class birds, a line which like the Marafote one-bird purchase of the grizzle hen continues dominantly today, probably because of the severe and constant inbreeding practices of the two men.

Bart Cummings, Tommy Smith and Vincent O'Brien did it with racehorses. O'Brien went to Windfields Stud in Canada to inspect a particular yearling colt, but whilst there a strapper was seen leading another young horse, and O'Brien had suddenly seen the horse he was going to buy. He paid, in today's money, about \$600,000 for him, and he went on to become Nijinsky, one of the turf's

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greatest racehorses and stallions. Bart Cummings did something very similar with So You Think. The great pigeon selector Piet de Weerd made the point that there can be fifty shades of grey between black and white. The differences may be very subtle, but practice can help you to select one shade from another. I found Graeme Davidson – the walking encyclopedia on all things pigeon – fascinating to talk to on small differences. A panel beater by trade, he could look at a white car and tell you how the white on that particular vehicle differentiated from the white on the vehicle alongside it – how that particular colour could be made up. I found it fascinating, and it was obviously a learned experience.

Jim has always maintained close friendships with top fanciers, and recalls with pleasure the time spent with Alan Goodger, often visiting him for long periods when Alan's cancer became terminal. He recalled the times coming home from SAHPA's Long Distance Committee meetings with John Pryor, and 'talking pigeons' in the car into the early hours of the next morning. He added, "Frances often reminds me of the phone conversation I had with Alan Goodger one night, during which time she watched two movies, so we must have spoken for three hours or more!" He speaks often with two interstate champions and has a close friendship with two Adelaide fanciers. One of his greatest friends was the late Stef Orfanos who suffered a crippling accident in 1982 and thereafter, and with his exceptional wife Theodora, maintained a close association with Jim and Frances until Stef's death in recent years. It became a treasured friendship, with Stef always retaining his positivity and his love of pigeons, and always delighting in any successes emanating from the Marafiotte lofts.

In 2006 Jim sold the rural property and the family returned to the suburb of Walkerville just a mile or two north of Adelaide. This time he didn't make the mistake of trying to break-in birds he'd flown at Hahndorf, and instead bred and raced just 58 late bred. With this small team of immature birds, he managed to still finish 6th in the SAHPA's aggregate. Association wins would soon come along, and he quickly mentions successes at the new address from Temora, Marla, Lyndhurst, Twins, Border Village and Allandale....and he might have missed one. It all came from the family he developed primarily around three hens – two daughters of James Bond and the champion Grizzle hen.

Season 2020 was to become quite problematic, and if the Covid matter hadn't intervened, Jim and his wife would have been enjoying a trip to Europe rather than racing. Jim had promised Frances a trip overseas after she had endured several years of incapacitating illness which had required long bouts of hospitalisation and extremely severe medical treatments. For Jim there were

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long periods of daily hospital visits, yet Frances always encouraged him to keep racing. "It was the only thing that would allow me to take my mind off her awful situation," he told me. "So I wanted to honour the promise of a trip when she was well again - but then Covid intervened.

During this time I looked at the results of the previous ten years, and calculated that I'd won more points than any other colleague in the SAHPA in that decade. Maybe it was time for a break!"

SAHPA Aggregate points: Ranking between 2010 and 2020

2020	1st
2019	1st
2018	4th
2017	1st
2016	3rd
2015	2nd
2014	1st
2013	4th
2012	2nd
2011	6th
2010	1st

"So, missing a season would be no big deal. I didn't intend to race, only breeding 21 youngsters in my first round, but once it became problematic whether we would be able to travel, I paired extra birds to breed a batch of latebreds. One of my best birds for the year was bred in March. When the start of the season was delayed by a month, I began to think seriously of racing and I still had some good older pigeons left over from previous years. Little could I have imagined after that tawdry start that I could win the short-distance aggregate with 205 points. That was something of a shock."

When the SAHPA got to Coober Pedy (750km) Jim took three good positions, 14th, 15th, 16th, and thought for the first time that he might be in the aggregate hunt. "You'll see from the table that I had several instances of consecutive placings, and while that looks good, it can be a real problem," he told me. "You see a bird coming straight to the loft, and just as it's about to land, a loftmate arrives and takes it for another lap or two, and just as they're about to land another bird joins them. The delight of seeing them come so quickly soon turns to despair when you realise you've lost two minutes on the trap and are now looking at a position further down the list. But it does tell you your birds are in good shape."

The Coober Pedy result was confirmed three weeks later when contesting Marla

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(970km), a fast race where he took 6th, 14th, 19th, 26th, 38th, and 46th. Beyond the 6 placings was the fact that he had twenty-six birds of his thirty entrants home on the day – from 970km - and three more arrived on the following morning. The birds had to be right on song to do that!

Now he needed some harder racing if his birds were to get up to the front of the Association. Nothing longer than 384km could be flown on the south-east line because of the restrictions on birds travelling to Victoria, and he got his wish with the penultimate event from Allandale – just 384km, but a seven and a half hour fly at 880mpm. First and second placings provided enough points for him to win the SAHPA aggregate again.

His winning hen was a daughter of a grizzle hen that had won two top positions in difficult two-day races....she herself was a granddaughter of the famous grizzle hen he'd purchased with one bid. And so the story continues. Because Jim feels his family is still improving he doesn't need to resort to older breeding stock. The successful birds of this year quickly replace those of earlier years unless an older bird has shown itself to be prepotent, and the family often throws up such birds.

He told me, "People make the mistake of thinking the SAHPA is an easier contest today. It isn't. Success is hard won because the Association has a much larger footprint than in the 600-member years. Over recent years the birds have discovered new routes into Adelaide during races from the east and south-east, where they have to contend with the Mount Lofty ranges just before they enter the Adelaide Plains. Added to that is the quality of the birds, with everyone now having access to pigeons bred from the best in the world."

Any competitor has to work very hard to gain success, and Jim retains



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admiration for a number of fellow fanciers he believes to be excellent competitors.

He still insists there are more important things in the world than pigeon racing, and his family with Frances – four children and twelve grandchildren, are still the overall highlight of a life well lived. One of the things that gave him the greatest pleasure in 2020 was the number of congratulatory calls he received when the final result became known. A fitting result for someone who was sent to manage the family shop at aged sixteen and took the habits he quickly had to learn in the business world and became similarly committed to gaining a thorough understanding of the behaviours, traits and motivation of racing pigeons.

Races contested in 2021 (SAHPA results only)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Racepoint</i>	<i>Distance</i>	<i>Positions won</i>	<i>Winning velocity</i>
22/06	Warnertown	195km	17, 41, 46	1167mpm
27/06	Carrieton	270km	39, 40, 41, 50	1800
04/07	Hawker	330km	13, 39	1097
04/07	Tintinara	180km	2, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34,	1063
12/07	Hawker	330km	20, 21	1011
12/07	Keith	215km	43, 44, 45	1694
17/07	Keith	215km	5, 6, 7, 38	1108
17/07	Pimba	420km	25, 26, 27, 37, 38	1720
25/07	Lyndhurst YBC	510km	21	1135
01/08	Maree	580km	-	1783
01/08	Penola	330km	7, 21, 24, 37, 38, 39	867
09/08	Penola	330km	5, 6, 21, 22, 23, 26	1496
15/08	The Twins (Special)	620km	48	1218
15/08	The Twins (Open)	620km	13	1234
23/08	Mt Gambier (5B)	365km	4	1395
23/08	Mt Gambier YBC	365km	11	1412
28/08	Coober Pedy (Cocks)	750km	16	1375
28/08	Coober Pedy (Open)	750km	14, 15, 16, 19	1457
05/09	Mt Gambier	365km	18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 46	1238
13/09	Allendale	384km	39, 40, 43, 44, 49	1298
19/09	Marla	970km	6, 14, 19, 26, 38, 46	1520
26/09	Allendale	384km	5, 10, 23, 49	1395
03/10	Allendale	384km	1, 2, 16, 35.	880

With sincere thanks to Dennis Gao for use of his excellent photographs of 1st and 2nd Allendale 2020.