Some Places

March 16, 2016

This story is dedicated to my running buddies: they are the salt of the earth, they get me up at 5.30 am, they supply me with running shoes, they lie about their times and distances, they argue about the camera angle in photo finishes, they tell me about their children, they argue continually about indisputable facts, they rage about dumb theories, they actually believe that shoes and stretching make a difference, they are an encyclopedia of excuses, they are a bunch of losers – most of my running buddies have never won a race, they never learn how to tie shoelaces, they grow older and slower every day, they run. They are to be found everywhere. What follows is a brief introduction to great places to run early in the morning.

Running buddies know all about morning runs, they have their own favorites. Some write about them, some measure them to the nearest yard (or mile). They know every tree, dog and tripping hazard. They all know how long it takes, and still lie about their times.

A run consists of a route and a person or persons, a time, a purpose and some memorable events. This story will address all of these.

Some running buddies may complain that I stretch the truth a little, that I am repetitive and sometimes slanderous. These criticisms may be true, but I will use the catchall defenses of literary license and senile memory loss– he who has the pen creates history.

Google Earth fans can check out the routes, but as times have changed what they see may not be quite how it was back in the day. Back then the hills were steeper, the distances greater and the times were faster.

[Sproatley](file:///C:\Users\user\Desktop\Sproatley,%20Hull,%20UK.kmz)

From the age of two until I joined the Royal Air Force at age 18, I lived in Mill House, the site of Joseph Rank’s first windmill. It was about a mile to Sproatley Endowed School: along the garden path, open and close the gate, along Park Road to the village green, right along Hull Road to the village institute, where we watched Tarzan movies on Friday nights, and left up Church Lane to the school. This was the most direct route but there were two alternatives that could be used after school when time was less of a constraint and little boys took time to plan how they were going to change the world or play football for Hull City. The first alternate route was across the stiles – instead of going back down Church lane we ran straight across the road, past the council houses and then over three stiles, two fields and a bunch of cows back to the village green. The third route took us right out of the school, past the 12th Century Church, left along “the wire”, past Reffold’s stack yard to the Blue Bell Inn, down the hill to the village green and then right along Park Road. Google Earth shows the direct and “Wire” routes to be intact, but, alas, the fields with the stiles have been filled with houses. And even my old garden path now has a house on it.

Plain running was too easy for us in those days; we preferred to kick a tennis ball as we trotted to and from school. The object was to see how few kicks it took from here to there. In those days the “coach” had not been invented; we learned to play football with a tennis ball and friends or a wall. Every day at school there would be half a dozen parallel games going on in the school yard before and after school, at lunch time and during recess. At home we used the side of the house to hone our skills. Windows were broken. I believe that the main purpose of coaching is to bolster or destroy the egos of their charges.

Back then we did not run to run, rather we just ran when we felt like it or were in a hurry or we walked or wandered or sometimes hopped. So running buddies is a misnomer for the gang of small boys that explored every nook and cranny of this village and its environs. There were a lot of Johns – John Butler, John Chilton, John Garthwaite and my first name is John, there were also Robert Beadle, Vincent Scanlon, Allan Rawson and Terry Rawson. We co-opted boys a bit younger (one Chris Chilton became a superstar with Hull City) and older than ourselves and formed football and cricket teams to play against local villages such as Preston, Bilton and Aldbrough. We made and marked our own pitches.

Hull

When I was 11 I went to grammar school – [Malet Lambert High School](file:///C:\Users\user\Desktop\Malet%20Lambert%20High%20School.kmz), in Kingston upon Hull, pronounced ‘ull by people from ‘ull. I had always been a finicky child when it came to food so I opted out of school dinners. Instead I went (ran) to various “aunties” – relatives and friends of the family, where they knew how to treat a growing boy – give him chips. Now in those days my comic book hero was Alf Tupper, the tough of the track. He worked on Saturday morning in a factory, ate fish and chips for dinner (lunch) and then went out and broke the world record for the mile. Cause and effect; I could eat tasty food and become a superstar. Auntie Edie lived on Ryehill Grove, about a mile away from Malet Lambert. To get there I had to cross James Reckitt Avenue into East Park, turn left along the boating lake, right up Hurley Close, across Holderness Road, up Portobello Avenue and then half way along Ryehill Grove to the six way cross roads. We only had an hour for lunch, but it was worth it; Auntie Edie was good to me and I would grow up like Alf Tupper, tough of the track, fueled by chips with salt and vinegar.

Mostly we played football and cricket at school, although once a year we had “sports day” where the four “houses” (Delapole, Wilberforce, Andrew Marvel and Ferens) competed in a whole range of track and field events, including javelin and cricket ball throwing, various jumps and sprints, pole vault and the mile relay. In my senior year, I won the school pole vault at about 7’, competed in the city meet and won by default because after I had cleared 7 feet another competitor broke the pole, and went to the county championship in Bradford. There the only other competitor said he was going to come in at 11’6”, so I came second. One day a new PE teacher arrived and entered a school team in the city cross country meet. We trained by running around East Park Boating Lake. The race was around the golf course on [Beverley Westwood](file:///C:\Users\user\Desktop\Beverley%20&%20East%20Riding%20Golf%20Club.kmz) and it rained. A turn around point was a flag on the golf course and 100 pairs of feet turned the green into a ploughed field. Happy days! Since that time I have sought out golf courses to run on and collected many golf balls, but steered clear of the greens.

Loughborough

After my National Service in the Royal Air Force in Hong Kong, I had a short career in physiotherapy – 4 years of college and three years of practice in accident, geriatrics, sports and amputee rehabilitation. Not much running, but lots of football, rugby, table tennis and cricket and all the social life that is expected of a young man. Happy days. Then I went back to Loughborough University to study ergonomics and cybernetics – the most interesting subjects in the world. Still not much running, other than a morning run around the golf course or woods to keep in shape for you know what – football, rugby and cricket. Loughborough University has an interesting history – it started as an engineering college and then spawned the country’s premier physical education college. The two organizations split while I was there and then joined up again some 10 years later. The college produced and continues to produce many of the country’s top athletes, including the women’s marathon world record holder, Paula Radcliffe. She made good use of the trails that I had burned through the woods while I was at Loughborough.

There were two important lessons in nutrition that I learned during these days. The first was Chicken Vindaloo at the Taj Mahal and the second was Jock’s Hot Dogs. Jock, a Scotsman, had a stall downtown Loughborough where he cooked sausage meat and onions, which he put in a warm bun and smothered the whole with rich brown sauce. Now in those days students, especially those in the sports teams, drank a lot of beer, which coupled with either hot curry or hot dogs on a Saturday night, prepared one well for an early Sunday morning run.

[Hong Kong Hash House Harriers](file:///C:\Users\user\Desktop\Hong%20Kong.kmz)

For the next 20 or so years I didn’t run much, as such. Youth and football, table tennis, squash, badminton, hiking, rugby, marriage, children, gardening etc. were enough to keep one fit. But at age 36 I ended up in Hong Kong and found the Hash House Harriers. Now that is running with a difference. Hashing was invented in Malaysia, by expatriates in the 1930s and has spread throughout the world, except where it is banned, sometimes for good reason. Two hounds set out earlier in the day (usually Monday) and mark a trail, using chalk or flour, with lots of false branches. The pack of runners follows at 6pm. When the front runners hit a dead end marked by a turnaround arrow they run back to the branch just in time to hit the middle of the pack. The trick is to get all the runners back to the finish at about the same time to indulge in the after race hash. Hash means food, which was found at a local restaurant after the Monday night run. During the run the bugler announces significant events, such as when a trail mark is found and the pack chorus “on on” or “on back” or “on home”. I ran on trails up and down mountains and skyscrapers, through jungles, across beaches and busy roads. So much for the factual side of hashing. In reality hashes can have a handful or hundreds of hashers, each with a rude hash name, and they invariably drink beer at the end of, or sometimes before and during a run, with the result that they sometimes become very light hearted or obnoxious, depending on your point of view. Happy days!

[Halifax](file:///C:\Users\user\Desktop\Halifax.kmz)

We arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1979, with three small children and another on the way, and bought a house we couldn’t afford in the South End. Fortunately, in the two years that we were there, there was rampant inflation, so we turned a profit. The cricket was not much fun anymore, although the football was. I played one of the best games of my life at left full back – we lost 10 – 0! I was teaching in the Physical Therapy and Physical Education schools, – “if it’s physical, it’s therapy.” So I decided to run a marathon and learned that training is important. I ran in a pair of cutoff jeans, an old football jersey and a pair of tennis shoes. It rained torrents all day long. But I still have the best photograph ever – I picked up my two year old daughter, Caroline, a hundred yards from the finish and crossed the line in 4:19. Some 25 years later we ran together in the New York City marathon. So much for sowing the seed early.

My morning runs in Halifax took me around the Citadel and Point Pleasant Park – one loop was about 8 miles, so my longest run consisted of two loops – not enough for a marathon. But I became hooked on this running thing in the mornings before everyone else in the household was awake. The streets are empty, the views of the harbor spectacular and there is nothing better than running along trails through the woods. Here I learned how to avoid tree roots, most of the time.

My second marathon, in Glasgow, NS, the home town of the famous Johnny Miles, was a little faster –about 3.50. I got a couple of long runs in this time, but not enough. I was humiliated by one of my students, a college basketball player, who patted my back as she blew past at mile 18. I was beginning to realize that long training runs would be needed, and that running buddies were important contributors; a realization that carried me through the next seventy odd races.



Oklahoma

In the summer of 1981 our family of six set off in our newly acquired camper van to Norman, Oklahoma, the home of the Sooners. Although I had played soccer, rugby and cricket for my university, I had never seen spectators, other than the odd dog walker. What a culture shock - 70,000 screaming students and alumni. The dean of engineering explained to me that “football is important here” and the new president, when asked about his plans, said “I will build a university that the football team can be proud of.”

I hooked up with members of the Meteorology Department for lunch time runs around the golf course. Now, Norman, Oklahoma is close to “Tornado alley” – and the site of the National Severe Storms Laboratory”. So I learned all about bad weather and tornado chasing and cumulo-nimbus clouds, which came in useful some 25 years later when I was learning to fly.

I formed the Oklahoma Hash House Harriers group. We ran on Monday nights with between 5 and 50 runners, from both town and gown, and found some interesting trails. One was through the Shacklee complex where we were chased off by security guards and dogs. We had a good turnout of newbies and one evening an ROTC guy volunteered to carry the trumpet. The crowd went round a corner at the start and the trumpeter raised his instrument and ran into a concrete bench, putting a gash right into his knee joint. Fortunately his ROTC buddies had a car to take him to the ER, so we had only a minor interference with the main agenda of the evening - running, shouting and having fun. I still have the very bent trumpet. The cadet showed up a couple of weeks later, very proud of his scar. Another enterprising hash group member – an Electrical Engineering student, found out how to duplicate the new electronic cards for entry to the OU faculty and staff parking areas, and distributed them among the Hashers – “on on”.

Morning runs around Norman, Oklahoma were mainly around the streets and golf courses but the long weekend runs took us out N, S, E and W along the dirt roads and past the horse farms. A group of us decided to train for the Dallas White Rock Marathon, a couple of meteorologists, my Taekwondo instructor – the manager of the Pheidippides running store and a handful of others. This was my third marathon supported by a few more long runs around the red dirt of Norman Oklahoma. It was at this run I was again reminded of the importance of diet, having been somewhat starved of chips since my school days. I took two small daughters and a couple of running buddies down to Dallas in our window van which we had traded for our camper van in El Paso when the toilet started to leak. We attended the pasta dinner – I had found the Italian substitute for fish and chips. But the real lesson came in the hotel dining room early on race day morning. I was just explaining to my daughters that runners should only eat bagels before a race when in came a couple of healthy looking girls. They tucked in to bacon and eggs and sausages and toast and jam and coffee, and came in first and second in the women’s race.

Rochester, MI

After five years in Oklahoma I was attracted by a small advert about a job with GM, so we packed our bags and drove up to Detroit, or rather Rochester, Michigan to be exact. Work in Advanced Vehicle Engineering started early, so I ran for about 45 minutes every afternoon – along Dutton Road, up the monstrous Dutton Hill, along Brewster, then Tienken and Livernois and back to our home on Dutton. Back in time to work with the children on their homework. I was wandering about after one of these runs when a jolly young man came trotting past. “Good afternoon”, I said, “do you run here often”. “Yes” he said,” my name is Michael Light; you will be most welcome to join our running group from time to time, if you so wish.” So I did, and that was the beginning of 15 years of learning all about running buddies, marathons and the meaning of life. In addition to Michael, a college history teacher and cross country coach, there was Garry Watson, a physical education teacher, who once hit 50 free throws in a row, and Mark Murphy a Clydesdale dentist, but young and fast. We ran lots of races together; sometimes we even beat Joe Washburn.

My morning run from the house on Hunters Creek Lane took me East along Silverbell, down and up a hill and around some bends then down again to the Paint Creek trail; a fast mile along the converted railroad track to Dutton Road and up the monster Dutton Hill to Brewster and back to Silverbell. This run was just 10k and I once beat 40 minutes, hills and all. Dutton Hill is about half a mile long with three steep parts separated by a couple of short, less steep parts. Mark Murphy and I used to race up this hill. He was big and I was old, but he was also young so he always won. But we always raced just for fun. Michael Light used to take his cross country team up and down the hill five times to make them strong.

Paint Creek Trail runs about ten miles from Rochester to Lake Orion. When I first arrived in Michigan it was just a beaten down narrow track, but the Rails to Trails folk converted it into a running, walking, horse riding, cross country skiing, dog walking trail with beautiful Oakland Township woods and large homes along Paint Creek. Paint Creek Trail, like the Peavine trail I Prescott, AZ is a great place to run and meet running buddies, coming and going. Both trails had deer and dog walkers.

The Stoney Creek reservoir is about ten miles to the East of Rochester, and guess what; it is just 10 k along the path that runs around the lake. I used to run this picturesque route with Jim Karner, Wayne Zimmerman and Chuck Maxwell. There is even a Stoney Creek running club. The story about Arline and her Zola Budd bare feet will be told later.

Singapore

We have lived in Singapore for 7 years from 2009 and moved condominiums twice. We first lived in Siglap which is a nice suburb half way between downtown and Changi airport. Our condo was just half a mile from East Coast Park – a beautiful linear park along the SE shoreline of Singapore. Our landlord was a world famous mountain climber – check out pictures of Halil Ngah swinging by his fingertips from an overhang. East Coast Park has bike tracks and walking tracks runners get confused, sometimes to the irritation of the walkers or bikers. From Siglap you can run west to the Barrage or east to Changi Airport about 5 miles each way. But 10 miles in the Singapore heat and humidity was sometimes a challenge. As you run you can watch the hundreds of large container ships parked out in the ocean waiting for their turn to come or go. As on the Paint Creek and Peavine trails you meet and greet other runners, joggers and hobblers of all shapes, sizes and ages.

Our first move was to Sanctuary Green close to Marina Bay. From there the early morning run was out along the side of the golf course, across the impressive Barrage and down the west side of the bay, through the Gardens by the Bay, past the Singapore Flyer and along the ECP back home. Or simply an out and back to avoid the traffic. As usual the route is inhabited by walkers, dog walkers, runners, joggers and bikers who generally, but not always obey the rules of the road. I started a survey once to investigate the interactions among these different route users, using various modes of movement, except dog walkers. It is true if a runner meets a runner or jogger a “good morning” or audible “hi” is generated. Similarly bikers raise their fingers from the handlebars in a surreptitious wave. But bikers and runners rarely communicate, except for the occasional warning – “on your left” or “on your right” accompanied by a pathetic ding from the bell. Mostly these warnings come far too late and the apparent direction of the sound may not coincide with the intent of the over taker. I have come to the considered opinion that wheels should be banned.

Our next move was to the Ridley Park condo west of down town next to Dempsey Hill, the site of an old army barracks, The old military buildings have now been converted to upscale restaurants, carpet shops, museums, gymnasia, kindergartens and dog boutiques. My early morning run takes me up and over Dempsey Hill across Holland Road and into the Botanical Gardens. These beautiful gardens are a National Historic Site and there are no bicycles allowed! The paths go in and out and around swan lakes, orchid gardens, ginger gardens, waterfalls and a large symphony orchestra stage at the end of Symphony Lake. Throughout the year there are many performances with the audience sitting on blankets and eating picnics on the grassy hillside. In the morning the weather is a little cooler and the running is faster, while birds of all denominations whistle, chirp and caw like a natural symphony. Deer are no longer seen in the park although 40 years ago one ate daughter Lily’s sandwich. This is a running and walking paradise, except for the heat and humidity. Another route, often taken by Eileen and me on Saturday mornings is down Tanglin Road and along the Linear Path to the grocery store. The route back home is up Queensway, along Holland Road and back over Dempsey Hill. Half way up the hill on Queensway is a McDonalds, strategically located for a leisurely breakfast.