

## HISTORY OF RUNNING IN OMAHA – PART IX

In most parts of the USA, organized running in late Fall means two things – turkey trots and cross country. The Omaha area is no exception. Although you pretty much have to venture outside the city limits – there some traditional events that are extremely popular – and are well worth the drive and the entry fee.

Turkey Trots have become the rage all of the country. A couple of years ago, USA Today had a feature story discussing the huge numbers these events are drawing. Although it would seem unlikely that families would want to venture out, early on a holiday that can involve either a) sleeping in, or b) lots of work preparing food – that is exactly what is happening. Entire families have made a tradition of getting up early, and burning some calories before settling down at the table.

A look at the area racing schedule finds Thanksgiving Day runs in places like Beatrice, Fremont and Red Oak, Iowa. And following nationwide trends, these events are very popular. The Fremont Turkey Trot, which started in 1987, has been around the longest. The YMCA sponsors the event which includes both a 5-mile run and a 2-mile run. Both of which are extremely flat. The biggest surprise about the Fremont run is not so much the number of runners (which is relatively high), but the quality of runners. This event draws some of the fastest runners from Omaha, Lincoln, and the small towns in between. Although there isn't a lot of hardware, (like - ten-year age groups) Fremont Turkey Trot is typically one of the most competitive races in the area.

Cross country events have also become very popular and draw surprising numbers. Cross Country within driving distance include the Beer and Bagel Run, Living History Farms, the Lincoln Track Club Holiday Run, and the relatively new Lavista Halloween Run.

The Lavista event has been around three years and judging by its popularity—will probably be around next year. For those of you who have never run cross country – this is a great place to give it a try. The course is relatively flat and includes two loops around a golf course. There is a costume division, which is typically very entertaining – along with the competitive 5K race. As is typical with most cross country runs today, this event draws a lot of ex-high school cross-country runners. You will see people at these events that you won't normally see at other events. And once you try cross-country running, you'll see why. It is a lot of fun, and offers a very different experience than running on the streets.

The Beer and Bagel Run is a Peak Performance event which has been around since 1984. The first B&B was held at Tranquility Park and has since moved from Memorial Park to Lake Cunningham to its current home – Crescent Ski Hill in Iowa. The Crescent ski resort is the perfect match for this quirky event. The distance is advertised as roughly 4 miles – but who knows. This is a challenging event that is not for the faint-of-heart. The hills redefine the word steep, the terrain is dangerous, and for much of the course, the only way you will know where to go is by following the flags that guide you through the shrubs and high weeds. As crazy as it sounds, this event is one of the more popular

events in the Omaha area and draws large numbers of loyal runners. Among the usual post-race snacks, there is beer and chili. And the “drinker with a running problem” t-shirts are coveted collector items. With B&B – either you love it or you hate it. The scenery is beautiful. The view from the top of the Loess Hills allows a view of the Missouri River and Omaha that you will not find anywhere else in the metro area. And everyone is there to have fun. Even the most gifted runners find themselves walking up some of the hills – so although there are age-group awards, it is not so much a competitive event as it is a challenge.

The Saturday before Thanksgiving is Living History Farms day. Literally hundreds of Omahan’s will make their way to Des Moines to run this extremely popular event. Another quirky cross country, this event is in its 29<sup>th</sup> year and has boasted for several years that it is the largest cross country run in North America. The last few years there have been over 4,000 finishers and the event continues to grow. Again, this is not your typical cross country course. Until recently, the actual course layout changed from year-to-year. You were never sure if the distance would be until race day. The distance varied from four to six miles – but one thing was certain – you would find yourself crossing creeks, going over fences, and using ropes to get out of the creek beds. Cornfields, trails through the woods, cow manure. This event has everything. And in mid-November, the weather can vary dramatically. Some years, it is warm enough to run in a t-shirt, other years, there may be snow on the ground and ice on the creeks. And speaking of creeks, recent rainfall determines the real challenge of the course. During droughts, you can pretty much jump the streams – but if it has rained recently, the water level can be knee-high. If you do this event, plan on throwing away your shoes when the race is over. Now, why would anyone drive to Des Moines to go through this? Because its wildly fun. For many, it is a costume run.